

RD.COM, VIA AMAZON.COM (3)

## The best laptops under \$500

Buying a laptop doesn't need to break the bank. Believe it or not, it's possible to find a decent laptop for \$500 or less—without sacrificing features like powerful processing speed, large memory storage, and long-lasting battery life. “With the rapid evolution of computer technology and large-scale manufacturing, it is now possible to enjoy a quality, affordable laptop without making many compromises,” says Alan Zilberman at LaptopMD+, an IT repair company. “Whether you spend your day on Excel, answering emails, video editing with Adobe Premiere Pro, programming, or working on a graphic design project, there is an affordable laptop out there for you.” And if you buy at the right time, like during a stellar [Labor Day](#) or [back-to-school sale](#), you might even be able to score more of a deal.

There are some trade-offs to searching for budget-friendly laptops, though. “Finding ones worth buying is no easy task,” says Tom Brant, senior hardware analyst at PCMag. “COVID-related challenges have made it even harder, with

shuttered factories and skyrocketing demand from people who need a reliable work-from-home platform.”

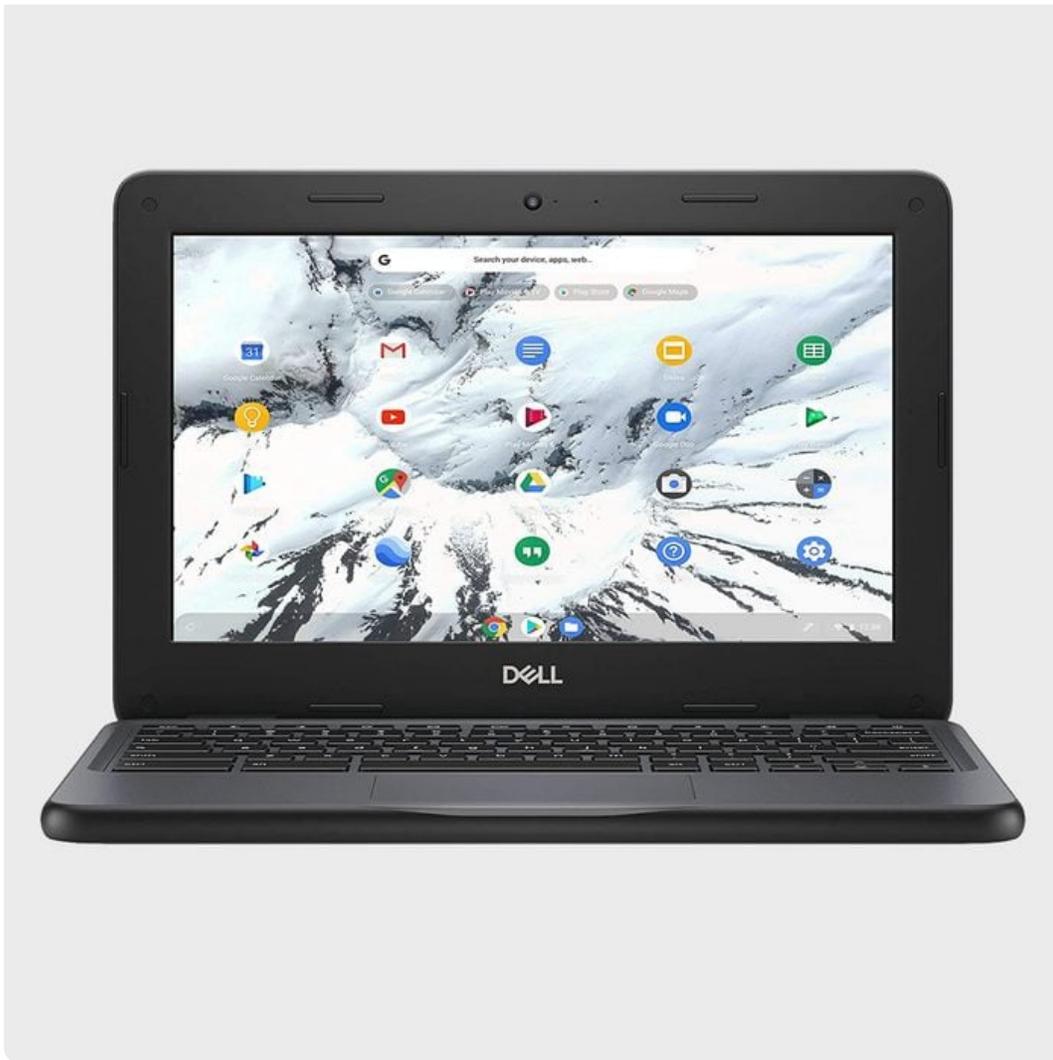
Luckily, we can make your search a little easier. Just add one of these laptops to your shopping cart and you’ll be all set! Once you check off this must-have on your back-to-school checklist, get a [laptop backpack](#) to go with it, a [laptop cleaner](#) to keep it in good shape.

