

Carl's Place

Five Things to Consider When Picking a Projector



While we don't sell projectors or recommend specific models, we have several tips to help you find a good one. Keep in mind these five things: resolution, brightness, throw distance, brand reputation and extras (like wireless connectivity) that factor into convenient use.

1. PICK THE RIGHT RESOLUTION

Always make sure you're aware of the "native resolution" of the projector you're considering. Many will list "up to" resolutions that aren't meaningful if the native resolution is lower. If it has a native resolution of 800×600 but lists "up to" 1920×1080, it simply means that the image will technically be displayed, even if it might be all blurry and distorted. Avoid this by making sure the native resolution is clearly stated and is what you need.

The native resolution also determines the aspect ratio of the projector. You'll want a 16:9 aspect ratio (the most common for home theater screens) for 1080p (1920×1080) or 4k (3840×2160). 4:3 (1024×768 most often or even 800×600 sometimes), is less popular though still has some useful applications in golf simulators or offices.

2. LOOK FOR BRIGHTNESS BUT DON'T OVERSPEND

While you typically want at least 1,500 lumens (a typical ideal projector brightness goes up to 2,500+ with a lot of ambient light), don't get too hung the lumens, just buy as bright as you can afford. Conversely, be skeptical of high brightness claims from ultra-cheap projectors.

When looking for good home theater projectors for the money brightness-wise, look for around 2,200 to 2,500 lumens in the best models under \$1,000, in the \$650 – \$900 range to be exact. While cheaper models may offer more brightness (up to 3,500 lumens) they often lack in other areas. Unless you have a specific need for it, there's no need for 6,000 lumens or even 4,000 or 3,000 lumens, because as mentioned a 2,500 lumens projector (or even 1,000 lumens projector) will often do.

A note about type of light source:

When choosing a projector, there are several options when it comes to the type of lamp or bulb that produces the light. Some projectors use a traditional lamp, some use LEDs and still others use laser technology. Lamp projectors can be cost effective and provide the best value in lower or intermittent usage scenarios. While typically more expensive, many buyers are opting for lamp-free models in an effort to eliminate the expense and inconvenience of regular lamp replacement. While not known for extreme brightness, the primary benefits of LED projectors are that they're smaller in size, produce less heat and last quite a bit longer than traditional lamp projectors. Laser projectors boast even lower maintenance, improved brightness and higher contrast than the more affordable lamp or LED models.

3. KEEP THROW DISTANCE IN MIND

Don't buy a projector that can't fill the screen you want from the mounting point you want. Calculate the aspect ratio, desired throw distance, and screen size. Throw distance is simply the measurement from the screen to the projector. Generally speaking, most projectors fall in a similar range. If your environment requires something different, you'll have to pay more for short-throw or long-throw models. To measure screen size and other considerations like proper viewing distance for our desired screen size, use the Screen Size Calculator on projectorcentral.com.

4. AVOID GENERICS THAT LURE WITH CHEAP PRICE POINTS

There are a lot of no-name projectors out there that we generally recommend avoiding. The discerning viewer will be able to easily tell the difference. But it may be good for small kids or very casual outdoor movies. With that said, if you're ready to go pro, stick with these trusted brands: Optoma, Epson Home Cinema, BenQ, Panasonic, and ViewSonic.

5. CONSIDER OTHER EXTRAS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU

If you want wireless connectivity, built-in speakers (handy for outdoors though the speakers are rarely worth using), or the ability to keep your mounting flexible with keystone correction or lens

shift, be sure to look for those features in the manufacturer's details, always to be looked up on their official website. One final note: don't be lured to pay more for a Bluetooth projector or smart Wi-Fi projector that leads with that claim, because it may or may not make it a better overall. See above.

A few of our recommendations:

At 2,500 Hundred Lumens
Epson Home Cinema 2150 Projector

At 2,200 Lumens
BenQ HT2050A 1080P Home Theater Projector

Before we send you out into the projector world...

There are pros and cons to every projector, so be sure to select the best one for your needs (whether the best 4k projector, best home theater projectors under \$2,500, or even the best model under \$500). That's one of the reasons Carl's Place recommends looking up your chosen projector for buyer reviews and competitive pricing on Amazon. Once you've selected your ideal projector, you're ready to look into your ideal screen and get this show on the road!