

XCloud, now Xbox Cloud Gaming - Games, Pricing, and More You Need to Know

Microsoft has been testing its xCloud cloud-gaming platform, the technology that lets you play Xbox games on your phone, streamed from remote servers, for more than a year. Now we've come to the part where the free ride for testers ends and it's time to pony up for the privilege via a subscription to Xbox Game Pass Ultimate. And as frequently happens with many a clever project name, "xCloud" has been swept into obscurity; Microsoft considers the technology an integral part of Xbox Game Pass Ultimate and now refers to it generically as "cloud gaming" and "game streaming." We're going to keep calling it xCloud, though, at least until there's a less ambiguous shorthand for it.

How much does xCloud cost and when can I get it?

At the moment, you can only get it as part of the Xbox Game Pass Ultimate plan for \$15 per month. (It's £11 per month in the UK. Sorry, it's not available yet in Australia.) Microsoft says you'll have other ways to access it in the future, but hasn't said when, how or how much. I'm guessing a standalone subscription for streaming games you already own is at the top of the list.

Unlike competitors Google Stadia and Nvidia GeForce Now, there's no free tier for Xbox's cloud gaming. Microsoft's running a first-month-for-\$1 (£1) offer that will likely continue, and a three-month free trial will be available through partners, such as Samsung.

Get Xbox Game Pass Ultimate

Some people consider the fact that Xbox Game Pass comes as part of the streaming deal makes it a winner compared with Stadia, which is still ramping up on games, and GeForce Now, which is a bring-your-own-game platform. You can't stream all games in Game Pass Ultimate, just a select subset.

What devices can I play on and what are the requirements?

Any mobile device running Android 6 (Marshmallow) or better and has Bluetooth version 4 or later for a wireless controller, plus a connection with a bandwidth of at least 10Gbps -- on a 5GHz channel if you're on Wi-Fi. You can download the app from the Google Play Store or the Samsung Galaxy Store.

Keep in mind, though, that as with all cloud gaming it's about more than bandwidth. Microsoft doesn't specify minimum latency or jitter for a playable experience, and those make a big difference. It also depends on your phone's hardware, especially its Wi-Fi modem and power to decode the incoming stream.

XGS doesn't include streaming to PC like Stadia and GFN do, so it's not a solution for playing on low-power potato PC or playing Windows games on a Mac. You can play XGP games on a PC via Xbox Game Pass PC -- also part of Game Pass Ultimate or available for

\$10/month by itself -- but those are installed and played on your local system.

But what about iOS? Can I play on my iPhone?

Nope. There was a brief beta flirtation with it, but it's all gone now.

Microsoft isn't alone here. Apple doesn't let you play via Google's Stadia, Nvidia's GeForce Now, Sony's PlayStation Now or any cloud-gaming platforms because of its App Store policies. Amazon's recently announced Luna runs on iOS devices by circumventing App Store rules, instead running as a Web app. Apple recently relaxed its App store policies to allow cloud gaming, but requires companies to create a separate app for every game in the catalog, which is only marginally less annoying. The whole situation has led some to consider if Xbox Game Pass is a good enough reason to switch from iPhone to Android.

Do I need a controller?

Yes. Only a few games like Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice and Gears 5 support touch controls at the moment. But you can use any Xbox-compatible wireless controller with it, you don't need to buy a specific model endorsed by Microsoft. No keyboard and mouse support, which is unsurprising given that it doesn't run on any devices you'd use with a keyboard and mouse.

How do I buy games?

You don't. You can stream many of the games in the Xbox Game Pass subscription library.

MINECRAFT SERVERS

On the upside, that includes Day 1 play of many new titles from Xbox Game Studios. If you choose to buy a game, your membership entitles you to discounts on titles in the catalog. They all support crossplay with PC and console versions, as well as any crossplay already supported on other platforms, like the Nintendo Switch or PS4.

What games can I play?

Microsoft says "100-plus games" will be available for play on mobile at launch. As of this writing, the beta has 173, many of them Xbox Game Studios titles. They include:

Ark: Survival Evolved

Bleeding Edge

Costume Quest 2

Crackdown 3 (campaign)

Destiny 2

F1 2019

Forza Horizon 4

Gears of War: Ultimate Edition

Gears of War 4

Gears 5 Ultimate Edition

Grounded

Halo 5: Guardians

Halo Wars: Definitive Edition

Halo Wars 2

Halo: The Master Chief Collection

Halo: Spartan Assault

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice

Killer Instinct Definitive Edition

Max: The Curse of Brotherhood

Minecraft Dungeons

The Outer Worlds

Ori and the Blind Forest: Definitive Edition

Ori and the Will of the Wisps

Quantum Break

ReCore: Definitive Edition

Ryse: Son of Rome

Sea of Thieves: Anniversary Edition

State of Decay 2: Juggernaut Edition

Sunset Overdrive

Super Lucky's Tale

Tell Me Why

The Bard's Tale Trilogy

Wasteland 2: Director's Cut

Wasteland 3

Wasteland Remastered

Yakuza Kiwami 2

The list includes some titles that weren't in the beta, though, such as The Outer Worlds, so hopefully there will be some surprises. But, as with all of these services, games move in and out of the catalog. Those are not pleasant surprises.

Can I chat? What about streaming gameplay?

You can chat in-game with the phone's mic. To stream gameplay you'll need a third-party app; there's no in-game support. That's too bad, because you could probably get far better quality if you could render and transmit the broadcast stream via the server rather than locally on your phone.

Cancellation policy

If you stop subscribing, you keep your progress and achievements if you buy the game from Microsoft, but obviously lose the ability to play on mobile.