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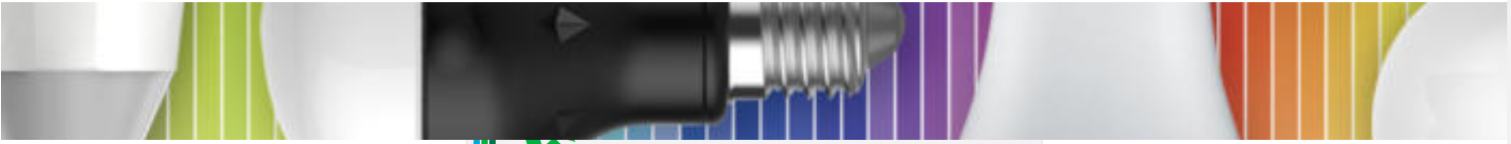
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Home / Lighting

Best smart bulbs for your connected home

Today's smart bulbs are brighter and easier to control than ever, but choosing the right one for your environment remains a challenge.



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Smart light bulbs—LED-based bulbs that can be controlled by a hub or smartphone app—are no longer a new idea. What is new is how far this technology has come since its advent just a few years ago. Also new: Products like the Nanoleaf Aurora—a system of interlocking LED panels that let you decorate with light—fundamentally change the light-bulb concept.

SMART BULB BUYER'S CHEAT SHEET

- Best color LED smart bulb: Philips Hue White and Color Ambiance A19 (Bluetooth + Zigbee)
Best white LED smart bulb: Philips Hue White Ambiance A19 Starter Kit
Wyze Bulb [wyzelabs.com]
Best smart bulb to pair with a security camera: LIFX+

Smart LED bulbs aren't quite a commodity, but they are getting close to maturity as far as the market goes. Today's bulbs are more compact, much brighter, have better color representation, and, for the most part, feature control apps that do more than ever and are easier to set up. Prices have also come down, with some no-name color-tunable bulbs

now available for less than \$10 each. (Buyer beware: You get what you pay for.)



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Updated July 21, 2020 to add a link to our news story announcing Hampton Products' entry into the smart light bulb and smart plug markets with its A19 and BR30 Wi-Fi smart bulbs and a 15-amp Wi-Fi smart plug that will be available exclusively at Best Buy.

[Further reading: A smart home guide for beginners]

White LED bulbs are smart, too

With their rainbow of hues and myriad party tricks, color LEDs get all the press in the world of smart lighting. It's fun stuff, but the reality is that most of us will rarely find much of a need to turn all the lights in the house blue or red—unless it's time to celebrate our team winning the World Series. Even then, you'll probably want to turn them all back to white after the celebration.

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
White light is also important in its own right, as today there is plenty of science to show how various shades of white—with variations in [color temperature](#)—impact our psychological state. Cool light that's closer to blue has an energizing effect, and is best in the morning. Warm light is relaxing, and is best after the sun goes down. Note, however, that not every white LED smart bulb is color-temperature-tunable. Check out the specs before you buy.

White smart bulbs downplay the party features that are a staple of color-tunable bulbs. On the other hand, white smart bulbs are less expensive than color bulbs, making it more affordable to roll them out in multiple rooms.

We've tested just about every color and white LED smart bulb on the market. You'll find links to all our reviews at the bottom of the page, and we'll update this story as new models are introduced.

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Best color LED smart bulb



Philips Hue White and Color Ambiance A19 (Bluetooth + Zigbee)
★★★★☆ [Read TechHive's review](#)


\$42.00 [See It](#)
on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

No one does smart lighting better than Signify's Philips Hue, and adding Bluetooth while keeping Zigbee makes it cheaper and a whole lot easier to get started.

Philips was one of the first players in this market, and the company's experience shows. Physically, its Hue Color and Ambiance bulbs haven't changed much since their introduction in late 2012, but the latest generation lasts a lot longer and the company has added a Bluetooth radio that obviates the need for the Philips Hue Bridge (but most smart home denizens will want the Bridge anyway). The Philips Hue ecosystem is the industry's deepest and broadest, including not only bulbs of every shape and size imaginable, but also indoor and outdoor fixtures as well, including the [Philips Hue Calla pathway light](#) and the [Philips Hue Lily outdoor spotlight](#), both of which we like very much.

