

# Disney Plus: Pixar's Onward arrives today, months ahead of schedule

Pixar's *Onward* arrives Friday on Disney's streaming service, less than a month after it premiered in theaters before coronavirus shut cinemas down.

Disney's streaming service, Disney Plus, is the entertainment giant's online hub to stream almost everything it produces, including Star Wars, Marvel, Pixar, and all the family-friendly movies and animation from Disney itself, plus programming it acquired by taking over Fox, such as *The Simpsons*. But as swaths of the world are gripped by the new coronavirus and containment measures shutter cinemas and force families to entertain themselves at home, Disney Plus is changing its standard operation procedure.

On the bright side, Disney is releasing recent big-screen movies, like animated hit *Frozen 2* and Pixar's *Onward*, to stream early on Disney Plus.

Most recently, *Onward* dropped on Disney Plus Friday after Disney released the Pixar movie for online purchase just two weeks after its premiere in theaters. "While we're looking forward to audiences enjoying our films on the big screen again soon, given the current circumstances, we are pleased to release this fun, adventurous film to digital platforms early for audiences to enjoy from the comfort of their homes," director Dan Scanlon and producer Kori Rae said in a statement.



And *Frozen 2* is already available to stream in the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand. It arrived on the service three months earlier than its original streaming date of June 26, and it came just a few weeks after the movie became available for purchase as download, DVD or Blu-ray in February. Releasing *Frozen 2* early was meant to surprise "families with some fun and joy during this challenging period," the company said.

On the other hand, Disney Plus delayed its launch in France until April 7 because European officials worried that internet traffic linked to the rollout could strain the country's networks. Disney Plus launched elsewhere in Western Europe -- the UK, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland -- March 24. Disney Plus generated about 5 million downloads on the first day solely on mobile devices across its new European markets, according to App Annie.

Still, Disney Plus said it's lowering overall bandwidth use by at least 25% in all of those new European markets to minimize stress on networks. Disney will keep an eye on congestion and could further reduce bit rates if service providers are getting overwhelmed, the company said.

The coronavirus and the respiratory disease it causes, COVID-19, have been even more disruptive to Disney's other arms. Amid the pandemic, Disney has shut down its theme parks like Disneyland, delayed releasing big films like *Mulan* and *Black Widow*, and paused production on movies and shows. That includes Disney Plus' first Marvel original series, *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, which was supposed to be released in August.

Overall, Disney Plus is the company's huge bet on streaming as the future of home entertainment, taking on Netflix and an emerging crop of rivals like Peacock, Apple TV Plus and HBO Max -- even unconventional short-form, mobile service Quibi. It was one of last year's biggest launches, with a media analyst calling it "one of the greatest product launches of all time." Disney Plus launched Nov. 12 and registered more than 10 million sign-ups in little more than a day. In less than three months, Disney Plus signed up 28.6 million subscribers.

Disney Plus costs \$7 a month in the US, or \$70 if you prepay for a full year. (International prices are listed below.) The monthly rate is half the price of HBO Now and the forthcoming HBO Max. That price is also a discount compared with Netflix's cheapest tier, at \$9 a month.

Disney Plus is designed to be the exclusive home to stream theatrical blockbusters from Star Wars, Marvel, Pixar, Disney's own studio and National Geographic. Disney is also plugging in a slate of original shows and movies, including big-budget Star Wars spinoff *The Mandalorian*. *The Mandalorian*, its marquee original series with viral sensation Baby Yoda, became a pop culture phenom, and will return in October with its second season. Another live-action Star Wars series, a prequel to *Rogue One*, is set to start shooting this year.

So is Disney Plus worth paying for? All the details about Disney Plus are below, but basically: If you love Star Wars or Marvel movies or if you have kids, you may find yourself considering yet another subscription.

## **When are its release dates?**

Disney Plus launched Nov. 12 in the US, Canada and the Netherlands. The initial launch of Disney Plus came less than two weeks after Apple TV Plus rolled out. Disney Plus arrived on Nov. 19 in Australia and New Zealand. Then on March 11, Disney Plus rolled out unexpectedly early in India, as Disney rebranded its existing Hotstar streaming service there as Disney Plus Hotstar and added a wealth of new titles to stream.

On March 24, it launched across parts of Western Europe, including the UK, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. The company offered discounted preorders for potential customers there: a one-year subscription for 60 euros or 50 British pounds. Disney Plus' standard pricing in Western Europe is €7 or £6 a month, while an annual subscription is €70 or £60.

