

A Folding iPhone at Last? What to Expect From Apple's Surprise and Shine Fall Event

From the iPhone 18 lineup to the Apple Watch 12 and new AirPods, this is everything Apple could release in its anticipated September event.

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After months of leaks and rumors, Apple is set to reveal its fall hardware lineup on Wednesday, Sept. 9, at its Surprise and Shine event. And from everything we know so far, the event will be unlike most others.

For one, this year's event is a bit sentimental for the Cupertino company. Tim Cook announced in April that he is stepping down from his role as CEO, a job he has held for nearly 15 years after legendary Apple co-founder Steve Jobs stepped down in 2011. John Ternus, the company's hardware engineering chief, will be stepping into the top role just days before the event.

Apple is also heavily rumored to break with its usual routine by holding off on releasing a base iPhone 18 until next year, meaning only the more expensive Pro models will be revealed in September. That would give another highly anticipated release center stage: the foldable device expected to be called the iPhone Ultra.

We'll be keeping a close eye on the price tags. Apple raised prices across its computer and home devices this summer, attributing the cost increases

to memory chip supply chain issues, largely driven by the AI race. Additional price hikes on Apple Music and Apple TV subscriptions aren't helping cash-strapped consumers, either.

New iPhone 18 models, joining the foldable fun

Apple's iPhone 18 lineup is likely going to look a little different this year. One of the biggest rumors is that Apple is going to do an extended rollout. This September, we expect to see the foldable iPhone Ultra, the 18 Pro and 18 Pro Max, but we likely won't get the base iPhone 18, iPhone 18E and a possible iPhone Air 2 until spring 2027.

The iPhone Ultra, as Apple's much-rumored first foldable phone is tentatively named, has a book-style design, according to analyst leaks. Think more Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 8, which opens like a book into a mini tablet — not like an OG 90s flip phone.

But the possible \$2,000 price tag means the Ultra likely won't be a replacement for the base iPhone 18. More likely, it will be more of a luxury option.

That may be one reason why a majority of US adults (75%) don't care about foldable phones, a recent CNET survey found.



We had CNET's creative director show us what we could expect from the new potential iPhone 18 colors.

Jeffrey Hazelwood/CNET

The iPhone 18 Pro and 18 Pro Max models are rumored to have bigger batteries, variable-aperture cameras and run on the new Apple A20 processor. More satellite connectivity, a smaller Dynamic Island and tweaked back camera islands are also possibilities. And these new phones could come in colors such as light blue, dark cherry and dark gray.

Running on all these devices is the already announced new family of operating systems. iOS 27, with the anticipated Siri AI revamp, is likely to be released this fall, along with MacOS Golden Gate, Apple TVOS 27 and more. Since we learned about these at WWDC in June, we've been playing around with the public betas to see what's inside.

Apple Watch Series 12: Apple Health and Touch ID?

A Series 12 Watch is “all but guaranteed,” CNET wearables expert Vanessa Hand Orellana says. Less likely are a new Apple Watch SE and Ultra model since they were refreshed in 2025. But any new watches, the Series 12 and Ultra 4, are likely to come with a new processor, which should extend their life and usefulness for you.

The biggest design change expected is largely mechanical, not aesthetic. A more energy-efficient screen technology could be included to extend the watches' battery life without sacrificing screen brightness. A new processor — probably named the

S12 to match the line-up's naming, despite "S11" being next in line — would also help with this.



The next Apple Watch Series 12 may bring back TouchID.
Jeffrey Hazelwood/CNET

Another potential addition could be biometric authentication — in other words, a Touch ID for Apple Watch. Some internal code leaks suggest Apple is working on integrating this tech into its wearables, but it's unclear when it will be publicly available. Health features, like blood pressure monitoring, are also rumored to be in progress, but again, no guarantees. The Apple Health App's AI overhaul has also reportedly run into issues.

Our early testing shows WatchOS 27 with Siri AI will bring a big boost to devices — at least, for the ones it's compatible with, which isn't all of them. Watches were excluded from Apple's summer price hike, but similar raises from watches by Google and Samsung mean a higher starting price isn't out of the realm of possibility.

AirPods with or without cameras

Possibly the biggest Apple rumor has been that the next generation of Apple AirPods will be equipped with a new, tiny infrared camera — not to take photos, but to scan its physical environment to power its visual intelligence, or AI, answers.



The AirPods 5 could look similar to the AirPods 4 (shown) but have performance upgrades.

These rumored “AirPods Ultra” sparked a lot of concern and outrage from tech enthusiasts, who have spent most of the summer criticizing other AI-and-camera-enabled wearables, like Meta’s smart glasses. Apple is known to tout its focus on privacy, so it will be interesting to see if Apple ultimately comes out with these earbuds and, if so, how it defends them.

AirPods are generally on a two-year refresh cycle, so we may get the AirPods 5 and AirPods 5 Pro this year. The previous model, the AirPods 4 with active noise canceling, is “something of a technological marvel,” CNET headphones expert David Carnoy said. Effective noise canceling is hard to achieve with an open-earbud design, but Apple’s previous success sets the foundation for even more progress here. The Apple-owned Beats 360 headphones could also get refreshed this fall.

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