Terms apply.

Runner-up



LIFX A19 smart bulb (2018)
★★★★☆ [Read TechHive's review](#)

\$49.00 [See It](#)
on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

LIFX's top-of-the-line bulb gets even better: It's brighter with a slightly smaller physical profile.

LIFX is a very strong competitor in the smart lighting space and comes a very close second place in our roundup. LIFX no longer has just A19 and BR30 form factors to offer, and we really like its unique [LIFX+](#) (which has an array of infrared LEDs that will help your home security camera see in the dark), but Philips still delivers much more diversity in its ecosystem and universe of third-party support.

Best white LED smart bulb



Philips Hue White BR30 (Bluetooth + Zigbee)
★★★★☆ [Read TechHive's review](#)

\$19.99 [See It](#)
on Philips Hue

No one does smart lighting better than Signify's Philips Hue, and adding Bluetooth to the existing Zigbee control makes it cheaper and a whole lot easier to get started.

Our choice won't surprise anyone who's been following this market. Philips dominates this space and is also our top pick for [best color LED smart bulb](#). The latest Hue bulbs can be controlled via Bluetooth or Zigbee (the latter requires the Philips Hue Bridge), they deliver high-quality light, and are backed by a strong warranty. We received the BR30 form factor for our review, but the bulb is also available in A19, candelabra, and even with vintage-style LED filaments.

Runner-up



LIFX Mini White
★★★★☆ [Read TechHive's review](#)

\$15.22 [See It](#)
on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

LIFX's pint-size bulb arrives in a non-tunable, white-only model, but drops a ton of features along the way.

Best white LED smart bulb

Best budget-priced smart bulb

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If you want a smart white-only bulb that doesn't require a smart home hub, the LIFX Mini White is a great choice. While it's slightly dimmer than the full-size LIFX bulb, it produces a 60-watt-equivalent 800 lumens.

Best budget-priced smart bulb



Wyze Bulb
●●●●○ [Read TechHive's review](#)

\$7.99 [See it](#)

on Wyze Labs

This ultra-affordable smart bulb doesn't have every bell and whistle, but it's an amazing value if you're just looking to cover the basics.

Wyze Labs consistently impresses us with its low-cost products for the smart home. Sure, their low-cost Wyze Bulb is only a tunable white (not full-spectrum color), and it's the only smart bulb in the Wyze ecosystem right now (you *can* pair it with a Wyze motion sensor, or control it with Alexa or Google Assistant), but it's a quality smart bulb that costs only eight bucks. Anyone who's just looking to dip their toe in the smart lighting pool would be crazy to not give this bulb a shot.

Best color LED smart bulb

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Best smart bulb to pair with a security camera



LIFX+
●●●●○ [Read TechHive's review](#)

\$69.93 [See it](#)

on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

This color smart bulb enhances the night vision of your security cameras through infrared LEDs, even when it's turned off.

Most home security cameras are equipped with infrared LEDs to deliver a semblance of night vision. The LIFX+ is equipped with infrared LEDs of its own, which are active even when the bulb is turned off via software. Infrared light is invisible to the naked eye, but the LIFX+ can bathe a room in it so that your security camera can see more of the room and in more detail than it can with its own infrared LEDs.

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Smart light bulb protocols and features

Three control technologies continue to vie for leadership in the smart bulb market (Z-Wave is a major contender in smart lighting, but you won't encounter it in bulbs—just in switches, plug-in modules, control panels, and smart-home hubs).

- **Zigbee:** Bulbs that use the popular smart-home networking protocol require a bridge to communicate with your home Wi-Fi network. This is the technology Philips has adopted for its Hue lineup, but it's not the only one.
- **Wi-Fi:** This class of bulb talks directly to your Wi-Fi router, no hub or bridge required. LIFX and TP-Link both manufacture excellent Wi-Fi smart bulbs, but neither company comes close to Signify's Philips Hue lineup in terms of the depth and breadth of the Hue ecosystem.
- **Bluetooth:** These bulbs skip your home network altogether and pair directly with your smartphone or tablet. As such, they can't be controlled from outside your home. GE and a number of other manufacturers make Bluetooth bulbs, some of better quality than others. Signify has recently added Bluetooth radios to its Philips Hue line of smart bulbs, which eliminates the need to deploy the Philips Hue Bridge. Taking the bridge out of the equation reduces the overall cost of deployment, but adds some limitations. You can read more in [our review of the new Philips Hue bulbs](#).