## How we chose the laptops on this list

Our recommendations are based on a combination of expert reviews, user testimony, and online ratings. We spoke with experts at tech review website PCMag and IT repair company LaptopMD+ about which laptops they recommend, what features to look for, and why. We also scoured online articles and reviews to find out which models are getting the most buzz. Read on for the best affordable laptops in every category, from processing speed to portability.

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VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best overall: Dell Chromebook 11

This “sturdy, inexpensive” laptop tops the list of the best affordable laptops, according to Brant. “If your budget and needs are extremely modest, a Chromebook is probably the best bet,” he says. With its compact design, spill-resistant keyboard, and multiple USB ports, this \$250 Chromebook 11 is a great option for young students who need a laptop for homework and other online tasks. Of course, spilled liquids aren’t the only reason you should be [cleaning your laptop](#) frequently.

### Highlights:

- Four USB ports: two USB-C ports and two USB Type-A ports
- Four years of damage coverage for just \$60
- Keyboard can withstand up to 12 ounces of spilled liquid

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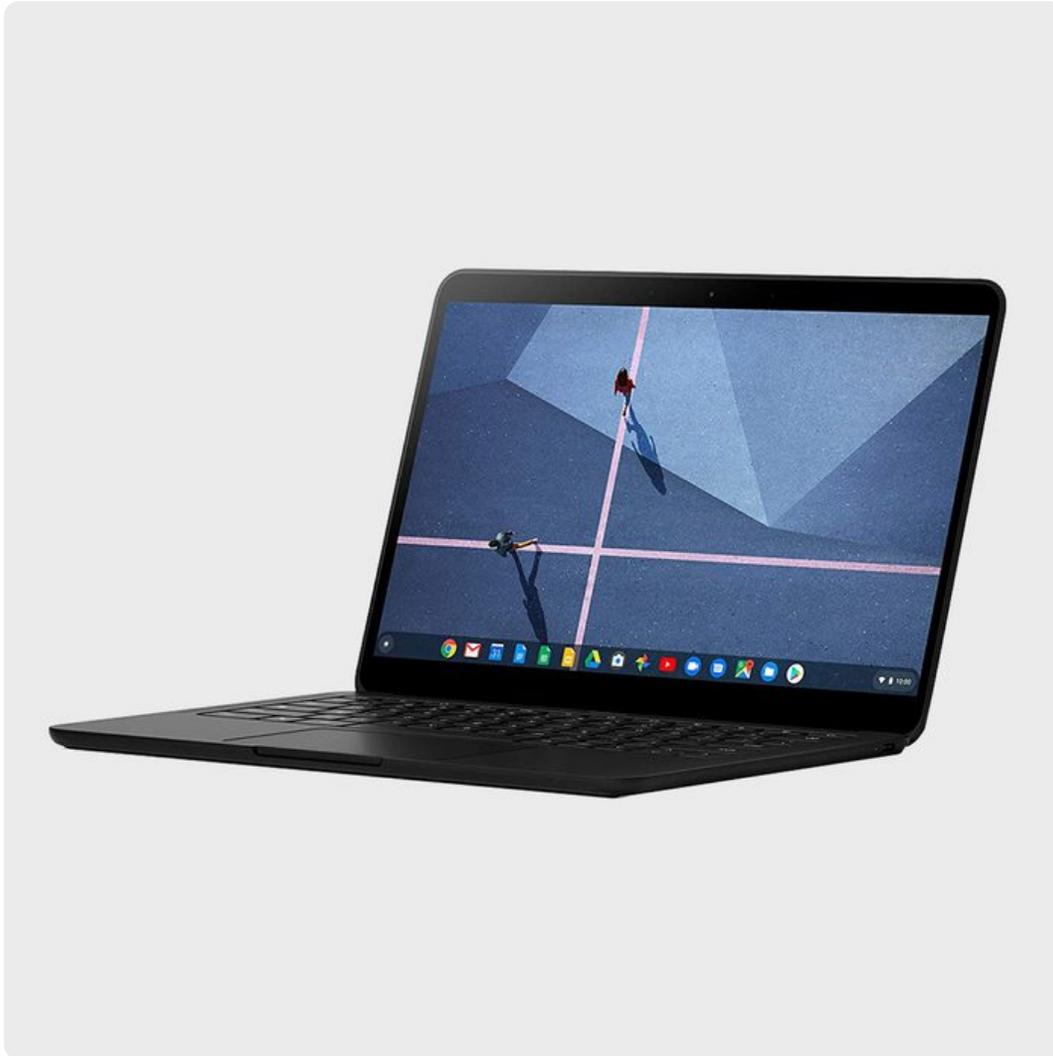
VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best processing power: Lenovo IdeaPad 3

