My Smart Home for Seniors

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Michael Miller
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Find the online chapter and other helpful information on this book’s website at http://informit.com/title/9780789759894.
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About the Author

Michael Miller is a popular and prolific writer of close to 200 non-fiction books, known for his ability to explain complex topics to everyday readers. He writes about a variety of topics, including technology, business, and music. His best-selling books for Que include My iPad for Seniors, My Facebook for Seniors, My Social Media for Seniors, My Internet for Seniors, My Samsung Galaxy S7 for Seniors, My Windows 10 Computer for Seniors, Easy Computer Basics, and Computer Basics: Absolute Beginner’s Guide. Worldwide, his books have sold more than 1.5 million copies.

Find out more at the author’s website: www.millerwriter.com

Follow the author on Twitter: molehillgroup
Dedication

To my six wonderful grandkids, who are all interested in smart technology (especially Amazon Alexa!): Collin, Alethia, Hayley, Judah, Lael, and Jackson.

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About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities™, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities, and protection from financial abuse. Learn more at aarp.org.

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As the reader of this book, you are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we’re doing right, what we could do better, what areas you’d like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you’re willing to pass our way.

We welcome your comments. You can email or write to let us know what you did or didn’t like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

Please note that we cannot help you with technical problems related to the topic of this book.

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Technology Note

Smart home technology is continuously and rapidly changing. The products and services discussed in this book were accurate at the time of writing, but it’s likely that some things will have changed by the time you are reading this text. Always consult with device manufacturers for the latest models, features, and prices.

AARP Benefits

At the time this book went to publication, AARP members are able to take advantage of discounts on certain smart home devices. Check http://www.aarp.org/benefits-discounts/ for these and other discounts and benefits for AARP members.
In this chapter, you learn how to use the Alexa personal assistant to control smart home devices via Amazon’s Echo and Echo Dot devices.

➔ Understanding Alexa—and Echo
➔ Meet Amazon’s Echo Devices
➔ Setting Up Your Echo Device
➔ Working with Alexa
➔ Using the Alexa App
➔ Working with Alexa’s Skills
➔ Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices

Controlling Your Smart Home with Amazon Alexa

All the smart home systems and hubs come with their own smartphone apps to control their various smart devices. And, as described in Chapter 10, “Controlling Your Home with Apple Home,” there’s Apple HomeKit, which lets you control systems from multiple companies from the unified Home app. All of these apps attempt to simplify the operation of what is essentially a set of complex technologies.

But if you really want to make your smart home easy to control, there’s nothing easier than using voice commands. That’s where Amazon comes in, via its Echo and Echo Dot devices and Alexa personal digital assistant. The Echo/Dot devices connect to all (or most) of your smart hubs and devices via your home’s wireless Wi-Fi network, and then you can control those devices via simple voice commands. Just tell Alexa what you want to do, and it controls the devices to do it.

It’s far and away the easiest way to control your smart home. (And there’s more beyond that, too!)
Understanding Alexa—and Echo

In spite of the name and the voice, Alexa isn’t a person. No, Alexa is just a piece of software, a kind of intelligent digital assistant that interacts with you using voice commands. That is, you talk to Alexa and she (or is it an it?) talks back. There are no keyboards to type or touchscreen to touch; it’s all done vocally.

What Alexa Does and How Alexa Works

In many ways, Alexa is similar to Siri on an Apple iPhone or Cortana in Windows 10. You ask Alexa a question or issue a command, and Alexa answers your question or does what you’ve asked it to do. You speak, Alexa listens. Alexa “speaks,” and you get whatever it is you’ve asked for.

What can you use Alexa to do? Well, you can have Alexa find current information (weather forecast, news headlines, sports scores), find interesting and useful facts, calculate math problems, and retrieve recipes. You can also use Alexa to play music, add items to your calendar or to-do list, and order items online. And, more pertinent to our current interests, you can use Alexa to control various smart devices in your smart home.

