iPhone SE 2020 vs. iPhone 8: One of these $400 iPhones is a better buy

Some retailers are still selling the iPhone 8 despite Apple discontinuing the device. But you should just get the new iPhone SE instead.

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CNet - May 11, 2020 5:00 p.m. PT

iPhone SE 2020

$399 AT APPLE

iPhone 8

$349 AT WALMART

In a bid to lure budget-minded iPhone fans, Apple debuted its new iPhone SE for 2020 for $399 (£419, AU$749). The iPhone SE's specs and looks are similar to the iPhone 8 from three years ago, which is likely the reason why the tech company

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announced it would discontinue its 2017 flagship on the same day.

When it first launched, the iPhone 8 cost $699, but the price lowered to $449 before Apple pulled the plug on it. These days, you can still get the phone from third-party retailers for even less (Walmart, for example, is selling it new for $349 on Straight Talk). But if you're thinking of buying the iPhone 8 over the iPhone SE 2020 at that price, don't. The iPhone SE may share many of the iPhone 8's specs, but for $50 more you'll get more mileage out of a phone that isn't going to be three years old out-of-the-box. (And if $399 is absolutely out of your budget, consider shopping for even cheaper phones.)

iPhone SE 2020
The new budget iPhone champ

Apple

Though it shares many key specs, the new iPhone SE still has a few upgrades that make it better than the iPhone 8. That includes an A13 Bionic processor, dual-SIM capabilities and a handful of camera upgrades. (Neither phone has a headphone jack, in case you're wondering.) If you're looking for an affordable new iPhone from a reliable retailer with up-to-date support, the iPhone SE is your best bet. iPhone SE 2020. $399 AT APPLE

iPhone 8
Goodbye and thanks for all the fish

Sarah Tew/CNET

If you already have a well-functioning iPhone 8, there's no reason to update to a new iPhone SE if you can help it. But if you're tempted to buy a new one, don't. In addition to the iPhone SE 2020 upgrades you'll be missing out on (which I listed above), there's the likelihood that software updates

from Apple and customer support from wherever you purchase your iPhone 8 may not be as robust on a 3-year-old device than on a new one. Though it's difficult to place a tangible monetary value on things like reliable iOS updates, a robust return policy and a possibly higher trade-in value, it's worth paying a bit more for those features. (Speaking of trade-ins, Apple is offering $170 off the iPhone SE if you turn in your iPhone 8.) Read our Apple iPhone 8 review.

If you need more reasons, though, let's walk through both models and explain why the iPhone SE is the smarter buy.

Design: Both iPhones are nearly identical, but...

Unlike the iPhone SE and the iPhone 11, which look different even at a glance, the iPhone SE and the iPhone 8 look relatively the same. Both have 4.7-inch Retina HD displays (a branding terms that Apple uses to differentiate its display technology) with the same resolution and pixel density. They also have a physical home button that houses a fingerprint reader for unlocking the phone and authorizing digital payments. Both are rated IP67 for water protection too.

The new iPhone SE looks a lot like the iPhone 8.
Angela Lang/CNET

But there are two minor differences about the phones. One is that the iPhone 8 still has 3D Touch. The feature debuted in 2015 in the iPhone 6S, allowing you to access additional menu options and commands by hard-pressing your finger against the screen. Apple began to phase out the feature in 2018 with the iPhone XR and it's now absent from new iPhones. Instead, the company replaced 3D Touch with Haptic Touch. Haptic Touch is on the iPhone SE and works relatively the same way, except instead of having to press down harder on

the screen, you'll need to merely long-press on the item.

Second, the iPhone 8 comes in black, white and gold -- but inventory is limited depending on the retailer so you may find even fewer options. The iPhone SE, meanwhile, is available now and comes in black, white and red.

Camera: iPhone SE has some hidden extras

The iPhone SE and iPhone 8 both have a 12-megapixel rear camera and a 7-megapixel front-facing shooter, with the same apertures on each (f/1.8 and f/2.2, respectively). On the surface, it looks as if there's no difference between the two phones' cameras, but Apple added some useful camera upgrades under the hood. These include:

- Portrait Mode and Depth Control for taking and adjusting bokeh photos
- Smart HDR, to improve highlights and shadows
- Red-eye correction
- Quicktake, which lets you quickly record video without tapping out of Photo mode
- Video improvements: Extended dynamic range for 30fps; 3x digital zoom (the iPhone 8 has 2x);

cinematic video stabilization for 4K video (the iPhone 8 has it only up to 1080p) and stereo recording
- Front-facing camera: Portrait mode and cinematic video stabilization up to 1080p (the iPhone 8 has none)

Altogether, iPhone SE captures better quality photos and video than the iPhone 8, and at times takes photos equally comparable to the iPhone 11. For more on camera quality, be sure to read CNET's iPhone SE review.

Processor, battery, dual-SIM and memory

The iPhone SE is equipped with Apple's latest proprietary A13 Bionic chip, the same one that's inside the iPhone 11 flagship. When we ran processing performance speeds on 3DMark and Geekbench 5, the iPhone SE clocked in similar results with the iPhone 11, which is to say that the iPhone SE also performed comparably -- and at times better than -- the Galaxy S20, Pixel 4 and the OnePlus 8 Pro. And compared to the iPhone 8, the iPhone SE's result for 3DMark's Ice Storm

Unlimited test was miles above the iPhone 8's (97,415 compared to the iPhone 8's 62,206 score).

Apple's A13 processor.
Screenshot by Stephen Shankland/CNET

Apple never discloses its iPhones' battery capacities, so when it announced the iPhone SE, all it said was that it was the same as the iPhone 8. It also listed identical wireless video and audio playback hours (13 hours and 40 hours, respectively) for both phones. However, when we ran our battery tests for video playback on Airplane mode, the iPhone SE lasted longer than the iPhone 8 by nearly two hours. (To be more specific, the iPhone SE lasted about 15.5 hours, while the iPhone 8 lasted 13.5 hours.)

In addition, the iPhone SE has options for a nano-SIM and an e-SIM, meaning you can manage two phone numbers on the same phone. Having <u>dual-SIM capabilities</u> is handy if you travel a lot and need a phone abroad, or you have two phones for personal and business use and would like to combine it in one device. Lastly, while both phones have a 64GB and 256GB memory option, the new iPhone SE has a third, 128GB model. That capacity is commonly considered to be the "sweet spot" as far as storage goes. That's because 64GB may not be enough to hold all your photos and 4K videos, 256GB may be too extravagant.

	Apple iPhone SE (2020)	iPhone 8
Display size, resolution	4.7-inch Retina HD; 1,334x750 pixels	4.7-inch Retina HD; 1,334x750 pixels
Pixel density	326ppi	326ppi
Dimensions (Inches)	5.45x2.65x0.29 in	5.45x2.65x0.29 in
Dimensions (Millimeters)	138.4x67.3x7.3 mm	138.4x67.3x7.3 mm
Weight (Ounces, Grams)	5.22 oz; 148g	5.22 oz; 148g
Mobile software	iOS 13	iOS 11 (can update to iOS 13)
Camera	12-megapixel	12-megapixel
Front-facing camera	7-megapixel	7-megapixel
Video capture	4K	4K
Processor	Apple A13 Bionic	Apple A11 Bionic
Storage	64GB, 128GB, 256GB	64GB, 256GB
RAM	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
Expandable storage	No	No
Battery	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
Fingerprint sensor	Home button	Home button
Connector	Lightning	Lightning
Headphone jack	No	No
Special features	Water resistant (IP67); dual-SIM capabilities (nano-SIM and e-SIM); wireless charging	Water resistant (IP67); wireless charging