

How to Buy an HDTV

YOU LET THE HOLIDAYS come and go without pulling the trigger. But March Madness looms, not to mention the new season of *The Sopranos*. You know it's time to go high definition, but with all the 1080p's and HDMI's and whatever, buying the right TV seems as straightforward as buying the right nuclear submarine. Good news: Now that prices, and the technology, have stabilized, HD is officially a no-brainer. So take this guide and pick your set. —*Oliver Ryan*

Size*	Technology/Price range*	The lowdown
0 Inches	LCD \$250–\$6,000	Up to 40 inches or so, LCD flat panels are the best option. They provide the brightest HD picture at the best price and are also the most energy-efficient. Higher-end models will serve gamers well and double as computer monitors.
20	PLASMA \$1,000–\$8,000	For big rooms, plasma still wins on price-to-performance, though LCDs are catching up. Screen “burn-in” problems are mostly fixed. Live in the mountains? Be careful: Some plasmas overheat at high altitudes (not enough air).
40	REAR PROJECTION \$1,000–\$5,000	Of the three flavors of rear-projection TV, the most popular is DLP. DLP screens are more affordable than plasma but are also much bigger and heavier—and the picture fades noticeably when viewed from the side.
60	FRONT PROJECTORS \$1,000–\$35,000	For those with a big budget and plenty of wall space, a high-definition projector will dish up that magical movie theater experience. But bear in mind: massive screen and awesome speakers sold separately.
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*Most common sizes and prices.

Three Can't-Lose Sets

Still trapped in analysis paralysis? We pinned down several experts and asked them to recommend rock-solid TVs to suit a range of budgets.



ENTRY LEVEL

Sharp Aquos
32-inch LCD
MODEL: LC-32D43U
\$1,400

WHY: Sharp is famous for its LCDs. Excellent quality; nice looks.

ALSO: **Samsung** units are solid and a bit cheaper.



UPSCALE

Panasonic
50-inch Plasma
MODEL: TH-50PX600U
\$3,300

WHY: Panasonic is the Sharp of plasmas. Known for decent prices too.

ALSO: **Pioneer's** expensive **Elite** line gets raves.



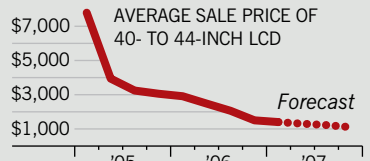
EXTRAVAGANT
Sim2 USA Projector
MODEL: HT3000
\$16,000

WHY: Sim2's 1080p projector will blow you away.

ALSO: Much cheaper but still excellent: the **Sony** VPL-VW100 and the **Runco** CL-410

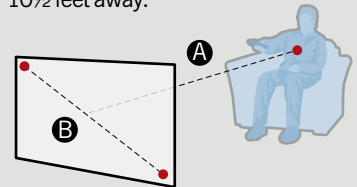
KEY QUESTIONS

1. How cheap will these things get? Price declines are tapering off. That means there's little danger you'll end up kicking yourself for not holding off another month.



2. What's 1080p, and do I need it? There are several levels of HD resolution; 1080p is the high end. The vast majority of HD content, including cable and broadcast programming, will be sub-1080p for years to come. Unless you're a hardcore gamer—or rich—720p is fine.

3. How big a screen? Viewing distance **A** should be at least 1.5 times screen size **B**; any closer and the image looks bad. So don't splurge on that 84-inch set unless you can sit 10½ feet away.



SHOULD I GET ...

External speakers?

YES A “home theater in a box” system is the most cost-effective way to amp up your TV experience.

HDMI connections?

YES And the more the better. Newer components—DVD players, DVRs, stereos, etc.—will use HDMI. The cables are nice and compact too.

“Premium” cables?

NO The cheap ones work fine.

Universal remote?

YES Try a Logitech Harmony.

A warranty?

MAYBE The math is a wash at best. But if you'll sleep better, do it.