For Alexa to do all that she does, she has to connect to the Internet. That’s where she gets all the answers to your factual queries, from various news sites, Wikipedia, and the like. When you ask a question, Alexa essentially does an Internet search and comes back with the closest answer, which she then reads to you. It’s a little unnerving if you’ve never dealt with artificial intelligence; close your eyes, and it’s as if you’re talking to a human servant instead of a digital one. (In fact, it’s easy to drift into a conversational mode with Alexa, which doesn’t really work that well.)

Using Alexa as a Smart Home Controller

In addition to connecting to the Internet to find pertinent information, Alexa can also connect to various smart devices in your home. When your smart hub has discovered your Echo device, you can then use Alexa to control those connected devices, using similar voice commands.

Just say “Alexa, turn off the living room lights” and, assuming you have everything set up correctly, the lights will turn off. It’s a lot easier than using a smartphone app—or turning off your lights by hand!
Meet Amazon’s Echo Devices

Alexa is a piece of software. You interface with Alexa via a piece of hardware, a freestanding controller that plugs into the nearest electrical outlet and connects to the Internet via your home’s Wi-Fi network.

Amazon currently sells five Alexa-controlled devices, and more are no doubt on the way. All these devices include wireless connectivity, feature built-in speakers, and operate in a similar fashion.

Amazon Echo

The original Alexa controller is the Amazon Echo. Amazon originally sold Echo as a kind of wireless speaker, and its height belies the full-range speaker enclosed within. That speaker is useful when you want to use Alexa to play streaming music from Pandora and Spotify and other streaming music services.

Like all of Amazon’s Alexa-controlled devices, the Echo uses far-field voice recognition to hear your commands from across a room, even if it’s noisy or there’s
music playing. The voice recognition works surprisingly well, better than you may be used to with other voice-controlled devices.

The Echo sells for around $180 and is available in both white and black versions. You can order direct from Amazon (www.amazon.com); it's also available at select retailers. (When you order direct from Amazon it ships preprogrammed with your Amazon account details.)

**Amazon Echo Dot**

If you don’t need a full-range speaker, go with the Echo’s smaller sibling, the Echo Dot. The Echo Dot does everything the Echo does but is a lot less obtrusive on your living room or bedroom end table. And, because the Dot does include a speaker (just a smaller one), you can still hear Alexa speak and listen to music; it just won’t sound quite as good as with the larger Echo. (If you want better sound, you can connect the Dot to external speakers or headphones via Bluetooth or the included 3.5mm audio jack.)

You can also save a hunk of money with the Echo Dot, which sells for just $50. That’s right—you get all the Alexa functionality of the $180 Echo for less than a third of the price. Unless you really, really need that full-range speaker, that makes the Echo Dot a heck of a bargain. (It’s available in both black and white versions, like the original Echo.)
Amazon Echo Show

Amazon’s newest Echo is quite a bit different from the others. The Echo Show is an Echo device with a 7-inch touchscreen—or, looking at it another way, a 7-inch touchscreen with Alexa functionality included. It has the same capabilities as the normal Echo (including built-in speakers and microphone), but it adds a built-in display and camera that let you see Alexa’s answers and results, as well as engage in two-way audio and video calling with other Alexa users.

The display can also play back videos, including content from YouTube, Amazon Video, and various news sources (as part of your Flash Briefing). It can also function as a digital picture frame, display lyrics to songs you’re playing from Amazon Music, and show live feeds from connected security cameras.

Obviously, the Echo Show is a bigger device than the normal Echo or Echo Dot, and isn’t near as unobtrusive as those devices. It’s also more expensive, selling for about $230.

Which Echo Is Right for You?

Which device you choose depends on your specific needs. If you want visual feedback, video playback, or the ability to monitor smart security cameras, your
only choice is the Echo Show with its touchscreen display. If you want to use the
device as a freestanding speaker, then definitely go with the better-sounding
Echo. If you want to use the device as a smart home controller, however, and
don’t care so much about the quality of the music playback, then save some
bucks and go with the smaller and less-expensive Echo Dot.

