

Size isn't everything

If you're looking for a second TV for the kitchen or bedroom, we've got a couple of crackers

The most popular size for TVs these days is 32 inches, and many people dream of owning a massive flat-panel screen. But not everyone lusts after a huge picture; for those who want a more discreet TV, perhaps as a second set, we've tested a range of smaller models with screen sizes of around 26 inches.

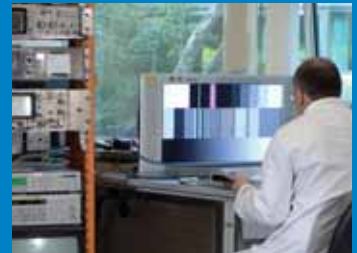
These TVs have similar features to their larger 32-inch cousins that we reported on in October (see p46). They're all LCD widescreen models and are high-definition (HD) ready. Although high-definition pictures may not be your main consideration on a 26-inch TV, the sets all have the necessary connections and screen resolution to show HD pictures when hooked up to a suitable

box. And picture quality was noticeably better on all models when viewing HD broadcasts. Sky satellite and Telewest cable are currently the only companies broadcasting HD content, but NTL cable will join them over the next few months.

Most sets are integrated digital TVs (IDTVs) – that is, they have built-in digital tuners, so you won't need a separate set-top box to pick up Freeview channels. But they've all got analogue tuners, too, so they'll still pick up the five analogue terrestrial channels if you don't live in the Freeview coverage area.

Whether you view analogue, digital, standard or high-definition broadcasts, our Best Buys are great TVs, with pictures that are a pleasure to watch.

Picture quality was noticeably better on all models when viewing high-definition broadcasts



We sit right down, waiting for the gift of sound and vision

Picture quality

As well as subjecting our TVs to a battery of technical tests, we use an expert viewing panel to assess picture quality. They watch all TVs in a room with dimmed tungsten lighting to replicate a normal living room. We set brightness and contrast at comparable levels on all sets and supply them all with the same-quality picture signal. To ensure continuity and impartiality, the same panel members take part each time, we conceal the brand names and, of course, no conferring is allowed.

We show a test card plus nine different video clips to highlight different aspects of the picture. For instance, a sequence of a moving train shows up any deficiencies in panning and movement, while a shot of garden flowers helps determine sharpness, detail and colour reproduction. We also watch the TVs in high-definition mode.

TVs that score well for picture quality are a good compromise between different demands. For instance, a sharp, detailed picture is appealing but not if that sharpness comes at the expense of stuttering motion. Likewise, smooth motion shouldn't come at the expense of picture sharpness.

Sound quality

We use a similar mix of technical measurements and expert opinion to assess sound quality. Our experts listen to extracts of voices (male and female), classical music, pop music and jazz as well as a TV drama in controlled conditions.

What you should look for

SCART/VIDEO INPUTS

Scart sockets connect the TV to external equipment such as DVD players or recorders. Having several of these will give you greater flexibility. Those that support the higher-quality RGB signal will give the best picture

SCART LINK

This lets you select TV programmes you want to record using the on-screen electronic programme guide. At the appropriate time, the TV sends a signal via the Scart lead telling a compatible recorder to start/stop recording



HDMI

If you're interested in high-definition (HD) broadcasts, look for a set with an HDMI input for HD video and audio signals. With two HDMI sockets you could connect an HD receiver and an HD DVD player



64% Sony Bravia KDL-26S2010U £795



This 26-inch IDTV came top in this test, thanks to its unrivalled high-definition picture quality. The standard picture is very good, too; our expert panel was impressed by the realistic colours and good detail. Sound quality is OK – slightly 'nasal' but clear.

It's a smart-looking set, with a matt gunmetal-coloured plastic surround and silver trim. It comes with a matching stand – though you can mount it on the wall if you buy a suitable bracket. There are two Scart inputs (both accept RGB) and one HDMI socket at the back, plus a further audio-visual input on the side to connect a camcorder or games console, for example. It's also got a headphone socket and audio output for connection to a hi-fi system, too.

The eight-day electronic programme guide (EPG) displays 12 channels on screen at a time and is pretty simple to use. The Scart link makes it simple to record programmes with a compatible video or DVD recorder. The large remote control is simply laid out, with good-sized keys and spacing, and generally the set is easy to operate.

Conventional Sony TVs have above-average reliability but we don't yet have any information on LCD TVs. This Sony is available from Comet and John Lewis.

We like This Sony is the most energy-efficient model on test, so it's good for the planet as well as your bank balance.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Screen** 26in **Tuners** Integrated digital and analogue **Sockets** 2 Scarts, HDMI, video, headphones, stereo audio, computer VGA **Scart link** Yes

Our Best
Buy in 1960
sold for £66
3s 0d – the
equivalent
of about
£900 today



62% Panasonic TX-26LXD60 £700



This 26-inch IDTV ran the Sony Best Buy close but couldn't quite match it for picture quality. However, our expert panel praised its good colour reproduction and resolution. Sound quality was OK but could be muffled at times.

The design is simple yet stylish, with a matt black and silver surround. It comes with a matching stand, though it can be wall mounted if you buy a suitable bracket.

It's got two Scart inputs but only one accepts RGB. Handily, it's also got two HDMI sockets, so you could use one for an HD receiver and the other for an HD DVD player. There's an input on the side to connect a camcorder or games console, plus a headphone socket and hi-fi connection, too.

