

Ring the changes

Cordless phones allow you to make calls from any room in your house. We pick the best

While the first cordless phones offered the simple novelty of chatting to friends as you were walking around the house, the latest models mimic the new wave of mobiles in looks and in features, which range from texting and paging to polyphonic ringtones and games.

For many of us, though, the simple things are still key. We want a phone that's easy to use. It should have long-lasting batteries, so we're less likely to be cut off during an important call, and the range to give good reception even if you have a big house with thick walls.

Our Best Buys have all these things as well as more features than their rivals. They cost between £70 and £110 but if that seems pricey, we have given

details of two good Budget Buys.

These aren't widely available on the high street but can be found online.

For the second test in a row, Panasonic is the brand to beat. Great sound quality on both handset and answering machine is what makes its two models stand out. BT was also a strong performer and two of its phones are our other Best Buys.

On the downside, several phones were badly designed and difficult to use. The Binatone Icarus (22) doesn't have an LCD display screen, which makes storing numbers on to its memory a game of blind man's buff. The tiny buttons and slimline design of the Binatone iDect (20) gave it more style than substance and made it frustrating to use.



Storing numbers into the Binatone Icarus 1200 is like a game of blind man's buff

78% Panasonic KX-TCD240 £70

Speed dial, texting, polyphonic ringtones and caller ID options are all features of this great all-rounder. There is an illuminated screen and buttons to make the phone easier to use in the evening. When it gets to bedtime, you can switch to night mode which will lower the ringtone volume.

You can pick up answer machine messages from the base station and the handset, and the base station has dial keys so you can use it to make calls. The two can also form an intercom system – handy for telling the kids that dinner is ready. The phone is available from Comet, Currys, John Lewis and The Link.

WORTH KNOWING You can buy a signal repeater to extend call range.

Cheapest stores Comet, Currys, John Lewis, The Link
Weight 139g **Speed dial** Yes **Display** Monochrome **Sim card reader** No **Phonebook** 220 phone numbers



What you should look for

GAP COMPATIBILITY

This lets different phone and base stations work together. It will be shown as a feature with the phone

SMS MESSAGING

Further bridging the gap between mobile and cordless phones, several models on test allow you to send text messages

SPEED DIAL

This function assigns all your most commonly used telephone numbers to a button on your phone. Four models on test had it

SIM CARD READER

Put the Sim card from your mobile into the reader to transfer numbers to your cordless phone. Only some BT models had this



I'll just put you on hold

If you want to get your own back on banks and call centres that put you on hold and force you to listen to a panpipe rendition of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', now could be the time. The BT Diverse 6350 (3) allows you to put people on hold. Even better, it plays a tune. So next time your bank phones to offer you another way to get into debt, pop 'em on hold and make a cup of tea. If they're still there when you get back, at least it shows they care.

Contacts

Binatone
0845 345 9677
www.binatone.com
BT 0800 800 150
www.shop.bt.com
Cable & Wireless
0870 241 3201

Magicbox
01959 565 525
www.magicbox-products.co.uk
Motorola
0870 197 4131
www.motorola.com/uk

Panasonic
08700 100076
www.panasonic.co.uk
Philips
0870 900 9070
www.philips.co.uk



78% Panasonic KX-TCD290 £70

This is a good choice if you have young children round the house. Its rubber-coated protection helps it stand up to the most energetic handling and it is splash and dust resistant, protecting its inner workings from a dip in Ribena or a sandpit. All this robustness makes it the heaviest handset on test at 190g.

WHICH? BEST BUY

In other ways it is similar to its sister model (left), although there are no dial keys on the base station and the sound quality of messages on the answering machine is not as good.

The Panasonic KX-TCD290 is available from John Lewis.

WE LIKE An indicator lights up when the phone rings – useful if your hearing is not too good.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Weight** 190g **Speed dial** Yes **Display** Monochrome **Sim card reader** No **Phonebook** 200 phone numbers



73% BT Diverse 6350 £110

If you buy a cordless telephone you may still want a traditional phone as well in case the batteries on the cordless model run out and you need to make an emergency call. The BT Diverse 6350 has both types of phone and an answering machine. Like the Panasonic KX-TCD290 you can make calls with the base station or handset.

Features include texting, an illuminated display screen and an intercom system between handset and base station. It has a Sim card reader so you can transfer numbers from your mobile to the home phone. It stores 200 numbers. The BT Diverse 6350 is available from Argos.

WATCH OUT It has the worst sound quality of all our Best Buys.

Cheapest store Argos **Weight** 155g **Speed dial** No **Display** Monochrome **Sim card reader** Yes **Phonebook** 200 phone numbers



71% BT Equinox 1350 £100

You'll like this if you have a hectic social life – it stores 250 phone numbers. As with our other BT Best Buy, the Equinox 1350 has a Sim card reader so you can transfer numbers you've collected from your mobile. It's one of just a few models tested to have dial keys on the base station so you don't need to rely on the handset to make calls.

WHICH? BEST BUY

You can send texts and set up the base station and handset as an intercom system. Extras for your entertainment include five themed wallpapers, five games and a colour screen. The BT Equinox is available from Comet and online.