Personally, I use the Echo Dot in my living room (and am considering adding a sec-
ond one in my bedroom). Its smaller size fits better in my living room, and as I have
an existing home audio system, I don’t need it to function as a speaker. Considering
its low price, the Echo Dot is the right smart home controller for many similar users.

Other Alexa Devices
Amazon currently sells two other Alexa-enabled devices. The Amazon Tap is a
battery-powered wireless speaker, and the Amazon Echo Look includes a selfie
camera to help you make better fashion decisions. In terms of smart home con-
trol, both function similarly to the original Echo and Echo Dot.

>>>Go Further
MULTIPLE DEVICES
You’re not limited to a single Echo or Echo Dot in your home. In fact, Amazon encourages you
to purchase multiple Echo devices, so you can put one in each room where you have smart
devices—in your living room, of course, but also in your bedroom or kitchen.

All Echo devices include Echo Spatial Perception (ESP) technology that ensures only the device
closest to you will respond to your commands. This eliminates the possibility of your living
room Echo responding to you when you’re talking to the one in your bedroom.

Setting Up Your Echo Device
Whichever Echo device you have, setup and operation is identical. When you first
unpack your device, you need to connect it to your home Wi-Fi network, down-
load the Alexa app to your smartphone or tablet, and then pair your Echo with
the smartphone app. After that, you can configure a handful of settings to make
Echo work better for you.
Setting Up Your Device

Setting up the Echo in your home is a relatively quick and easy process. Just make sure you have a nearby electrical outlet and that your Wi-Fi wireless network is readily accessible. You also need to have the Alexa app installed on your phone or tablet; you can download it (for free) from the Amazon Appstore, Apple App Store, or Google Play Store, depending on what type of phone or tablet you have.

1. Connect one end of the supplied power cable to the Echo, and the other to a nearby power outlet.
2. Launch the Alexa app on your phone or tablet.
3. The Alexa app should recognize you from your Amazon account. (If it doesn’t, follow the onscreen instructions to sign in to your account.) Tap **Begin Setup**.

---

**Echo and Echo Dot**

Going forward, I refer to both the Echo and Echo Dot as the Echo because their functionality is identical. The figures show the Android version of the Echo app, but it’s functionally identical to the iOS (Apple) and Fire OS versions.
4 Tap to select the device you're setting up—**Echo**, **Tap**, or **Echo Dot**.

5 On the next screen, select your language (if it isn’t English) then tap **Continue**.
Make sure your smartphone or tablet is connected to your home Wi-Fi network, and then tap **Connect to Wi-Fi**.

When your Echo is ready to connect, Alexa tells you so and the ring on the top of the device turns orange. When this happens, tap **Continue**.

Your smartphone now tries to pair with your Echo. When the connection is established, tap **Continue**.

Wait for the orange light ring

Make sure your Echo Dot is plugged into a power outlet. In about a minute, Echo Dot will tell you that it is ready and the light ring will turn orange. Then continue.

**Connected to Echo Dot**

Please continue with setup.
You now see a list of available Wi-Fi networks. Tap to select your network from the list. (Make sure the network you choose is the same one to which your smartphone is connected.)

Enter the password for your network into the **Password** box.

Save this password, so you don’t have to enter it every time you launch the app, by tapping **Save Password to Amazon**.

Tap **Connect**.

Amazon prepares your Echo for initial use. This might take a few minutes and involve downloading the latest updates.
14 When the setup is complete, tap Continue.

15 If you're connecting an Echo Dot, you're prompted to indicate how you want to use the device—with a Bluetooth speaker, with an external speaker via audio cable, or with no additional speakers. Make your selection. You're prompted to view a short video (if you want), and then you see the Alexa app's home screen.

Amazon Account
Your Echo device needs to be connected to your Amazon account to take advantage of all the information and content in your account. As noted previously, if you purchase your device direct from Amazon, it arrives loaded with your account information. If you purchase the device elsewhere, you need to log in to your Amazon account from the Alexa smartphone app when prompted during the initial setup process.

Setup Complete
Echo Dot is now connected to Wi-Fi.

Select how you want to use your Echo Dot

Bluetooth
Pair Echo Dot with your speaker using Bluetooth.

