

Compare iMac M3 and iMac M1: Is it worth upgrading?

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Following the first Apple Silicon iMac with M1 chip launched in 2021, the first update of Apple's all-in-one desktop computer has arrived. Let's read the detailed comparison of iMac M3 and iMac M1 in terms of performance, screen, features, I/O, etc. to draw a conclusion whether it is worth upgrading.

CPU, GPU, memory, Neural Engine

Improvements beyond the speed and efficiency of the M3 chip CPU include up to 24GB of memory, a more powerful media engine, and up to a 10-core GPU.



	M3 iMac	M1 iMac
CPU	8 cores	8 cores
GPU	8 or 10 cores	7 or 8 cores
Media engine	Hardware-accelerated H.264, HEVC, ProRes and ProRes RAW, video decoding engine, video encoding engine, ProRes encoding and decoding engine, AV1 decoding	Hardware-accelerated H.264 and HEVC, video decoding engine, video encoding engine
Storage	Up to 2TB SSD	Up to 2TB SSD
Memory	Up to 24GB	Up to 16GB

Memory bandwidth	100GB/s	66.67GB/s
Neural engine	16 cores	16 cores

While many Macs have both M1 and M2 chips, the iMac switched from M1 to M3. Apple says that means performance is up to 2x faster than the M1.



And if you're using a 21.5-inch Intel iMac (2019 or earlier), you'll see up to 4x faster overall performance.

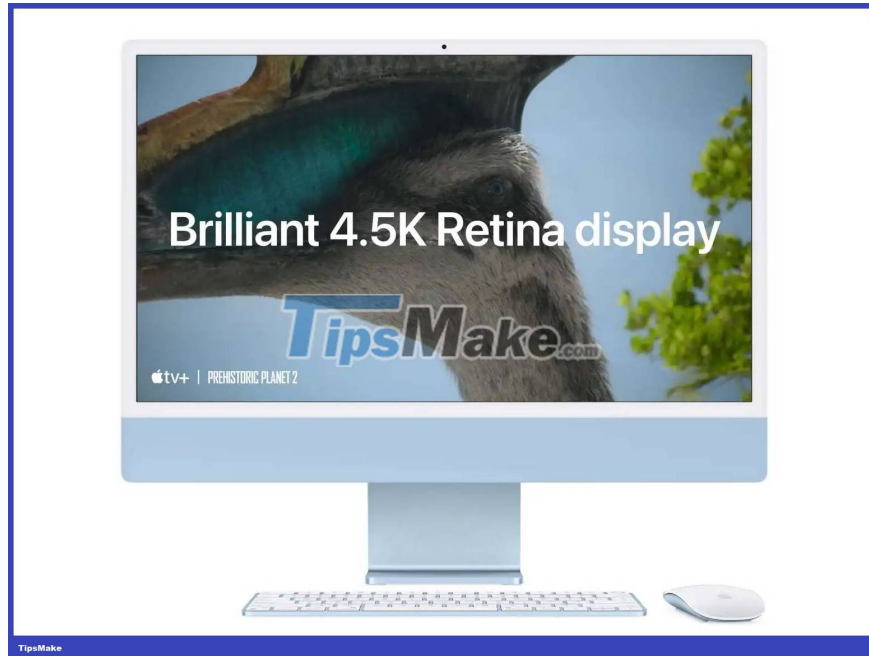
Apple also says the iMac M3 is up to 2.5 times faster than the most popular iMac models using Intel.



The above statements are for overall performance. When it comes to the specific CPU and GPU in the M3 chip, Apple says the 8-core CPU is up to 35% faster than the M1 and the 10-core GPU is up to 65% faster than the M1.

In the first iMac M3 benchmark, the single-core and multi-core scores approached the 35% mark.

Screen



The iMac M3 has the exact same screen as the iMac M1. That's not surprising – you get an excellent 4.5K Retina display, P3 wide color, True Tone, and 500 nits of brightness.