Disney delayed its launch in France until April 7 because of concerns demand for the new service could strain the country's internet capacity. When Disney originally launched in the US in November, demand to sign up and

start using the service caused widespread crashes the first day, even though that launch came during much more routine patterns of bandwidth demand.

In the UK and Ireland, Disney Plus replaces existing service Disney Life, but the switch isn't automatic for Disney Life subscribers. If you were a Disney Life subscriber, make sure you sign up for Disney Plus. And after some uncertainty, Disney Plus' catalog in the UK and Ireland appears to include The Simpsons.

Disney Plus also agreed to launch on Comcast-backed pay-TV operator Sky via its Sky Q service and Now TV app in the UK and Ireland. In France, broadcaster Canal Plus will be the exclusive pay-TV distributor of Disney Plus, and its traditional networks will air the first episode of The Mandalorian on March 24 as part of a publicity push.

Globally, Disney plans a progressive rollout worldwide over two years. The company provided a generalized timeline for when it'll expand the service to the world's major regions.

Disney Plus is slated to roll out in:

1. Eastern Europe over the course of a year starting as early as summer 2020.
2. Latin America over the course of three months starting as early as October 2020.
3. Asia-Pacific over the course of two years starting anytime -- the company hasn't specified.

(Read: Disney Plus en español.)

Kevin Mayer, the Disney executive in charge of the division launching Disney Plus, declined to specify any other international launch dates in August. But he told a group of international press that he believes people "will be happy" with how quickly Disney rolls out the service to international markets.

## How much does it cost?

In the US, the Disney Plus service costs \$7 a month, or \$70 a year.

In Canada, Disney Plus is priced at CA\$9 a month, or CA\$90 per year. In countries that are part of the euro zone, it is €7, or €70 a year. In the UK, it is £6 a month, or £60 a year. In Australia, it's priced at AU\$9 a month, or AU\$90 per year, while New Zealand subscribers pay NZ\$10 per month, or NZ\$100 per year. In India, Disney Plus Hotstar is priced at 299 Indian rupees a month, or INR999 a year.

The US price undercuts the \$13 monthly fee for Netflix's most popular plan in the US, which lets you stream to two different devices simultaneously in high definition. Disney Plus, however, allows all subscribers to stream to four devices and access 4K content at no extra cost -- features Netflix includes in its \$16 premium tier.

Disney Chief Financial Officer Christine M. McCarthy hinted Disney Plus pricing may rise as the service advances, calling the \$7-a-month fee an "initial" price.

The company also bundles Disney Plus with Hulu (with ads) and ESPN Plus, offering a \$5 discount if you subscribe to all three of its streaming options. At \$13, that costs the same as Netflix's most popular plan in the US.

Way back in 2017, Disney CEO Bob Iger noted that the price would reflect the "fact that it will have substantially less volume" than prime competitor Netflix. As the months and years pass, Disney will accumulate

a bigger catalog of exclusives and originals on Disney Plus. As that happens, it's a good bet the company will start pushing its price higher.

In October, Disney and Verizon announced a deal that gives a free year of Disney Plus starting on launch day to all of the carrier's customers with a 4G LTE or 5G unlimited account, as well as new customers of Verizon's Fios and 5G home internet services. Those who prepurchased a Disney Plus plan such as the now-expired three-year discounted subscription deal can stack their one free year on top of it, according to a Verizon FAQ.

## **How does Disney Plus compare with competitors and fit in with Disney's other streaming services, like Hulu?**

Disney Plus is a competitor to video streaming services such as Netflix, HBO Now and Apple TV Plus. It's a paid subscription without any advertising, and it gives customers access to a vast library of Disney's and Fox's legacy content as well as new, exclusive TV shows, movies, documentaries and shorts.

Disney's other streaming services -- Hulu and sports-focused ESPN Plus -- run on the same tech platform. Disney plans for all three to be individual subscriptions, but it's offering a triple-service bundle for \$13 a month.

Disney Plus includes all of Disney's family-friendly content and much of its mass-audience fare -- basically, anything made for audiences up to a PG-13 rating. It has content from Disney proper, Marvel, Lucasfilm (so, Star Wars), Pixar and National Geographic. And outside those traditional categories it'll also offer all 30 seasons of The Simpsons, a new feather in its cap from the Fox takeover.



Hulu, on the other hand, is where Disney streams more adult-oriented material. For example, two series originally planned for Disney Plus -- High Fidelity and Love, Victor -- were moved over to Hulu instead because of their mature themes.