Audio Cable
Connect Echo Dot to your speaker using an audio cable.

No speakers
Use Echo Dot as a stand-alone device.
Changing the Wake Word

To ask Alexa a question or give her a command, you have to speak a *wake word* to your Echo device. By default, this wake word is “Alexa.” So, for example, if you wanted to know today’s weather forecast, you would say “Alexa, what’s the weather today?” If you don’t say the wake word, your Echo doesn’t wake up, and Alexa doesn’t hear you.

But what if you don’t like the wake word “Alexa”? What if your name is Alexa and you get tired of your Echo activating every time someone calls you by name? What if you just want to wake up your Echo with something cooler?

Whatever your reasons, Amazon enables you to change your Echo’s wake word. You can choose from four different words:

- Alexa (default)
- Amazon
- Echo
- Computer

That last one is a gift to *Star Trek* fans. Everybody on the starship *Enterprise*, whichever generation, interfaces with the ship's computer by first saying, “Computer.” In fact, if you want to have a little fun, ask Alexa “Computer, beam me up” or “Computer, tea, Earl Grey, hot.” There are definitely some Trekkies on the Amazon programming team!

Why “Alexa”?

There were two main reasons that Amazon’s engineers choose Alexa for the Echo’s wake word—and thus gave the digital assistant its name. First, Alexa is a relatively uncommon word; saying most other words might falsely trigger the device. (Imagine if the wake word was “Dave” or “bread” or “mom.”) The second reason is that the “x” in “Alexa” is a hard consonant that is recognized with greater precision than other letters.
Change the Wake Word

1. From the Home page of the Alexa app, tap the **Menu** (three-bar) button to display the left navigation pane.

2. Tap **Settings** to display the Settings screen.

3. In the Devices section at the top of the screen, tap your Echo device.
4 Scroll down to the General section and tap **Wake Word Alexa**.
5 Tap the down arrow in the first list box.
6 Tap to select your desired wake word.
7 Tap **Save**. You will now be able to wake your Echo with your new wake word.

### Change your wake word

It will take a few minutes to update the system after you change your wake word. You will not be able to use your Amazon Alexa device or the Alexa app during this time.

**Alexa Device wake word:**

- **Alexa**
- **Amazon**
- **Echo**
- **Computer**

**Alexa Device wake word:**

- **Computer**
- **Save**
Working with Alexa

Using Alexa is as easy as speaking into your Echo device. Say the wake word (“Alexa,” by default), followed by whatever it is you want Alexa to do.

When the Echo hears the wake word, the ring on the top of the device lights blue, with a small cyan area pointing in the direction of whomever spoke. Alexa listens to your request, and then (sometimes after “thinking” about it for a few seconds) voices her response.

Now, Alexa is not all-knowing. There are many questions you can ask of Alexa that she can’t answer. If that’s the case, she tells you. She also tells you if she just doesn’t understand the question; when this happens, try stating the command again, or maybe try saying it a different way.

In most instances, however, Alexa tells you what she knows, or does what you asked her to do.

What, then, can you ask of Alexa? The questions and commands are almost limitless, but the following sections explain some common questions and commands you can try.
Source Data
Alexa obtains its data from multiple sources. Weather forecasts come from AccuWeather; news comes from a variety of media, including the Associated Press, NPR, ESPN, and local radio stations; music comes from the user’s Amazon Music account as well as Pandora and Spotify; and factual information comes from Wikipedia.

Employ General Commands
There are a lot of specific commands you can issue, but depending on what you want to do, there are also a handful of general commands that apply across all actions and applications. When you’re using Alexa, you can use the general commands shown in Table 11.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alexa command</th>
<th>Does this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, stop.</td>
<td>Stops the current operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, pause.</td>
<td>Pauses the current operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, cancel.</td>
<td>Cancels the current operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, mute.</td>
<td>Mutes the sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, unmute.</td>
<td>Unmutes the sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, volume five.</td>
<td>Sets the volume level; use a number between 0 and 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, louder or Alexa, turn it up.</td>
<td>Raises the volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, softer or Alexa, turn it down.</td>
<td>Lowers the volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, repeat.</td>
<td>Repeats what Alexa just said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa, help.</td>
<td>Requests assistance with the current operation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tell Alexa What to Do