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Each of these technologies has pros and cons, so before you attempt to settle on a specific bulb, first try to determine which tech is right for you. If you want to hook your bulbs into a broader smart-home system—such as SmartThings or Nest—Bluetooth bulbs are out. You can control more than one bulb with your phone, but you can't connect it to sensors or other systems inside your home. Don't like the idea of pairing a bulb to your phone? A Wi-Fi bulb will work best for you, though you won't have quite as many options as you'll find with a Zigbee product.

Smart bulb, or smart switch?

There's a significant argument about the best way to install smart lighting, and two approaches present themselves. You can either go with expensive smart bulbs and control them all individually, or you can use cheap dumb bulbs and install smart switches to control all the lights on that circuit. Both approaches make sense: With smart bulbs, the biggest issue is cost, but there's also complexity to deal with. While bulbs can usually be grouped based on location, this is only as intuitive to manage as the bulb control app.

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Smart switches, on the other hand, are far more complicated to install—to the point where some users might be uncomfortable dealing with exposed wiring and would prefer to hire an electrician. Smart switches, however, provide more flexibility in many installations.



A smart dimmer switch on the wall, such as this Leviton model, makes more sense than smart light bulbs in some cases.

Habituated from years of flipping hard-wired switches, many users (or their children) will instinctively use the wall switch to turn the lights out when they leave a room. Once that happens, all the apps in the world won't be able to turn the light back on until the switch is returned to the on position. While this won't be an issue if you install smart switches, they can't change a bulb's color or color temperature.

That said, smart bulbs, no matter what the technology, still won't be right for everyone. Notably, most of these bulbs cannot be dimmed via a hardwired wall switch (it messes with the power going to the radio, rendering them useless). Some will fail even if a dimmer is present on the circuit and dialed up to full power. The *quality* of light from an LED bulb is likely to be much, much better.

The good news is that bulb prices are going down, so it's easier to get started with smart bulbs and less punishing should you find that a product doesn't work for you. That said, we want to get you started on the right foot. So without further ado, here are deep dives into the most worthwhile color and white LED smart bulbs on the market.

Our latest LED smart bulb reviews

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AT A GLANCE

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- GE Vintage LED Light Bulb Edison Style ST19 Clear Glass Medium Base (2 pack)** \$24.88 (\$12.44 / count) [See It](#)
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- Philips Hue White and Color Ambiance A19 Bulb Starter Kit (Hub and 4 bulbs)** \$228.46 (\$57.12 / Count) [See It](#)
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- TP-Link Kasa Smart Wi-Fi Light Bulb, Color Tunable (KL130)** \$19.99 [See It](#)
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- WiZ Connected BR30 Colors bulb** \$15.97 [See It](#)
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on The Home Depot
- WiZ Connected Color and Tunable** \$14.97 [See It](#)
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WHITE A19 BULB

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WIZ Connected ST19 Filament Dimmable bulb (amber) \$15.97 See It on The Home Depot

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Samsung SmartThings Smart Bulb \$17.99 See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

Sengled Element Color Plus Starter Kit \$69.99 See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

Sengled Element Touch \$17.99 See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

TP-Link Kasa Filament soft white smart bulb (Model KL50) \$12.99 See It on Best Buy

TP-Link Kasa Filament warm amber smart bulb (Model KL60) \$16.99 See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

Bulbrite Solana color-changing A19 smart bulb \$17.99 See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

General Electric C by GE LED light bulb starter pack \$24.99 (\$6.25 / Count) See It on Amazon (Prime Eligible)

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Christopher Null is a veteran technology and business journalist. He contributes regularly to TechHive, PCWorld, and Wired, and operates the websites Drinkhacker and Film Racket.

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