

CHOOSING A PRINTER

When buying a printer, the price on the shelf is only part of the story. Many cheap printers are sold at little or no profit, with the manufacturer relying instead on the cost of replacement ink, so a printer that costs more to buy can work out much cheaper to own.

THE THREE MAIN TYPES

I STANDARD INKJET	Standard inkjet (cartridges) Benefits: Cheap to buy and compact, and prints photos as well as text. Drawbacks: Replacement cartridges are expensive and soon run out, often costing more each year than the printer itself. The ink can also dry out if the printer is left unused for a few weeks.
T INK TANK	Ink tank Benefits: Refilled from bottles that last for thousands of pages, and usually supplied with enough ink for two or three years, making it by far the cheapest type to run. It prints photos well too. Drawbacks: It costs more to buy and, like any inkjet, needs to be used every week or two to stop the ink drying out.
L LASER	Laser Benefits: It uses toner, a dry powder that doesn't dry out, so it's ideal if you print only occasionally. Text is crisp, printing is quick and running costs are low. Black-and-white models are inexpensive. Drawbacks: It's not suitable for photos, and colour laser printers cost a lot more to buy and to run.

ALL-IN-ONE PRINTERS

Most people choose a multifunction, or all-in-one, printer, which can also scan and copy. Standard inkjets and ink tanks are almost always all-in-ones, but many lower-priced laser printers only print, so check before buying. If you often scan several pages at once, look for an **automatic document feeder**.

COST TO BUY VERSUS COST TO RUN

	All-in-one to buy	Ink or toner each year*
Standard inkjet	From around £45	Around £135
Ink tank	From around £165	A few pounds
Black-and-white laser	From around £155	Around £25

** Which? estimate for a household printing 20 pages of text and 10 colour pages a month with the manufacturer's own ink. Prices are a rough guide and change frequently.*

If you only need to print, a black-and-white laser printer can be bought from around £85. Colour laser all-in-ones start at around £300, and their toner is expensive, so they're rarely worthwhile at home.

Many people keep a printer for ten years or more. Over that time, an ink tank printer usually recovers its higher price within about three years, while a cheap cartridge printer can cost hundreds of pounds more to own.

DO YOU NEED COLOUR?

Think about what you actually print. If it's mainly letters, forms, tickets and boarding passes, a black-and-white laser printer is reliable and inexpensive, and won't mind being left unused for weeks at a time.

Family photos are often better printed by a high-street or online photo service, where a standard 6 x 4 print typically costs from around 10p to 75p, with the quality of a proper photo lab. If you want to print in colour regularly at home, choose an ink tank printer.

GENUINE OR COMPATIBLE INK?

Printer makers recommend their own 'genuine' or 'original' ink, but cartridges and bottles from other companies, known as compatible or third-party ink, are widely available at a fraction of the price.

Genuine ink

- **For:** consistent quality, and guaranteed to work with your printer.
- **For:** any fault it causes is covered by the manufacturer's warranty.
- **Against:** expensive in standard cartridges, although far less so in ink tank and laser printers.

Compatible ink

- **For:** much cheaper to buy.
- **Against:** quality varies, and cartridges can leak, block the print head or not be recognised.
- **Against:** a printer update can stop them working without warning.
- **Against:** damage it causes may not be covered by the warranty.

Our advice is to stick with genuine ink. Rather than saving money with compatible cartridges, choose a printer that's inexpensive to run in the first place: an ink tank or laser printer keeps the cost of genuine ink and toner low.

A WORD ABOUT HP+ PRINTERS

Some HP printers are sold as **HP+**. These must stay connected to the internet and to an HP account for as long as you own them, and will only accept HP's own ink. We'd generally suggest avoiding them, so check for the HP+ label before buying.

INK SUBSCRIPTIONS

Most manufacturers now offer ink by subscription, such as HP Instant Ink. For a monthly fee you are allowed a set number of pages, and the printer orders new ink automatically before it runs out. It sounds convenient, but for most people it isn't good value.

- You pay every month, whether you print or not.
- Unused pages can only be carried over for a limited time, and printing more than your allowance costs extra.
- The printer must stay connected to the internet.
- With some schemes, including HP's, the cartridges are switched off if you cancel, even if they still contain ink.

For a household printing a few pages a week, an ink tank or laser printer is far cheaper over time. A subscription only really makes sense for someone who prints plenty of colour or photos every month.

WHAT ELSE TO LOOK FOR

- **Wi-Fi**, so that you can print from anywhere in the house, and from a phone or tablet. For an iPhone or iPad, check that the printer supports **AirPrint**.
- **Automatic double-sided printing** saves paper, although the cheapest models often lack it.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Choose a black-and-white laser printer if you mainly print text, or an ink tank printer if you want colour. We can recommend a model to suit you, set it up on your Wi-Fi and connect it to your computer, phone and tablet.