TP-Link’s new smart plug exposes a complicated Matter

The Tapo P125M smart plug ($19.99) is a fine smart plug. It turns things on and off on command or on a schedule, and it does all the smart plug tricks you might expect (except energy monitoring). But what makes this device interesting enough for me to spend a week testing it is that the Tapo is one of only two devices you can currently buy that work with the new smart home standard Matter. (The being the other).

So, this review is really a look at how Matter works across the four big smart home platforms that helped bring it to life. This one little smart plug showed me all I needed to know about the current state of Matter’s major promises for the smart home — multi-platform control, easy setup, and reliable local control.

Matter works very well on each platform and across platforms — if you can get them to share. But getting the Tapo plug into each platform simultaneously was complicated. Adding the plug to Apple Home, Google Home, Amazon Alexa, and SmartThings required two phones and a very specific order of operation. In short, there’s still a long way to go before Matter seamlessly delivers on its cross-platform promise.

6Verge Score

TP-Link Tapo P125M

$ 19.99

ul]:my-0 [&>ul]:mb-16 [&>ul]:py-0 md:[&>ul]:mb-0 [&>ul>li]:mb-6 [&>ul>li]:leading-140 [&>p]:mb-8 [&_*]:font-polysans-mono [&_*]:text-14 [&_ul]:font-light [&_p]:font-light [&_strong]:font-medium [&_li]:marker:text-franklin md:w-1/2 md:border-t-0 md:first:border-r md:first:pr-16 md:last:pl-16″>

The Bad

- Pairing between platforms is tricky
- Expensive compared to non-Matter plugs
- No energy monitoring

How we rate and review products

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Why would you want a Matter smart plug?

Today there are plenty of inexpensive, non-Matter smart plugs you can buy, many of which work with some or all the major platforms already. under its Kasa and Tapo brands. So, why pay more for a Matter plug? And you will pay more — TP-Link’s non-Matter Tapo plug that works with all four platforms sells for half the price of its Matter one, and Meross is charging over $10 more for its Matter version.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>What is Matter? Matter is a new smart home interoperability standard that provides a common language for connected devices to communicate locally in your home without relying on a cloud

connection. Developed by Apple, Amazon, Google, and Samsung, Matter uses Wi-Fi and Thread wireless protocols and, in its first rollout, supports smart sensors, smart lighting, smart plugs and switches, smart thermostats, connected locks, and media devices including TVs.

All this means that if a smart home gadget you buy has the Matter logo, you can set it up and use it with any Matter-compatible device and any Matter-compatible platform. Matter devices are starting to become available, and we expect to see more arrive this year.

Amazon Alexa, Google Home, Samsung SmartThings, and Apple Home are some of the big platforms that support Matter, and they have all updated their compatible hubs to be Matter controllers.

The main differences are local control and an easier setup across multiple platforms (using Matter's multi-admin feature, where a device can be shared with and controlled by up to six different platforms).

In order to be controlled by multiple platforms, most non-Matter smart plugs rely on the cloud. This means creating multiple accounts, logging into those accounts across platforms, and downloading "skills" (in the case of Alexa) to link devices. In my experience with the cloud, response times and automations can often be slow, and when you lose internet, your smart home breaks.

With a Matter plug like the Tapo, you can share your plug across any platform and to any smartphone in your home. No cloud required. No account setup needed. Once I added the Tapo plug to one platform with Matter, the idea is that I could connect it to the other compatible platforms locally over the Wi-Fi network.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*All Matter devices have a unique code that you scan with your phone to set them up.*

However, when I reset the plug and tried any other combination of setup — starting from iOS with Apple Home or SmartThings, or starting on Android with Google or SmartThings — I was never able to successfully add it to all four platforms.

Multi-admin is one of Matter's main selling points. And while using it across four platforms is likely an edge use case — most people will probably use one or two platforms, maybe three — it's a feature that should still work regardless. And as of today, it's just not ready.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*Google Home's Matter pairing page is the easiest to use, but it doesn't show you all your options.*

As Amazon doesn't have a Matter iOS app, I used a Pixel 6 for setup. The

Android operating system automatically found the device as soon as it was plugged in, without me having to open an app.

