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Google developed Android Auto for motorists who are frustrated with their car's native infotainment system. Like rival software Apple CarPlay, Android Auto gives drivers the option of embedding a familiar, smartphone-like interface into their touchscreen. Further reading What is Android Auto? All the cars with Android Auto Best Android Auto apps

Setting up Android Auto is a straightforward process, and it's relatively easy to use. Here's what you need to know. How to set up Android Auto to run on the phone's screen Unlike Apple CarPlay, which runs only on a vehicle's infotainment screen, Android Auto can run directly on a mobile phone in vehicles that either don't have a screen or can't run the software. The functionality is the same as it would be on the in-dash screen, but it allows the user to play audio over Bluetooth instead of needing to plug in. Regardless of the connection, the basic Android Auto functionality is the same. To get started: Make sure your device is running at least Android 5.0 (Android 6.0 is recommended) If you're using Android 9 or lower, you'll need to download the Android Auto app from the Google Play Store. Android 10 (the latest version as of writing) comes with the app built in. Once you've downloaded the app and checked your phone's operating system, you'll need to start the app for the first time. Your phone may ask you to download updates to other apps that are used by Android Auto, like Google Maps. The app will also require you to review a safety notice and acknowledge terms and conditions, but only the first time you use Android Auto. How to set up Android Auto to run with a USB connection Julian Chokkattu/Digital Trends Just like running Android Auto on the device's screen itself, using a wired USB connection requires that you have a device that is running at least Android 5.0, but there is an extra step involved in the vehicle's settings. You'll need to make sure that your vehicle is compatible with Android Auto (dozens are) and that it's enabled in your vehicle. The first time you plug in your phone, you will be prompted to download the Android Auto app if you don't have it already. If you're running Android 10 or higher, the app is already included. To complete the setup: Make sure your vehicle is running and safely parked Unlock your phone's screen Pair your phone and car via Bluetooth Update any required apps, like Google Maps Review the safety reminder Turn on notifications for Android Auto Until you disable it, Android Auto will auto-start whenever you plug your phone in. How to update Android Auto There's good news for people who worry about software updates. Android Auto is easy to keep up-to-date using the Google Play Store. Since the software runs primarily on your phone, you shouldn't need to make any major updates to your vehicle's infotainment system. If one is needed, you'll likely receive it via an over-the-air (OTA) software update pushed directly by the manufacturer, or as part of a normal check-up at an approved shop or dealership. How to use Android Auto The 2019 update brought a redesigned interface and new features to Android Auto. Previously, many consumers thought it was a somewhat bare-bones system. Switching from an Android smartphone to Android Auto felt anything but seamless. Thankfully, improvements to the design have us rethinking the system's previous evaluation. The overhaul starts with the system's menus. Instead of a "launcher bar" at the bottom of the screen, the updated interface has an app drawer. In fact, the drawer looks much like the one on the phone itself. There's a new launch screen that takes the place of the home screen from previous versions. Now, when you plug in your phone, you'll see the navigation app with a group of suggested destinations. The system is smart and will remember whether you were using Google Maps or Waze as your navigation software. Music or a podcast will start playing automatically as well. You can also disable the feature, though. On each screen of the interface, there is a home button that will return you to the app launcher. From there, you can select a different function. Getting the most out of the app is relatively easy. All you have to do is tap the icon like you would on your phone to open the app. Remember that the app won't close until you want to switch to a different app. The app will also close if you unplug your phone from the charger or if you turn off your car. You can use voice control to operate many of the features, making for an undeniably convenient and safe driving experience for drivers. It also offers clearly-labeled and easy-to-read icons and menus for users to browse through when they aren't behind the wheel. We can assure you that Google Assistant will fulfill your needs. It's currently the top voice control system available today, so you're bound to love what it has to offer. It has almost all of the same features in your car as it does on your smartphone, giving you the ability