Hulu is now the official streaming home for FX networks. (FX became part of Disney after Disney bought Fox for \$71.3 billion.) FX on Hulu will include all seasons of more than 40 FX series and will offer episodes of current and new FX series immediately after they air on the traditional network. Plus, FX will produce original series exclusively for "FX on Hulu."

For now Hulu will continue to stream content from three of the broadcast networks, as well as its own original series, like The Handmaid's Tale and Castle Rock.

And Disney now has full control over Hulu's direction. Hulu was jointly owned by four parent companies as recently as March. But in May, Disney said it'd buy the rest of Hulu it didn't already own. That gives Disney the flexibility to offer its bundle discount.

## **How can I stream it?**

Disney has wide device support, streaming to phones, tablets, computers, connected TVs and streaming media boxes. In August, the company said it also had global distribution agreements in place with Apple, Google, Microsoft, Roku and Sony. Then less a week before launch, Disney expanded that to Amazon, Samsung and LG. That encompasses the makers of:

1. Roku's boxes, sticks and TVs
2. Apple TV, iPhone and iPad
3. Phones and TVs running on Android operating systems, as well as Chromecast streamers
4. Xbox One
5. PlayStation 4.
6. Amazon Fire TV devices
7. Samsung smart TVs
8. LG smart TVs

Executives have said that they intend for Disney Plus to be supported by all major devices that stream video.

## **What product features does the service include?**

Disney Plus can stream 4K Ultra HD content in Dolby Vision, HDR10 and Dolby Atmos immersive audio. You can see a title's available formats in any of the Disney Plus apps by clicking to that show or movie's main page and then clicking on the "details" tab. The app for streaming boxes, like Roku and Apple TV, is also designed to briefly flash a symbol telling you the format that you're watching; it appears in the upper right corner of the screen for a few seconds when a video begins to play.

Every Disney Plus account can stream to four devices simultaneously and can create seven user profiles for different members of the household. Each account can pick an avatar of a Disney, Pixar, Marvel or Star Wars characters, with more than 200 avatars available.

Disney Plus also offers unlimited mobile downloads for offline viewing. Subscribers can download to up to 10 mobile or tablet devices, with no constraints on the number of times a title can be downloaded. The number of titles stored at one time on a device depends on how much storage space is available on the device.

The service is supposed to support English, Spanish, French and Dutch at launch, including both user interface as well as audio support and subtitles for library content, with additional languages available for Disney Plus originals.

The app also supports closed captioning, descriptive audio and navigation assistance to help subscribers with disabilities.

## **Shows and movies: What can I watch?**

Now that Disney Plus is up and running, sites like Just Watch or Reelgood make the service's catalog easy to search.

Generally, Disney Plus includes content from the Disney brand itself, Marvel, Pixar, Star Wars and National Geographic. It'll also integrate programming from Fox -- all 30 seasons of The Simpsons are on Disney Plus starting day one, and more titles, like The Sound of Music, The Princess Bride and Malcolm in the Middle, are joining in the first year. In August, Disney said that it'll go further than that, "reimagining" past Fox franchises "for a new generation." Iger indicated a reboot of Home Alone is in the works, for one.

Disney Plus is designed to be the only place you can stream all of Disney's theatrically released movies, starting with Captain Marvel and Avengers: Endgame at launch and the rest of its 2019 slate later on.

Disney Plus will also house the entire film libraries of Pixar, Star Wars and its Signature Series and Disney Vault lines of classic hand-drawn animated movies. (Think Bambi, The Lion King, Snow White and so on.)

And of course, the company is developing a big slate of original, exclusive shows and movies for the service.

Major originals include The Mandalorian, a big-budget series starring Pedro Pascal about a bounty-hunting gunfighter that takes place five years after the events in The Return of the Jedi. Disney is investing heavily in The Mandalorian. Its budget reportedly approached \$15 million per episode. By comparison, Game of Thrones didn't hit that kind of spending until its final season.

A Star Wars prequel series is based on Rogue One. It'll star Diego Luna, who played Cassian Andor in the original movie.

And Disney has seven live-action series featuring the stars of its blockbuster Avengers movies in their own shows.

The first wave includes: The Falcon and the Winter Soldier with Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan in August; WandaVision with Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany in December; a Loki series featuring Tom Hiddleston in spring 2021; and a Hawkeye series in fall 2021, starring Jeremy Renner and featuring Kate Bishop, who in the comics becomes a second Hawkeye.