If you want a laptop with premium processing power, look no further than the Lenovo IdeaPad 3. “This processor allows for your computer to think and work faster than other base models without making many sacrifices,” Zilberman says. In addition to its powerful performance, Zilberman recommends this laptop for its 1080p display, large memory and storage size, and slim, lightweight design. It’s truly amazing how far we’ve come when you think about [what computers used to look like!](#)

### Highlights:

- Dopoundsy Audio for crystal-clear sound
- Screen has narrow side bezels for more square footage
- Q-control feature allows users to switch between fast and powerful performance and quiet battery-saving mode

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VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best durability: Google Pixel Book Go

For people who travel regularly or tend to be hard on their laptops, the Google Pixel Book Go is a good choice. Google Pixel Books “pass benchmark durability tests and score highly across the board, so they are perfect for teenagers who tend to drop and abuse their laptops,” says Zilberman. Bonus: This model can stay unplugged for up to 12 hours without needing a charge, and it includes a security chip and built-in anti-virus software to help protect data. Still, make sure you know these [signs a computer has been hacked](#).

### Highlights:

- Top ratings on Laptop Magazine’s durability and drop test

- Titan C security chip and built-in anti-virus software for extra data protection
- Long-lasting battery life at 12 hours

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VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best memory storage: 2020 HP

Zilberman recommends the HP Notebook 14 for users who need larger memory storage. With 128 GB for storage and a 1 TB disk drive, you can run



VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best battery life: HP Chromebook x360 14G1

Compared to Windows laptops, Chromebooks tend to offer better battery life for the cost, according to Wirecutter. That certainly rings true for the HP Chromebook x360 14G1, which clocks in at 13 hours of battery life and will set you back just \$334. Zilberman also likes this model's detachable keyboard, kickstand, and touch-screen display. To make your laptop's battery last even longer, try [this handy charging trick](#).

### Highlights:

- Long-lasting battery life at 13 hours
- Crisp display with a 14-inch HD (1366 x 768) BrightView screen

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VIA BESTBUY.COM

## Best portability: Dell XPS 13

Always on the go? Consider getting the Dell XPS 13, which PCMag ranked as its top pick among ultraportable laptops in 2020. For Brant, the laptop's sleek design and high-resolution touch screen make it stand apart from other ultraportables. The Dell XPS 13 measures 0.58 by 11.6 by 7.8 inches (HWD) and weighs just 2.8 pounds with the touch screen or 2.64 pounds without.

### Highlights:

- Thin, lightweight design
- Vivid display screen, reaching up to 3,840 by 2,400 pixels

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VIA WALMART.COM

## Best wide screen: HP FHD

While most affordable laptops offer 13- or 14-inch widescreens, HP FHD's 15.6-inch display packs a punch while staying easy on your wallet. This high-resolution screen boasts FHD BrightView, micro-edge, and LED backlighting for a crisp and vivid display. For a price tag of just \$399, the HP FHD also offers a fast-charging feature and HD Wide Vision camera.

### Highlights:

- Impressive screen size at 15.6 inches, with HD display
- HP Fast Charge feature, which charges the laptop from 0 to 50 percent in just 45 minutes
- HD Wide Vision camera