Alexa can perform a wide variety of operations, from retrieving the latest news and weather to reading audiobooks to answering all manner of questions. Here’s a short list of what you can ask Alexa to do:

• Read the latest news stories: “Alexa, play my Flash Briefing.”
• Read the weather report: “Alexa, what’s the weather forecast?”
• Read the latest sports scores and news: “Alexa, play my Sports Update,” or “Alexa, what’s the score for the [your team] game?”
• Get traffic information: “Alexa, how is traffic?”
• Play music: “Alexa, play [song or album or artist or genre].”
• Read an audiobook: “Alexa, read the book [book name].”
• Find nearby restaurants and businesses: “Alexa, what [type of food] restaurants are nearby?” or “Alexa, where are the nearest [type of business] stores?”
• Set timers and alarms: “Alexa, wake me up at [time],” or “Alexa, set a timer for [duration] minutes.”
• Manage your calendar: “Alexa, what’s on my calendar today?” or “Alexa, add an event to my calendar.”
• Create shopping and to-do lists: “Alexa, what’s on my to-do list?” or “Alexa, add [item] to my shopping list.”
• Shop online at Amazon.com: “Alexa, order [item],” or “Alexa, add [item] to my shopping cart.”

You can also ask Alexa a variety of random questions. If you want to know how far it is to the moon, what is the capital of Brazil, what was the name of Bob Dylan’s first album, or what the square root of 42 is, just ask. Alexa probably knows the answer.
Tour the Alexa App

The Alexa app is relatively simple and easy to use, and you won't need to use it much. But it's good to know what's there and why and how to use it, if you need to. To that end, here's a short tour.

1. Launch the Alexa app on your smartphone or tablet. (It's available for Android, Apple iOS, and Fire OS devices; the step-by-steps in this chapter use the Android version.)

2. The Home screen displays cards that reflect specific commands or activities that Alexa has completed; the most recent is shown first. Scroll down to view additional cards.

3. If you've been playing music on your Echo device, a now playing pane may appear at the bottom of the screen. Tap the Play button to resume playback, or tap the Volume button to change the volume level.

Using the Alexa App

Even though Alexa lets you control your Echo device via voice commands, there's also a lot of behind-the-scenes configuration that you can do by voice. That's one of the reasons why Amazon created the Alexa app for your smartphone, to let you configure and control Alexa when necessary.
4. For some cards, Alexa would like to know how well she performed. If Alexa heard you right, tap Yes. If Alexa had a problem, tap No. Alternatively, tap Less to not display this section.

5. Tap the Menu (three-bar) button to display the left navigation panel.

6. Tap Now Playing to display the Now Playing screen. From here you can control playback of items you've played through your Echo; view items in the queue, and view recently played items (History).

7. Tap Music & Books to view details about and control specific music and book services connected to your Alexa account.

8. Tap Lists to view and edit your shopping and to-do lists.

9. Tap Timers & Alarms to manage the timer and alarm volume, and select alarm sounds.

10. Tap Skills to view and add skills to Alexa.

11. Tap Smart Home to view and control smart devices with Alexa.

12. Tap Things to Try to get suggestions of fun and useful things you can do with Alexa.

13. Tap Settings to view and configure additional Alexa settings.
Skills
Learn more about skills in the “Working with Alexa’s Skills” section, later in this chapter.

Smart Home
To learn more about Alexa’s smart home features, see the “Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices” section, later in this chapter.

Link Accounts from Other Services
Alexa gets more powerful when you link her to other services that you use. You can link Alexa to your accounts with streaming music services, online calendars, and online to-do lists.

1. From within the Alexa app, tap the Menu button to display the left navigation panel.
2. Tap Settings to display the Settings screen.
4 Go to the account you want to add to Alexa and then tap **Link Account**.

5 If you already have an account with this service, tap the **Log In** button or link and then follow the onscreen instructions to log in to and link to this account.

