



SPEAKERS' CORNER

Blast your favourite music from wall to wall with a set of multi-room speakers. **David Phelan** tests the finest



Pump up the volume: Sonos products are some of the most reliable (Sonos)

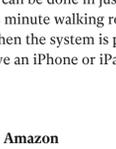
The joy of multi-room is the way you can walk from the kitchen to the bedroom and hear the same track playing everywhere. Although this once would have meant miles of cable under the carpet, now you can achieve this all wirelessly – power cables for each speaker may be all you need, plus a wire to your router in some cases.

Multi-room speakers also let you play different tracks in different rooms, at the same time. Speakers use wifi, or Bluetooth, or both, to spread the signal. Bluetooth is simplest but wifi is better. Not least because with Bluetooth, if your phone rings, your music stops.

Most multi-room systems work seamlessly with other speakers from the same brand, but not at all with rival manufacturers. Once you've got a Sonos speaker, say, it's harder to make a Bose one fit into the system. In each case we've picked a good standalone speaker and indicated what it can combine with for the best sound around the house.

Beyond wifi and Bluetooth, look out for Spotify Connect, which allows Spotify premium subscribers to control their music from their mobile and it overcomes the issue where a phone call interrupts, even though it works through Bluetooth. AirPlay is Apple's system for wireless streaming of audio, with the latest version, AirPlay 2, offering compatibility with a wider range of gadgets and with multi-room capabilities.

Sonos One: £199, Amazon



Bluetooth? No

Wifi? Yes

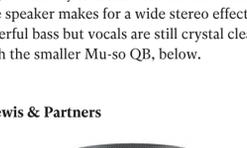
Spotify Connect? No, works with regular Spotify app

AirPlay 2? Yes

The small Sonos One sounds way bigger than it looks. It's mono, so you'll want two to create a stereo pair. Together they sound fantastic: punchy, clear, with lots of detail. Because they're two speakers which you can place wherever you like, the stereo separation is irreproachably good.

One of the strengths of the Sonos system is that you can start with just one or two speakers and add more when you're ready. All the speakers work together perfectly and some of them, like the Sonos One, are compatible with Amazon Alexa, so you can change tracks, for instance, with just your voice. The other strength is the simplicity of the setup which can be done in just seconds. There's also a neat Sonos speciality, called "Trueplay". You spend one minute walking round the room with an iPhone or iPad (while the speaker makes some funny noises) and then the system is perfectly tuned for your specific room. You only need to do this once, so if you don't have an iPhone or iPad, borrowing one for a few minutes will suffice.

Naim Mu-so wireless music system: £899, Amazon



Bluetooth? Yes

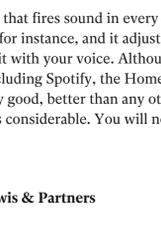
Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? Yes

The big, heavy box which is the Mu-so looks and sounds deeply impressive. It has stunning build quality, from the anodised aluminium heat sink to the highly tactile volume dial with a light ring. The curvy grille on the front also looks great and you can buy it in different colours – such as a vivid burnt orange – if black is too dull for you. The size of the speaker makes for a wide stereo effect and the audio quality is breathtakingly good: there's powerful bass but vocals are still crystal clear. You can add more Mu-so speakers or match the Mu-so with the smaller Mu-so QB, below.

Apple HomePod: £319, John Lewis & Partners



Bluetooth? Yes

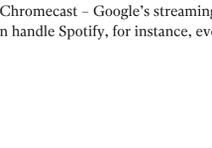
Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? No

AirPlay 2? Yes

Apple's smart speaker is a squat cylinder that fires sound in every direction. A series of microphones means it knows if it's sitting near a wall, for instance, and it adjusts where the audio is directed. The microphones mean you can also control it with your voice. Although you can play music from a smartphone with any musical source, including Spotify, the HomePod works best with an Apple Music subscription. One HomePod sounds very good, better than any other solo smart speaker, but the improvement from two as a stereo pair is considerable. You will need two or more for multi-room capabilities.

Panasonic SC-HC2020: £199, John Lewis & Partners



Bluetooth? Yes

Wifi? Yes

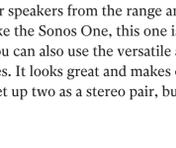
Spotify Connect? No

AirPlay 2? No

Like the Ruark below, this is an all-rounder with a CD player and radio tuner built in. It's light and small enough to be easily mounted on a wall. Speakers that can be added include the Panasonic GA10, a smart speaker with Google Assistant built in so you can control the system with your voice.

