The new Sonos Five looks and sounds identical to the Play:5 it’s replacing



Sonos is refreshing its best-sounding music speaker today, but the new product is so similar to its predecessor that there’s zero reason for anyone with a Play:5 to consider an upgrade. That new speaker is called the Sonos Five. And though it now shares branding with the Sonos One, which was the company’s first product with built-in voice assistant capabilities, the Sonos Five oddly does *not* include a built-in microphone for use with Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant.

Sonos told me that it’s fully focused on sound performance with this product and points to that as the reasoning for why it didn’t add mics to the design. The company also says that customers tend to put the Play:5 (and now Sonos Five) in spots where a voice assistant would be inconsequential and of limited use. I’m not really convinced by either of those explanations, but privacy-minded consumers will appreciate the decision.

In terms of audio quality, Sonos says the Sonos Five offers an identical listening experience to that of the Play:5. It's still got the same six custom-designed drivers inside. The external design is also unchanged except for the finish; this one comes in all-black or all-white options, whereas the "white" second-gen Play:5 had a two-tone look with a black speaker grill. (I loved that design, but Sonos says customers requested an all-white version.) You can still use it in both vertical and horizontal orientations, and it retains the auxiliary input for turntables and other external music sources.

An underwhelming update for a fantastic speaker

So what is different, then? The Sonos Five has "increased memory and processing power and a new wireless radio." And… that's it, folks. If you used the two speakers side by side, I guess you *might* notice that increased horsepower; my Play:5 does get hung up momentarily from time to time. But more than anything else, this refresh seems to be about readying the Sonos Five for another four or five years in the company's lineup.

You might be feeling a bit underwhelmed by the Sonos Five, and to be honest, so am I. The question I keep asking myself is "why now?" The Play:5 is already compatible with the company's S2 platform and is thus (hopefully) guaranteed firmware updates and new features for some time to come, so what's the reasoning for this minor refresh?

The Play:5 has always been the speaker that smart speakers like the Amazon Echo and could never quite measure up to — unless you bought two of them, anyway. But now, Sonos' competitors are getting more serious about delivering pleasing, room-filling sound. The best example of this is Amazon's $200 Echo Studio. It might not be *quite* at the level of the Play:5 if you did a listening test, but Amazon is coming closer and closer at a significantly cheaper price.

Sonos, meanwhile, seems content to rest on its laurels with the Sonos Five and risk getting leapfrogged. The company is still innovating in other areas, and the Arc is a showcase of that. But I use my Play:5 every day, and I expected to feel a smidge of temptation to upgrade whenever the next one came around. But nope. Not with all this sameness. I’ve no doubt the Sonos Five will sound excellent and outperform much of the competition; I was just expecting a little more after this long of a wait.

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https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/6/21248545/sonos-five-speaker-announced-play-5-price-features-release-date