In August, the company unveiled plans for three more shows, based on characters Ms. Marvel, She-Hulk and Moon Knight. In the comics, Ms. Marvel, or Kamala Khan, is a teen protege of Captain Marvel's Carol Danvers and is Marvel's first Muslim character to headline her own comic book. The Ms. Marvel series is confirmed for 2021 release. She-Hulk, or Jennifer Walters, is the cousin of Bruce Banner, whose superhuman powers transferred to her when she received a transfusion of Banner's blood. (Hulk actor Mark Ruffalo is in talks to appear in the series.) The character Moon Knight, or Marc Spector, is a former mercenary and CIA agent who has multiple personalities and is imbued with powers from an Egyptian god.

At Comic Con in July, Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige detailed how the studio's Disney Plus shows are designed to be essential viewing for Marvel fans. The characters and narratives of the Marvel Cinematic Universe will be knitted together between theatrical movies and original series on Disney Plus.

Benedict Cumberbatch, for example, will be joined by Scarlet Witch actress Elizabeth Olsen in May 2021's theatrical sequel Doctor Strange: In The Multiverse of Madness -- but to understand how Olsen's character arrived at the events on the big screen, you'll need to watch the Disney Plus original WandaVision, slated to come at the end of 2020.

On the flip side, Avengers: End Game contains a clue to how Loki returns from his death to appear in the Disney Plus original Loki, set for spring 2021.

Disney Plus also plans a gamut of original documentaries, reality shows, competition series, behind-the-scenes features, nature and adventure titles, animated programming -- the list goes on. It may also be the place Disney debuts live-action short films made via its Launchpad incubator program designed to elevate opportunities for filmmakers from underrepresented groups.

Disney Plus is even starting to stream two-dimensional versions of Disney's virtual reality.

Even though all of Disney's movies will stream exclusively on Disney Plus, the company doesn't plan to stream any of its big-budget motion pictures while they're in theaters. That's what's known as a day-and-date approach, to release titles on the big screen and on a streaming service at the same time. It was Netflix's strategy for years. Disney, however, plans for all its theatrical films like Star Wars and Marvel to run their course in theaters and home video before making them available with a digital subscription.

## **How will this affect Disney stuff on Netflix?**

Disney is mostly disappearing from Netflix in early 2020 (with a caveat).

Since 2016, Netflix has been the first place to watch Disney's movies with a subscription. That deal meant Netflix was the go-to place for the biggest US blockbusters of the last three years. The top two movies of 2017 and the top three movies of 2016 and 2018 were all from Disney, and Netflix has been the place to binge them all.

But Disney decided against renewing that Netflix deal as it plotted its own competitor. Starting with Disney's 2019 slate of movies, all those films are destined for Disney Plus. That means Captain Marvel, the first movie Disney released theatrically in 2019, is the first movie on Disney Plus instead of Netflix. It also means that Mary Poppins Returns should be the final Disney movie that has some type of release window on Netflix.

But licensing is complicated, and one report indicates Disney will return those movies to Netflix -- and remove them from Disney Plus -- temporarily starting in 2026. It affects movies released between January 2016 and December 2018, which includes Marvel titles like Captain America: Civil War, Thor: Ragnarok, Black Panther and Avengers: Infinity War; Star Wars hits like Rogue One: A Star Wars Story and The Last Jedi; and Pixar staples like Finding Dory, Coco and The Incredibles 2. It also touches family favorites like Moana and the live action Beauty and the Beast.

One consideration: Disney Plus won't lose these titles until six years after the service launches. At that point, Disney Plus will have built a large permanent library of original content, and it will continue to funnel all its newest releases to Disney Plus and nowhere else. Presumably, that will take some of the sting out of losing these films for a limited time.

Netflix's Marvel Defenders shows are complicated too. Netflix has put out five original series based on Defenders characters in partnership with Disney. In 2018, Netflix canceled three of them: Daredevil, Luke Cage and Iron Fist. Then in 2019, Netflix canceled the last two: The Punisher and Jessica Jones. Kevin Mayer, the Disney executive in charge of Disney Plus, has said Disney Plus could possibly revive the canceled shows. But the terms of their original deal could restrict Disney Plus from any revivals until 2020, according to a report.

With the third, and now final, season of Jessica Jones having hit Netflix in June, all we know about the future of these characters is Marvel Television chief Jeph Loeb teasing fans that the characters will continue in some form.

What shows and movies do you want to appear on Disney's streaming service? Pop them into the comments section and we'll keep updating this post with more information as it becomes available.

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