	M3 iMac	M1 iMac
Size	24-inch	24-inch
Resolution	4480 x 2520 (4.5K)	4480 x 2520 (4.5K)
Aspect ratio	16:9	16:9
Brightness	500 nits	500 nits
Retina display	?	?
Wide color P3	?	?
True Tone	?	?
LED backlight	?	?
Nano texture option	x	X

The only thing you don't get from Apple's Studio Display and Pro Display XDR offering is low-reflective nano-textured glass.

Compare iMac M3 I/O and iMac M1 I/O



You're looking at smaller I/O improvements to the iMac M3 like WiFi 6E and Bluetooth 5.3.

The general layout of Thunderbolt 4/USB 4 is the same with 2 or 4 ports depending on the model you choose. The speaker and mic system are the same as before.

	M3 iMac	M1 iMac
Thunderbolt 4/USB 4	2	2
USB 3 Type-C	2 on mid-range and high-end models (0 on basic models)	2 on mid-range and high-end models (0 on basic models)
USB-A	x	x
Gigabit Ethernet	2 on mid-range and high-end models (0 on basic models)	Optional with basic models, comes with mid and high-end models
10Gb Ethernet	x	x
SDXC slot	x	x
WIFI	WiFi 6E	WiFi 6
Bluetooth	5.3	5.0
Touch ID	Optional with basic models, comes with mid-range models and above	2 on mid-range and high-end models (0 on basic models)
'Hey Siri' support	?	?
Webcams	FaceTime 1080p HD + M3 ISP	FaceTime 1080p HD + M1 ISP
Video output	An external display up to 6K at 60Hz	An external display up to 6K at 60Hz
6 speaker system	?	?
Wide stereo sound	?	?
Supports Dolby Atmos	?	?
Studio-quality 3-mic array	?	?
3.5mm headphone jack	?	?

Like the iMac M1, the iMac M3 is still limited in supporting only one external display. But that might not be as big of an issue as with a MacBook since you've got a 24-inch built-in display.

Color and size



The color of the iMac M3 is the same as the M1. This includes 7 options for the 4-port model and 4 colors for the 2-port model.

	M3 iMac	M1 iMac
Color	Blue, green, pink, silver, yellow, orange, purple (all with white trim)	Blue, green, pink, silver, yellow, orange, purple (white border)
Weight	9.87 pounds (4.48 kg)	9.88 pounds (4.48 kg)
Height	18.1 in (46.1 cm)	18.1 in (46.1 cm)
Width	21.5 in (54.7 cm)	21.5 in (54.7 cm)
Thickness with base	5.8 in (14.7 cm)	5.8 in (14.7 cm)

The physical design of the iMac M3 matches the M1 build at an ultra-thin thickness of 11.5 mm (including the 14.7 cm stand). And the rest of the size and weight specifications also remain the same.

Price

Apple also kept the price unchanged with the new iMac, which is a starting price of \$1,299 for the basic model, \$1,499 for the mid-range model and \$1,699 for the high-end model.

The high-end iMac M3 is a bit more expensive than the M1 because this time there is a 24GB memory option.

	M3 iMac	M1 iMac
Basic 2 ports 256/8GB	\$1,299	\$1,299
4 ports 256/8GB	\$1,499	\$1,499

4 ports 512/8GB	\$1,699	\$1,699
4 ports 2TB/24GB	\$2,699	–

Conclude



Reasons to buy

If you've outgrown the iMac M1 or Intel iMac and love the all-in-one form factor, the iMac M3 is a great but iterative update. Considering most 4.5k or 5k external displays sell for \$1,000, the iMac M3 with its sharp display and modern Apple Silicon starts at \$1,299.

The main improvements are increased memory options, a more powerful chip, and the latest WiFi and Bluetooth.

Reasons not to buy

If your iMac M1 or other Mac is still working fine, there are no major updates to the super hot iMac M3. Alternatively, you might consider a Mac mini or MacBook for more flexibility with both form factor and hardware upgrades.

Advice on specifications

If you choose an iMac M3, remember that you can't upgrade the chip, memory, or storage afterward. So if you can afford it, spec it exactly the way you want.

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