to ask for directions and make or take phone calls while on the road. Users can set and edit reminders and task updates throughout the day and request music to be played by title, group, or genre. The fantastic thing about Android Auto is its high growth potential. This software is capable of more than what we see now. We're excited to observe how the platform evolves in the years to come. Over the years, infotainment systems have drastically improved. Android is working hard to remain steady and offer software that matches vehicles' capabilities. Each year we see more and more companies equipping their vehicles with Android Auto. If you're looking for a new car, you'll probably discover that Android Auto is included. For dedicated Android fans, pairing with Android Auto is a welcome experience each time they enter their car. Editors' Recommendations 2024 Chevrolet Equinox EV aims for affordability with \$30,000 base price Best dash cam deals for September 2022: Vantrue, Garmin, Anker, and more Apple CarPlay feature to offer an easy way to pay for fuel The best Android Auto apps for 2022: Music, Messaging, Navigation, and more WWDC 2022 announcements: iOS 16, iPadOS 16, WatchOS 9, MacOS Ventura, MacBook Air M2, and more Distracted driving is one of the most dangerous things you can do while behind the wheel. It puts you and everyone else on the road at risk, and while it should go without saying, it is obviously something we don't condone. That said, there are times when you need to stay connected, even when in your car. Whether you're following turn-by-turn navigation, making a hands-free phone call, or controlling your music while on a long road trip, having a device to do all of these things is a must. Google is aware of that, and that's why it created Android Auto. Android Auto is software that's available on your phone and in your car, and it gives you a way to do all of the things mentioned above as safely as possible. Ready to learn more? Keep on reading! Android Auto Explainer Source: Android Central (Image credit: Source: Android Central) Android Auto launched in March 2015 as a special Android interface designed for use in your car. There are three core functions that make up Android Auto: turn-by-turn navigation, phone call support, and audio playback. You can run Android Auto directly on your phone's display, or if you have a supported car, on its infotainment system (more on this below). You'll need the Android Auto app to get things started, which you can download for free from the Google Play Store. If your phone is running Android 10 or later, Android Auto is already built right into your phone and doesn't need to be downloaded. Android Auto On your phone Source: Joe Maring / Android Central (Image credit: Source: Joe Maring / Android Central) There are technically three ways to use Android Auto directly on your phone, and they largely depend on which version of Android you're running on your phone. If you're using a phone or tablet running Android 6.0 and up to 9.0, you can just open the Android Auto app, where the car-friendly UI is ready to use right then and there. This app is the original version Google released to run natively on phone and tablet screens. It's fairly easy to navigate, with a home screen showing recommended locations to drive to, any music, podcast, or audiobook currently playing, and call/text notifications as they come in. This card-based layout utilizes button shortcuts along the bottom or side to get to navigation, phone, and media apps, along with a home button for getting back to your home page. Tap the one of the shortcuts twice to see a list of all available apps under that section (like Spotify and Pocket Casts). You'll also find a menu icon in the upper-left corner for adjusting your Android Auto settings, along with a microphone for accessing the Google Assistant. Source: Android Central For Android 10 and 11, there is a separate app on Google Play called Android Auto for Phone Screens. It essentially emulates the original Android Auto app for previous versions, and made as a stop-gap for devices on Android 10 and 11 until Google could launch its Google Assistant Driving Mode integration. That ultimately came with Android 12. Google phased out the previous interface and replaced it with a new look that flows more seamlessly in that it's built-in to the operating system. Driving Mode automatically launches once your phone connects to your car's Bluetooth, though you do need to enable it to do so in the settings because it initially defaults to doing nothing. Google is also moving to add a shortcut for the home screen. It does feel somewhat unfinished, though, and mainly because you don't have the same access to the all the apps. Waze is one of the biggest examples, where you can't really launch it within Driving Mode — at least not yet. The best part about running Android Auto on your phone is that it brings a safe, distraction-free interface to your car regardless of its make and model. Just grab a car mount so