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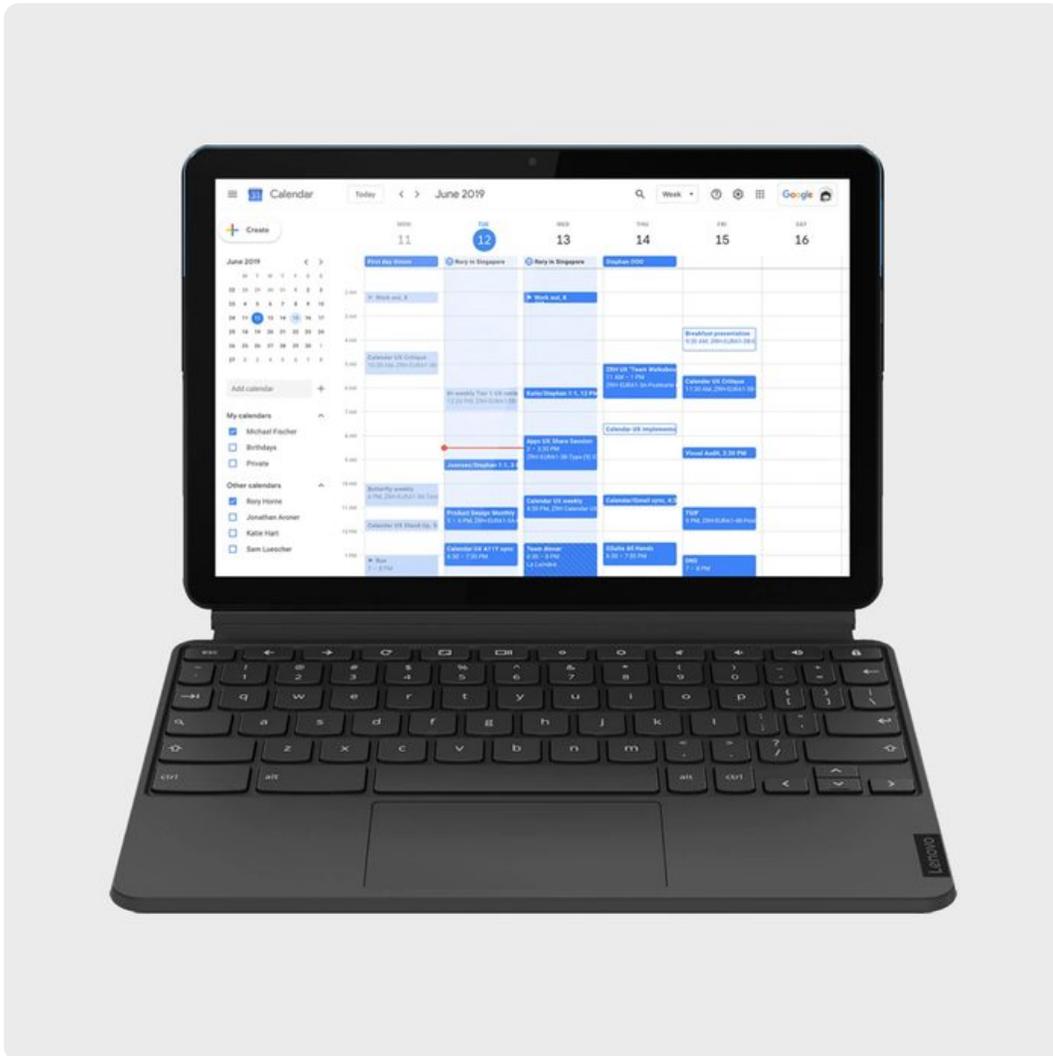
VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best Mac: Apple MacBook Air

Shoppers with a slightly bigger budget should consider the MacBook Air, Brant says. Apple's new M1 chip reaches whopping speeds of 3.2 GHz—up to 3.5 times faster than the Intel chips used in older MacBooks. At \$899, it is slightly more expensive than other budget options, but thrifty students and their parents can rest assured “it’s the best value among macOS laptops,” according to PCMag. These [tricks can make your laptop run faster](#), too.

### Highlights:

- Fastest processor speed at 3.2 GHz
- Long-lasting battery life for up to 30 hours
- Portable design: 0.63 by 11.97 by 8.36 inches

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VIA BESTBUY.COM

## Best keyboard: Lenovo Chromebook Duet

When you think about the best affordable laptops, the keyboard probably doesn't come to mind. But here's why it should: Unlike other two-in-one laptops, Lenovo's Chromebook Duet includes a keyboard for a total price of only \$299. Amazon reviewers also praise this laptop's Android phone integration feature and 128 GB of storage for documents, photos, and applications. Test out your new keyboard with these [simple keyboard shortcuts](#).

### Highlights:

- Includes keyboard
- Pairs with Android phones
- 128 GB of eMMC flash storage

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VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best gaming option: Acer Nitro 5

Gamers on a budget can't go wrong with the Acer Nitro 5, a gaming laptop with excellent CPU performance and battery life for the price. Though it has just 8 GB of memory, it offers expandable storage for another storage drive, as well as a 2 TB hard drive. The Ryzen 5 4600H chip also delivers processing speeds up to 3 GHz, according to PCMag.

### Highlights:

- Expandable storage
- Good processing performance for the price
- High-resolution (1920 by 1080p) display

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VIA AMAZON.COM

## Best detachable 2-in-1: Microsoft Surface Go 2

Starting at just \$380, the second generation of Microsoft's tablet PC is "a worthy competitor to both conventional laptops and the Apple iPad," according to PCMag. It offers a built-in kickstand, making this affordable laptop more versatile than an iPad, as well as a compact and lightweight design that makes it easy to toss inside a [backpack](#).

- Lightweight design at only 1.2 pounds
- Built-in kickstand
- Larger touch screen at 10.5 inches

[Shop Now](#)

#### Sources:

- Alan Zilberman, technician and marketing manager at [LaptopMD+](#)
- [Tom Brant](#), senior hardware analyst at PCMag
- [PCMag](#): Laptop Reviews

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#### Brooke Nelson

Brooke Nelson is a tech and consumer products writer covering the latest in digital trends, product reviews, security and privacy, and other news and features for RD.com.



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