6 If you don’t yet have an account with this service, tap the **Sign Up** button or link and then follow the onscreen instructions to create a new account.

7 Return to the Settings screen, scroll to the Accounts section, and then tap **Calendar**.
8 Tap the tile for the calendar you’d like to use with Alexa.

9 Tap **Link Your Calendar Account** to link this account, and then follow any additional onscreen instructions to log on to your calendar account and complete the process.

10 If you want to link to a third-party to-do list service, in addition to the lists feature built-into Alexa, return to the Settings screen, scroll to the Accounts section, and then tap **Lists**.

11 Tap **Link** for the to-do list account you want to link to, and then follow the onscreen instructions to complete the process.
Working with Alexa’s Skills

Alexa can get a lot smarter and a lot more useful when you add new skills to her repertoire. A skill for Alexa is like an app on your smartphone; an application that enables Alexa to perform a specific task based on a given voice command. You install skills when you want Alexa to be able to do more than she does out of the box.

Amazon offers more than 10,000 skills you can add to your Alexa. There are skills for playing soothing nature sounds (Ambient Noise), reading children’s stories (Short Bedtime Story), and playing trivia games (Test My Trivia). There are skills that tell you how to prepare various cocktails (The Bartender), concoct a recipe from whatever you currently have in the fridge (Best Recipes), and order pizza from Domino’s (Domino’s Pizza) or Pizza Hut (Pizza Hut). There’s even a skill that lets Alexa serve as a personal alert system if you’re in trouble (Ask My Buddy).

Even more useful are those skills that let Alexa connect to other applications and devices. For example, the Fitbit skill connects your Fitbit personal activity tracker to Alexa and lets you query Alexa on various statistics gathered by your Fitbit device. And, not surprisingly, there are a ton of skills available when you connect your smart home devices to Alexa.

Smart Home Skills

Learn more about Alexa’s smart home skills in the “Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices” section, later in this chapter.

Find a Skill

Finding a new skill is as easy as browsing or searching for it from within the Alexa app.

1. From within the Alexa app on your smartphone, tap the Menu button to display the left navigation panel.
2. Tap Skills to display the All Skills screen.
New and recommended skills are displayed first. Scroll down to view more skills, and scroll left and right through any section to view all the skills of that type.

To search for a skill, enter a short description (or the skill’s name, if you know it) into the search box at the top of the screen, and then tap the **Search** (magnifying glass) button.

To browse through skills by category, tap **Categories**.

Tap the category you want to view.
Skills within that category are now listed, newest first. Scroll down to view more.

To change how skills are displayed, tap the **Sort By** list.

Tap to sort by **Relevance, Avg. Customer Rating**, or **Release Date** (the default).
Add a Skill to Alexa

Adding a skill to Alexa is as easy as tapping a button and then following any additional onscreen instructions. You can add an unlimited number of skills to Alexa—and if you end up not using a skill, it’s no big deal.

1 Use any of the methods discussed in the previous task to find the skill you want to add.
2 Tap the Enable button.
3 The skill is now enabled. Scroll down to read more about this skill, including suggested voice commands.

More Steps Required
Some skills require additional steps to install. For example, if the skill involves a third-party service or website, you might need to sign in to that service or website to enable the app. Follow the onscreen instructions to complete the installation.
Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices

All this talk about Alexa and voice commands and skills leads us to the topic you’re probably most interested in—how to use Alexa with your smart home devices.

Here’s the good news: Alexa is compatible with the majority of smart home hubs and devices on the market today. That means you can control these devices, individually or collectively, via Alexa voice commands. And that’s a very neat thing.

What’s Compatible?

What smart home devices does Alexa work with? It’s a long list, and includes most major smart home systems and devices, including Insteon, SmartThings, and Wink. You can find a complete list at www.amazon.com/alexa-smart-home/b?node=13575751011.

In addition, many other smart devices work with Alexa when they’re connected to an Alexa-compatible hub, such as the Insteon, SmartThings, and Wink hubs. In short, there’s not a whole lot that doesn’t work with Alexa, which is good.

