



Digital Cameras

Manufacturers of digital cameras continually add features and make them easier to use and more affordable.

HOW TO CHOOSE

- ▶ **Pick the right megapixel level.** Pixels, or picture elements, define the level of detail the camera can deliver. Pixel count is important to your decision, but it isn't everything. It mostly affects the flexibility to crop and enlarge images without a loss in quality. If you're printing an entire image without alteration, a good 2- or 3-megapixel camera can produce a picture that looks as sharp as one from a 6- or 8- megapixel model. But if the image is blown up to poster size, or a small part of it is enlarged, the picture from the 2- or 3- megapixel camera will be blurry while the 6- or 8- megapixel one will be sharp.
- ▶ **Internal memory.** Digital cameras contain different amounts of internal memory for storing pictures. The higher the internal memory the more photos that can be stored. A computer floppy disk or memory card are the digital equivalents of rolls of film. Most cameras use a computer floppy disk or allow memory cards to be purchased separately to increase the memory. A card that can hold 128 megabytes (MB) of data is the minimum practical size these days.
- ▶ **Select the right size and style.** The most compact digital cameras are nearly as small as a credit card and less than an inch thick, but they may feel awkward to hold. A medium-sized model, shaped like a traditional point-and-shoot camera, can be easier to handle. The size of the LCD monitor or optical and electronic viewfinder may be important to some users.
- ▶ **Decide how much control you want.** As with most film cameras, a digital camera can be set to a plain point-and-shoot mode that automatically adjusts lens and speed settings. Most models also offer specialized auto settings for specific picture-taking tasks, such as close-ups, landscapes, and night shots. You turn a dial or select the setting from a menu.

► **Consider the optical-zoom range.** Most digital cameras have at least an optical 3x zoom. It makes objects seem about three times closer than they actually are. A zoom lens makes it easier to compose shots and is useful for portraits. A longer range is helpful for landscapes and outdoor action, when you can't always get close to the subject. But longer zoom lenses present drawbacks, such as darker images and more difficulty shooting in low light.

► **Weigh battery type and life.** All digital cameras run on rechargeable batteries, either an expensive battery pack or a set of AAs. In Consumer Reports tests, neither battery type had a clear performance advantage.

► **Consider camera speed.** Be prepared to wait after each shot as the camera processes the photo. While most cameras allow you to shoot an image every few seconds, a few models make you wait several seconds which can be frustrating when trying to take several photos in sequence.

► **Consider computer-free printing.** To print directly to a compatible inkjet printer, look for a Pictbridge-enabled camera.

► **Movie and sound.** Some cameras can record low-resolution movie clips and some record sound.

► **Eyeglasses.** Some digital cameras have a viewfinder diopter adjustment which allows some to use the camera without eyeglasses.

► **Single-use digital cameras.** Some single-use digital cameras are now available. Most allow you to preview and delete unwanted shots. Printing may be limited to the store where the camera was purchased and pictures cannot not be downloaded and printed at home. Criteria for selection follow features of regular digitals.

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