The design is sleek and attractive, in either its black and white finishes. Even without the GA10 this speaker is well connected, thanks to Chromecast – Google's streaming system – which is built in and can power the multi-room system and can handle Spotify, for instance, even though Spotify Connect is not included.

Sonos Play 5: £499, Currys



Bluetooth? No

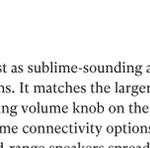
Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? No, works with regular Spotify app

AirPlay 2? Yes

This is the largest and most powerful of the Sonos speakers and is so good you can hear it from the next room. Even so, you'll want to add other speakers from the range and since all the Sonos models work together flawlessly, it's easily done. Like the Sonos One, this one is also AirPlay 2 compatible so you can play direct from your iPhone easily. You can also use the versatile and easy Sonos app to control apps like Spotify, Apple Music and other services. It looks great and makes outstandingly good work of whatever source you throw at it. You can even set up two as a stereo pair, but you really don't need to, even in the biggest rooms.

Naim Mu-so QB wireless speaker: £649, Currys



Bluetooth? Yes

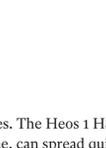
Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? Yes

This smaller sibling to the Mu-so is almost as sublime-sounding as the full size design and works brilliantly for small to medium sized rooms. It matches the larger model for the same design aesthetics, the same handsome and hard-to-resist-touching volume knob on the top and has the same option to buy a grille that isn't black if you prefer. The same connectivity options apply. Although the speaker is small, the carefully angled woofer, tweeters and mid-range speakers spread the sound wide and have a lot of sonic power to them.

Denon Heos 1 HS2: £149, Richer Sounds



Bluetooth? Yes

Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? Yes

Denon's "Heos" range comes in varying sizes. The Heos 1 HS2 is the smallest, but still works well and since you can connect up to 32 units at a time, can spread quite far. The speakers work from the mains but for ultimate versatility, a battery pack is available, so you could plonk a couple in the garden if you wish (it's designed to withstand the elements with a humidity-resistant case, but don't leave it out in the rain). Control is through a dedicated Heos smartphone app, which is straightforward and easy to use.

Cambridge Audio Yoyo L wireless music system: £329, Richer Sounds



Bluetooth? Yes

Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? Yes

Solid British audio company Cambridge has a multi-room system called "Yoyo" and this large model in the range is simple but effective with plenty of power and bass. It also has Google Chromecast built in to make it more versatile still. It has a wide sound thanks to drivers mounted on the front and sides. Small and medium Yoyo speakers are also available which can be added to the setup. The audio is tuned with a digital signal processor which is designed to improve bass and volume as well as the high notes.

Bang & Olufsen Beoplay M5: £426.54, Amazon



Bluetooth? Yes

Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? Yes

B&O speakers are routinely spectacular. The cylindrical M5 delivers strong, stereo sound from a compact speaker with plenty of bass. The sides are clad in an acoustically transparent fabric, which is now available in an especially fetching bronze-coloured finish. The sound comes from all sides of the circular drive. The lid of the M5 rotates to adjust the volume, and you can press it to pause or play music. You can add extra M5s or other speakers from the range, such as the BeoSound 1, Beoplay A9 floor speaker and the Beosound Edge. The sound quality on even the smallest (this one) is powerful and very impressive.

Ruark R5: £999, Ruark



Bluetooth? Yes

Wifi? Yes

Spotify Connect? Yes

AirPlay 2? No

British audio company Ruark has a history of making classy, elegant speakers with a special emphasis on radios. So, it's no surprise that the latest model, due out in a few weeks, includes a CD drive, DAB and FM tuners, internet radio capabilities and solid, rich sound. The new R5 looks smart and attractive, with strong, room-filling sound quality that is very appealing – a built-in subwoofer means there's plenty of bass, too. The controls come in the form of a rotating dial that is satisfying to use and this speaker also comes with a matching circular remote. You can connect it to some, not all, of the Ruark range to create multi-room audio: R2 Mk3, R7 Mk3 and MRx speakers are all compatible.

Available 15 March

The verdict

Sonos remains at the top of the tree for multi-room speakers. Its Sonos One and Play 5 both provide fine-sounding audio reliably. They are also very easy to set up and highly enjoyable to use. Naim's Mu-so and Mu-so QB match the Sonos speakers for audio quality, and have few downsides (apart from price). And the new Ruark R5 looks elegant and fills a room with sound effortlessly.