you can prop up your phone hands-free, run the Android Auto app, and you're ready to ride. Android Auto in your car Source: Andrew Martonik / Android Central (Image credit: Source: Andrew Martonik / Android Central) Alternatively, you can run Android Auto on your car's infotainment system. You do need to drive a supported make/model that integrates the platform, or a compatible third-party head unit. Either option helps integrate the UI more seamlessly with your car. Assuming your car does support it, running Android Auto is pretty simple. When you first connect to the car's infotainment system or head unit, a prompt will pop up on your phone to begin the pairing process. You may also see a similar prompt on the head unit screen as well. On older Android devices, you may need to open the Android app on your phone first, then plug in a USB cable between your phone and the infotainment system to start Android Auto on your car's display. Newer vehicles, including head units from JVC, Kentwood, and Pioneer, are increasingly supporting wireless connectivity, but if that's not an option, you can always plug in through a wired setup. It took a long time for Google to actually make it available to users, but that finally changed in November 2020 with a staggered rollout in the United States. By April 2021, Google had started rolling it out to some other countries in English, including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Singapore, and India. If you live in the U.S. and have your device set to English, you can run Driving Mode within Google Maps when your phone runs Android 9.0 or later and has at least 4GB of RAM. Source: Android Central (Image credit: Source: Android Central) You can also start things up by opening Google Maps, tap your profile icon on the top right, and choose "Settings." From there, select "Navigation" and then "Assistant settings," where Driving Mode should appear right away. If you don't see it, double check that you're running the right Android version. Once you get Android Auto up and running, you'll notice that the user interface looks different than the original phone version. Google revamped the UI in May 2019, and if you ask us, it's the best way to use Android Auto. It's easier to navigate, there's a legit app drawer for seeing all of your available apps in one place, and you can control the entire UI using your car's physical knobs/buttons if you never want to use its touchscreen. Android Auto Google Assistant Source: Ara Wagoner / Android Central (Image credit: Source: Ara Wagoner / Android Central) We mentioned it above, but it's worth calling out again — Android Auto gives you quick and easy access to the Google Assistant. Whether you're using Android Auto on your phone or in the car, tap the microphone button to access Google's digital helper instantly. You can use the Assistant for just about anything, such as asking about the weather, sending a text, playing a specific song, and more. You could ask it for the closest gas stations or where there might be a good place to grab a bite nearby. The Assistant proves incredibly useful outside of Android Auto, yet feels especially at home in a setting where you can't afford to be doing something else with your hands. Whether you tap the microphone icon or just say "Hey Google" for truly hands-free access, it's an essential addition that makes the Android Auto experience that much better and safer. Android Auto App support Source: Android Central (Image credit: Source: Android Central) Over the years, Google's done a great job at making sure Android Auto is backed by support for just about every major app you could want in the car. We won't list off every single one, but some of the highlights include: Google Maps, Waze, Spotify, YouTube Music, Amazon Music, Apple Music, Tidal, Pandora, iHeartRadio, Deezer, NPR One, Audible, Audiobooks.com, Pocket Casts, Facebook Messenger, Signal, Telegram, WhatsApp, Skype, Android Auto, Android Automotive. Source: Ted Kritsonis / Android Central (Image credit: Source: Ted Kritsonis / Android Central) If you haven't heard (or maybe you have), there is a different platform called Android Automotive. This is a wholly separate platform that runs natively within select vehicles, meaning it's installed in the car's infotainment system and doesn't really need your phone to run anything. The apps that run on it would require to sign in directly through the car's own head unit. For instance, you sign in to your Spotify account, and your profile appears there — again, without your phone being part of the equation. The only time it might be in that case is if you need to use your phone's data to stream content and route phone calls. It's not clear if or when Google will replace Android Auto with Android Automotive, but for the time being, the two will probably work in tandem for the foreseeable future. The platform looks to be a big part of Google's plans for the automotive space, but Android Auto remains the most ubiquitous choice for Android users.

