

Apple TV (4th Generation) Streaming Media Player Reviewed

By: [Adrienne Maxwell](#), April 4, 2016

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Let's get one thing out of the way right from start regarding Apple's latest [Apple TV](#) streaming media player. It does not support 4K video playback. For some inexplicable reason, while [Roku](#) and Amazon were embracing things like HEVC decoding, HDMI 2.0, and HDCP 2.2 in their newest boxes, [Apple chose to introduce a new player](#) that was outdated before it even hit store shelves, at least in terms of its video streaming capabilities. So, for all you 4K lovers out there looking for the [best streaming media player](#) to mate with your [new 4K TV](#), this ain't it.

What does the new fourth-generation Apple TV bring to the table? Well, the new model is built on a new tvOS operating system (based on iOS) that has a redesigned interface and, for the first time, includes access to an Apps Store to add new content and services. Apple has opened up the API to encourage developers to create apps for [Apple TV](#), as they do for the [iPhone](#) and iPad.

The new Apps store includes games, and Apple is putting a big emphasis on gaming in this new device. The player comes with a redesigned remote that features Siri-based voice search, while the more advanced gaming enthusiast can choose from a variety of [compatible third-party gaming controllers](#).

The 4th-gen [Apple TV](#) is available in two versions: a 32GB model for \$149 and a 64GB model for \$199. I picked up the 32GB model and compared it with the newest players from [Roku](#) and Amazon, as well as my third-gen Apple TV. Let's find out how it measured up.

The Hookup

The 4th-gen player has the same footprint as its predecessor, a 3.9-inch square, but its 1.4-inch height is about a half-inch taller than the previous model. It sports the same black finish (matte on the top and bottom, glossy on the sides) with a glossy black [Apple TV](#) logo on top.

The connection panel features an HDMI 1.4 input (grrr), a USB port for service only, and a 10/100 Ethernet port for a wired network connection. Built-in 802.11ac Wi-F with MIMO is also available. The player lacks a USB input that supports media playback, and gone is the optical digital audio output found on the previous [Apple TV](#), so HDMI is your only audio output option. The internal storage is specifically for apps/games, not personal media files.

The new remote control is noticeably different from the previous design. It's about the same height but is a tad wider and thicker, and it comes in a black finish as opposed to the brushed silver of its predecessor. The directional wheel has been replaced with a glass-touch surface along the

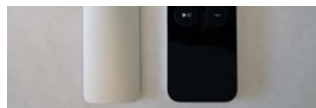


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top of the remote, which allows you to navigate via slide-touch with a click in the center serving as the enter/select function (you can also click up/down/left/right for gameplay). There are dedicated buttons for home, menu, voice search, play/pause, and volume up/down.



The remote communicates with the player via Bluetooth 4.0, so it does not require line of sight. Apple has included an [IR receiver](#) on the player itself, so you can control it via a [universal IR remote](#). (The Remote Settings menu can walk you through the processing of adding Apple TV commands to your other remote.) The addition of volume buttons allows you to control your TV's volume directly via the Apple TV remote, and it worked with my older Samsung LCD TV right out of the box. CEC controls can be enabled to turn on your TV using the remote, as well.

I connected the Apple TV via HDMI to a [Samsung 1080p TV](#) and powered it up. The setup process is straightforward and includes one very cool feature. After pairing the remote control and choosing your country/language, the Apple TV asks if you want to finish setup manually or by using your iOS device. If you select iOS device, all you have to do is enable Bluetooth on your iPhone/iPad and place it near the Apple TV for a few seconds. Your iOS device will transfer your Wi-Fi settings and your iTunes account info to the Apple TV. All you have to do is confirm your [iTunes](#) password, and the player is all set up to access your existing [iTunes](#) content and order new stuff. It's pretty slick. (Obviously, if you don't have an [iTunes](#) account yet, the setup process will require more steps.)

As with the previous player, you can control the new Apple TV using Apple's "Remote" app for iOS. The process of pairing the player and the Remote App is a little more cumbersome than it is with other player apps I've tested. You have to go into the "Remotes and Devices" Settings menu and pair the two using the "Remote App" option. In my [case](#), there was no "Remote App" option until I did a software update on the player. (I had the system enabled to perform software updates automatically, so I'm not sure why there was an update waiting for me.)

Once set up, the Remote app includes a touchpad for navigation, a menu button, and a Now Playing screen. It also has a [virtual keyboard](#) that worked with every app I tried, which helps to speed up the sign-in and text-search processes. Oddly enough, you can't use your [iPhone](#) or iPad's microphone within the app to activate the Apple TV's Siri voice control.

In terms of AV settings, the Apple TV is set by default to the Auto output for resolution, so you should get a picture no matter what TV you mate with it. You can manually select a resolution from 480p up to 1080p at 50Hz or 60Hz. There's no option to enable 24p output as you get from the new [Amazon](#) Fire TV and NVIDIA Shield players. You can also choose between four HDMI color output options (Auto, YCbCr, RGB High, and RGB Low), and the Calibrate feature lets you adjust zoom/overscan and put up a color bars menu.

On the audio side, you can set audio output for Auto, Dolby Surround, or Stereo. The new player has added [Dolby Digital Plus decoding](#); if you go with the default "Auto" setting for audio output, the player will decode Dolby Digital and DD+ soundtracks from services like [iTunes](#) and Netflix and pass multichannel PCM in 5.1 or 7.1 channels to a compatible AV receiver. If you manually select Dolby Surround as the output option, you'll only get basic Dolby Digital. The player does not support DTS.

If you're connecting the player directly to a TV and want better sound than your [TV speakers](#) can provide, you can output the audio to AirPlay- and Bluetooth-enabled speakers and headphones. I was successfully able to send audio to both AirPlay and [Bluetooth speakers](#) that I own. Unfortunately, you can only send audio to one AirPlay speaker at a time, and you can't set up the device to simultaneously output audio via HDMI and AirPlay.

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