This is a nice feature the iPhone doesn’t have and jives with Matter’s promise of a simpler setup process. I didn’t *need* to download a manufacturer app or even open an app already on my phone.

A dialogue box appeared on the phone as soon as the

plug was powered on and offered to scan the device to Google Home or the Tapo app. An option at the bottom of the box to choose another app presented SmartThings as a choice, but not Alexa – even though the Alexa app was installed on the device. This is because of Google and Samsung's "expanded multi-admin capability partnership," where the companies have gotten together behind the scenes

to make this work more smoothly.

But I wanted to use Alexa. So, I closed out of this option and opened the Alexa app on the Pixel. The Alexa home screen immediately prompted me to “Connect Your Smart Plug.” This is because I have Device Discovery turned on, which shows any available devices on your Wi-Fi network (you can turn this on or off in the Alexa app settings).

I tapped yes, and it asked if the plug had a Matter logo. I proceeded to scan that. (This is on the side of the plug with an extra copy in the box, thankfully, as after removing the plug a couple of times, the ink on the code had smudged beyond being readable).

1 / 5

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-

highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Setting up on SmartThings and Apple Home with an iPhone

I reset the Tapo plug and set it up on iOS using the Matter-enabled SmartThings app, with the **SmartThings Station** as a Matter controller. (Side note: I also set up the plug using the Apple Home app and a HomePod Mini. But that process was identical to

adding a device to HomeKit. The setup process with SmartThings is what's notable here.)

I plugged in the Tapo plug, opened the SmartThings app on an iPhone 14, and a dialogue box appeared asking if I wanted to pair the new Matter plug the system had found. It then prompted me to scan the Matter QR code and took me through an onboarding process that was very

similar to using Apple's Home app.

This is because Matter is built into the iPhone's operating system, so essentially, I was using a version of Apple Home. Only rather than adding it to my Home app, the plug was added to my iCloud account, and its "sharing credentials" were stored in Keychain. In theory, this means if I wanted to add it to another app on iOS, the

data should transfer automatically, so I wouldn’t need to copy and paste codes.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*The Tapo, Meross, and Eve smart*

plugs are among the first devices to support Matter.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Matter: should you use it?

Not today. Unless you’re

only using one smart home platform or you just enjoy troubleshooting. Trying to use Matter outside of a single platform is an exercise in frustration. As I demonstrated, to set up a device in all four platforms, I had to use both an Android phone and an iPhone, because neither Amazon Alexa nor Google Home has Matter-enabled iOS apps yet. And that Apple Home app for Android is just … never going to

happen. Today, only Samsung SmartThings lets you add a Matter device to either Android or iOS.

I hope that in the next couple of months some of these issues will get resolved, and Matter will feel more like its early promise. Those who have been following Matter's rollout will have spotted that a **lot of new Matter devices** aren't coming out until at least the

“spring.”

Amazon has said its iOS app is coming in spring. Google tells me its version is “coming soon,” and we know several companies (including **Eve** and **Nanoleaf**) have slated the release of their new Matter products for late March or early summer. Additionally, support for Thread looks like it will be more widely available then, too; Amazon has said it will enable

Thread on its fourth-gen Echo smart speaker and all compatible Eero Wi-Fi routers this “spring.”

I still think Matter is on track to provide a stronger underlying infrastructure for the smart home, but it’s not there yet. Even by “spring,” I think it will be too early for people to start using Matter. It’s clear that there is a lot more cooperation needed between the major players

before it's a viable experience for everyone. Because anyone who goes through what I did this past week trying to add the Tapo smart plug to multiple platforms will be first in line at the Best Buy return counter.

Photos and screenshots by Jennifer Pattison Tuohy / The Verge

https://www.theverge.com/23599437/tp-link-tapo-p125m-review-matter-apple-amazon-

google-smartthings