The eight-day EPG shows seven channels on screen at a time and is nicely laid out, with good use of colours and prompts, making it easy to navigate. You can record with a compatible video or DVD recorder using the Scart link – just select the programmes from the EPG and the TV does the rest. The remote control is well laid out and easy to use.

Conventional Panasonic TVs have average reliability, but we do not yet have any information about LCD TVs. This Panasonic is widely available.

We like Its EPG is well designed and easy to use.

Cheapest store Comet **Screen** 26in **Tuners** Integrated digital and analogue **Sockets** 2 Scarts, 2 HDMI, video, headphones, stereo audio **Scart link** Yes

The way we were

In the 1960s, 17 inches was the ultimate when it came to size

We first tested televisions in May 1960, when there were only two channels, BBC1 and ITV. In those days black-and-white 17-inch screens were at the cutting edge (previously

only 9-, 12- or 14-inch screens were available). A typical set cost about £65, but one with a VHF radio cost 'four to six guineas more'. Our Best Buy, the Bush TV85, sold for £66

3s 0d – equivalent to about £900 today.

A set was expected to last five to seven years but would need regular servicing and components replacing.

Our endurance test involved switching the sets on and off 2,000 times, the equivalent of two years' use, to see whether they broke down. One set didn't last



the course – its 'silicon rectifiers blew up, causing a fair amount of damage inside'.

Insider information

Our TV expert Andy Woodward gives advice on how to fine-tune your TV to get the best picture possible

Once you've got your new TV home it's worth playing with the settings to get the best picture. Our tests show that the ideal settings for viewing at home are often very different from the manufacturer's settings. Changing the settings can also reduce power consumption – saving you money, too.

After noting the manufacturer's settings (in case you want to get back to them) switch off any picture enhancement features.

Then take the colour control right down to produce a black-and-white picture. Play a DVD that has a lot of dark scenes and adjust the brightness control so you can just pick out detail in the darker areas.

Next, find a bright scene (such as a daylight sky or white shirt) and adjust the contrast until the picture is comfortably bright enough for you without being completely 'washed out'.



Return to the dark scene and, if necessary, readjust this, before returning to the bright scene to check again until you find a satisfactory balance.

You'll find this easier with a conventional TV. With LCD TVs it can be difficult to get good levels of blackness without bright areas looking washed out, or vice versa, so you may have to compromise.

Now find some scenes with close-ups of people's faces. Adjust the colour so skin tones look natural. Sometimes a TV offers various 'colour tone' options – for example, cool, warm or neutral (typically, 'neutral' will be the correct setting).

To see the picture settings used by our experts for the TVs we tested, go online to www.which.co.uk/tvs. Although these are a great starting point, the lighting conditions of your own room and your individual preferences may mean that your final settings aren't exactly the same.

USING THE TABLE

We tested best-selling and new models from leading manufacturers. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you can expect to pay. **Size** Size without stand. **Screen** Diagonal measurement of TV screen.

Features

Scarts Number of sockets available to connect extra audio-visual equipment to your TV. **HDMI** Whether TV has high-definition media inputs available to connect HD equipment. **Audio out** A socket for connecting your TV to a hi-fi to enhance its sound. **IDTV** TV has a Freeview tuner built-in.

Test performance

Picture/HD picture/Sound/

Ease of use Ratings based on technical measurements and expert assessments. **Energy use** Based on power needed when on and in standby.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Picture quality	40%
Sound quality	20%
Ease of use	20%
Features	10%
Energy use	5%
IDTV functions/Teletext	5%

Contacts

Goodmans 0870 542 5425
www.comet.co.uk
Grundig 0870 920 1101
www.grundig.co.uk/
Hitachi 01628 643 3000
www.hitachi.co.uk
JVC 0870 330 5000
www.jvc.co.uk
Panasonic 0870 535 7357
www.panasonic.co.uk
Philips 0845 601 0354
www.philips.co.uk
Samsung 0870 242 0303
www.samsung.com/uk/
Sanyo 01923 246363
www.sanyo.co.uk
Sony 0870 511 9999
www.sony.co.uk

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113 more TVs tested

You will find reviews of a further 113 TVs on our website, from 16-inch portables to a 56-inch projection set. See www.which.co.uk/tvs for more.

MODEL	SPECIFICATION			FEATURES				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) WXHxD	SCREEN (in)	SCARTS	HDMI	AUDIO OUT	IDTV	PICTURE	HD PICTURE	SOUND	EASE OF USE	ENERGY USE	
1 SONY Bravia KDL-26S2010U	795	66x47x10	26	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	64
2 PANASONIC TX-26LXD60	700	66x47x13	26	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	62
3 JVC LT-26DX7BJ	895	67x47x14	26	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	58
4 PHILIPS 26PF5521D/10	700	81x44x12	26	2	✓		✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	55
5 SAMSUNG LE26R74BD	730	68x47x11	26	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	55
6 PHILIPS 26PF7521D/10	750	70x50x10	26	2	✓		✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	53
7 HITACHI 26LD6600 B	500	80x44x11	26	2	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	47
8 GOODMAN LD2650HD	500	65x51x10	26	3	see ^a			★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	46
9 GRUNDIG Monaco GUMONACOHD26I	800	69x50x11	26	2	✓		✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	44
10 SANYO CE27LD6-B	700	80x44x11	27	3	✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	44

^a DVI connection, not HDMI