

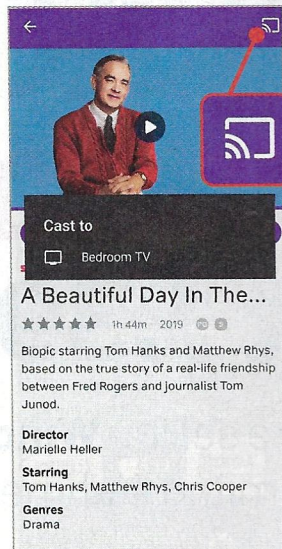
GOOGLE CHROMECAST

The puck-shaped **Chromecast** (£30 from www.snipca.com/36434, pictured below) works in a different way from other streaming devices. Instead of streaming content directly on the stick, it serves as an intermediary between your TV and other devices on your home network - a process known as 'casting'.

If you want to stream a film on Netflix, for example, you first need to install and open the Netflix app on your phone or tablet, go to the film/programme of your choice, then tap or click the Cast button (see screenshot right) and select your Chromecast from the list that appears. The Netflix content will then play back on your TV screen, and you'll be able to use your phone to pause, fast-forward and so on.

This may sound convoluted, but it actually works very well and almost all streaming services support casting (Apple TV+ is the only major service that doesn't). There are some downsides, however. Because the basic Chromecast doesn't come with a remote control, you'll need to use the device you're casting from to control playback. And if your casting device's battery runs out, your viewing will end abruptly. What's more, it doesn't support 4K video, so you're limited to HD streaming.

Although none of these are serious flaws, they're worth bearing in mind before purchasing.



Chromecast lets you cast programmes from your phone or tablet to your TV

control playback. It's voice-enabled, but in our tests we found it misheard our commands more often than the Alexa equivalent on Fire TV remotes.

As its somewhat awkward name indicates, this Chromecast also comes with Google TV. Based on Google's Android TV (the operating system used on many smart TVs), this lets you install and browse apps, and provides recommended viewing suggestions based on what you've watched previously. In our tests, it worked smoothly, reacting quickly to our commands via the remote control and loading apps in no time.

For an additional £30, you can buy this Chromecast with six months of Netflix's Standard package thrown in (which lets you stream to two devices in HD and would otherwise cost you £53.94). Note that this Netflix package doesn't support 4K streaming - for that you need Netflix Premium, which costs £11.99 per month.

Stream using Google TV

Unlike the basic Chromecast, the recently launched **Chromecast with Google TV** (£59.99 from www.snipca.com/36435) lets you stream directly from apps (iPlayer, Netflix and so on) installed on it. Disappointingly, some services (including All 4 and Now TV) don't offer apps for Chromecast. You can still watch these, but you can only do so by installing the relevant app on your phone or tablet, then casting it to your Chromecast. Hopefully, these apps will be added soon.

'Chromecast with Google TV' also comes with a remote control, so there's no need to keep your phone handy to

Cast your phone, tablet and PC screen to your TV

While both Chromecasts are primarily designed as media-streaming devices, they also have other uses. If you want to see your Android device's display on your TV (whether to go on virtual journeys with Google Maps on a bigger screen or browse the BBC News app without having to strain your eyes), you can do so by going to the Google Home app, tapping the icon for your Chromecast, then tapping 'Cast my screen'. Everything you do on your Android device will now be mirrored on your TV. This doesn't work with iPhones or iPads.

You can do the same thing with your Windows desktop using Google's Chrome browser. Click the menu button (three vertical dots), 'Cast...', then select your device, click Sources and choose 'Cast desktop' (see screenshot below).

Chromecast options



Chromecast
£30

www.snipca.com/36434



Verdict: Supports almost every streaming service, but not everyone will like the lack of a remote control and the need to stream media from other devices.

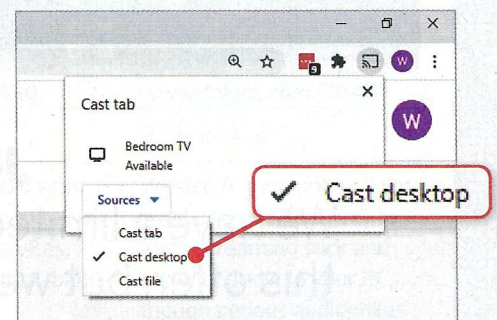


Chromecast with Google TV
£59.99

www.snipca.com/36435



Verdict: Comes with a voice remote control, 4K support and the excellent Google TV software, but it's also twice the price of the basic Chromecast.



Chromecast lets you stream your Windows PC desktop to your TV screen