IFTTT

Alexa also supports the If This Than That standard for creating new smart tasks on a variety of smart devices. Learn more in Chapter 14, “Adding More Functionality with IFTTT.”

Connect a Smart Device to Alexa

Before you connect any smart device to Alexa, make sure the device is connected to its own smartphone app and to your Wi-Fi network, typically via the device’s or system’s hub. For example, if you’re connecting a Wink-compatible device, make sure it’s connected to the Wink Hub; if you’re connecting a Philips Hue smart light, make sure it’s connected to the Hue Hub. Your Echo device connects to the smart device via the connected hub.
1. From within the Alexa app on your smartphone, tap the Menu button to display the left navigation panel.

2. Tap Smart Home.

3. Scroll to the Your Smart Home Skills section. Any skills you’ve previously installed are displayed here. Tap Get More Smart Home Skills.

4. Additional smart home skills are now displayed. Browse or search the list to find the skill for the smart device you want to connect and then tap that skill to open the skill screen.
5. Read about the selected skill and tap **Enable**.

6. If you're prompted to sign in to the account for your smart device, do so now.

7. If you're prompted to let Alexa control your smart device, tap **Yes** now.
When the connection is complete, tap Back to the App to return to the Alexa app.

Working with Device Groups

One of the nice things about Alexa is that you can control multiple devices from multiple companies. Now, you can control each device individually with its own unique voice command, but you can also create a single command to control multiple devices at one time. This is useful, for example, for controlling all the lights in a single room, even if those lights come from different manufacturers.

You do this by creating what Alexa calls a group. When you add all the lights in your room to a “living room lights” group, for example, you can control all those lights just by telling Alexa to do something to the living room lights, such as, “Alexa, turn off the living room lights.” One command takes care of multiple devices when you have them linked together in a group.

Create a Device Group

1 From the left navigation menu, tap Smart Home.
In the Your Groups section, tap **Create Group**.

Type a name for this group into the **Enter a Group Name** box.

Tap to select those devices you want to include in the group.

Scroll to the bottom of the page and tap **Save**. Your new group is now saved and ready to use.

---

**Your Groups**

Use groups to control multiple devices at a time.

Living room lights
4 Devices

Create group

---

**Devices in this group**

Alexa works best with group names she can understand like "Living Room" or "Upstairs". Names that include numbers, like "Kitchen 1", can be hard for Alexa to understand.

- [ ] Hue ambiance lamp 1
- [ ] Concentrate in Living room
- [ ] Energize in Living room
- [ ] Floor lamp by couch

Cancel

Save
Controlling a Smart Device with Alexa

After you’ve connected all your smart devices to Alexa, installed all the pertinent skills, and created groups of devices for easier operations, you can start using Alexa to control those devices. As with anything related to Alexa, all you have to do is say “Alexa,” followed by your command.

What you can control depends on the devices you’ve connected and groups you’ve created. Some devices only let you perform simple on/off operations with Alexa, like this:

*Alexa, turn on the hallway fan.*

Other devices let you perform more sophisticated operations, such as dimming lights and such, like this:

*Alexa, dim the Hue lights to 50 percent.*

Of course, groups have their own commands, like this:

*Alexa, turn off the bedroom lights.*

And if you’ve connected a smart thermostat, like the Ecobee or Nest, you can use Alexa to control your temperature, like this:

*Alexa, set the house temperature to 70 degrees.*

Or this:

*Alexa, lower the living room temperature.*

You can use Alexa to control all manner of smart devices. For example, both GE and Whirlpool offer appliances that can be voice-controlled by Alexa. Alexa even lets you guide your Roomba vacuum cleaner around the room via voice commands. The sky’s the limit!

To learn more about what you can do with a particular device, go the Smart Home screen in the Alexa smartphone app and tap the skill for that device. Most skills have examples of commands you can use.

More to Come

Amazon is continually adding new compatibilities, skills, and features to Alexa. To learn what’s new, go to the Home page on the Alexa app; to view the latest skills, go to the app’s Skills page.
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