WORTH KNOWING If you're playing a game on the phone and someone tries to call, it will drop you out of the game.

Cheapest store Comet **Weight** 130g **Speed dial** No **Display** Colour **Sim card reader** Yes **Phonebook** 250 phone numbers

The Panasonic KX-TCD290 is splash resistant, protecting its inner workings from a dip in Ribena

Worth tracking down

These previous Best Buys are worth finding online

PANASONIC KX-TCD320ES £70

This is nearly the same as the KX-TCD220ES (see 'Budget Buys', right) but with a larger colour screen and extra ringtones. **Score 77%**

BT DIVERSE 6450 £90

A large handset makes this comfortable if you like to rest the phone between your chin and shoulder. It

has a Sim card reader and an answering machine you can use from the handset or base station. **Score 76%**

PANASONIC KX-TCD820 £100

This can double as a baby monitor. It also includes a computer link to download ringtones and wallpapers. **Score 74%**

Budget Buys

PANASONIC KX-TCD220ES £50

All our Best Buys cost from £70 to £110. For something cheaper without losing quality, try this. A Best Buy in our last test (February 2006), it's easy to use and has great sound quality. The answer machine is



integrated with the handset, so you can listen to messages on the move. It has speed dial, space for 200 numbers and a night mode which lowers the ringtone volume. It's easier to find online than on the high street. **Score 77%**

BINATONE SYMPHONY G5 £30 This Binatone (13) came sixth out of

the 22 phones tested this time (not quite a Best Buy) and costs just £30 from Argos. It has features such as texting and a colour illuminated display. There's a fuzzy dial search – enter a number and the screen shows stored numbers to pick from. It also has games. **Score 63%**



ON TEST CORDLESS PHONES

USING THE TABLE

We've tested the latest digital cordless phones from the leading brands. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price at the time of going to press. Prices for other models are a guide. Prices quoted are for one cordless handset except for the Philips Dect 1222S Duo and

Motorola ME4052-2 which come with two.

Weight Weight of individual handset.

Compatible handsets The maximum number that can be used with one base station.

Speed dial You can press a button to call selected numbers. **LCD display** Type of liquid crystal display screen that the phone has: monochrome (M), colour (C) or none (N).

Phonebook How many numbers the phone can store.

Test performance

Phone Sound quality through earpiece, mouthpiece and speaker phone.

Answering machine Sound quality of the messages. **Range** We test the phone up to distances of 35 metres and through different kinds of walls to mimic the conditions of a normal house.

Battery How long the rechargeable battery lasts in continuous use. This varied from 27 hours and six minutes

for the Panasonic KX-TCD290 to seven hours and 41 minutes for the BT Esprit. **Ease of use** How easy it was to set up and use the phone, and whether the instructions were clear.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Sound quality	30%
Ease of use	30%
Features	20%
Battery	10%
Range	5%
Power consumption	5%

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MODEL	SPECIFICATION							WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	WEIGHT (g)	COMPATIBLE HANDSETS	SPEED DIAL	LCD DISPLAY	SIM CARD READER	PHONEBOOK	PHONE	ANSWERING MACHINE	RANGE	BATTERY	EASE OF USE	
ANSWERING MACHINE													
1 PANASONIC KX-TCD240	70	139	6	✓	M		220	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	78
2 PANASONIC KX-TCD290	70	190	6	✓	M		200	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	78
3 BT Diverse 6350	110	155	6		M	✓	200	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	73
4 BT Equinox 1350	100	130	5		C	✓	250	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	71
5 BT Esprit 1250	90	130	5		C	✓	255	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	61
6 BT Freelance XD 1500	70	112	5		M		50	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	61
7 BT Calypso 225	80	110	4		C	✓	200	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	60
8 BINATONE Fusion 2210	23	120	5		M		40	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	57
9 BINATONE Activity 6210	30	120	5		M		40	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	56
10 BT Freestyle 3500	40	140	1		M		30	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	55
11 PHILIPS Dect 225	38	137	5		M		30	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	54
NO ANSWERING MACHINE													
12 BT Zenith Flip	80	129	5	✓	C	✓	200	★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	64
13 BINATONE Symphony G5	30	111	6		C		50	★★★★	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	63
14 MAGICBOX Flip Single	60	129	5		C		200	★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	62
15 PHILIPS Dect 1221S	21	137	5		M		30	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	62
16 MOTOROLA ME4251-1	60	120	6	✓	C		80	★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	61
17 PHILIPS Dect 1222S Duo	30	137	5		M		30	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	61
18 MAGICBOX Touch	50	139	4		M		60	★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	59
19 MOTOROLA ME4052-2	60	140	4		M		30	★★★★	n/a	★★★	★★★★	★★★	52
20 BINATONE iDect X1	35	108	6		M		50	★★★★★	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★	51
21 CABLE & WIRELESS CWD1400	18	118	4		M		10	★★★★	n/a	★★★	★★★★	★★★	51
22 BINATONE Icarus 1200	15	129	4		N		10	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	48