

How To Buy A Two-Way Radio

Staying in touch in the woods is a snap with two-way radios. Besides keeping tabs on any game activity, two-way radios provide you with security and are an invaluable communications tool should something go wrong. With some added features, these devices may even help point you to your camp or keep tabs on the weather.

- Features to Consider in a Two-Way Radio
 - Channels
 - Privacy Codes
 - Call Features
 - Weather Radios
 - Lock Feature
 - Range
 - FRS/UHF
 - Size
 - Display Screen
 - Usage Life

Features to Consider in a Two-Way Radio

Channels

- Two-way radios come with as few as 2 to as many as 14 channels, with prices higher for those offering more channels
- If you are in a congested area, you'll need the extra channels to ensure you find one that's open
- Many models offer codes or sub-channels. This allows you to find numerous other channels for communicating with your partner or perhaps even others out in the woods with you.
- A two-way radio with 14 easy access channels and 38 sub-channels per channel, really gives you 532 available addresses to use

Privacy Codes

- Since anyone can pick up your channel, provided their equipment has the same number of channels as yours, manufacturers have designed some models with a privacy code or private call feature
- While others can still tune in on your channel, the private call feature scrambles your voice so your conversation won't be understood by outside parties

Call Features

- Most models come with a channel saver. The big difference is whether this is manual or automatic.

- Talk confirmation beep signals the completion of your conversation so the other party knows when it's clear to talk
- Incoming call/alert is usually a ring. You can, however, purchase a model that vibrates to alert you to a call, an especially valuable option when hunting.
- Most models also incorporate a last channel recall feature, much like the redial button on your phone. This feature can either be manual or automatic.
- Memory location helps you store frequently used channels and sub-channels. Typically, models with this feature can store 10 channels for easier access.
- Scanning allows you to quickly see which channels are being used. Once again, some models require a manual operation, while others do this automatically.
- A nice feature on many models is a speaker/mic jack. While you will need to buy the additional accessories, this will allow you to have hands-free conversations.
- Other options include a microphone and speaker that connects to your lapel, a speaker and microphone that fits in your ear, and the most advanced speaker and microphone that's a headset

Weather Radios

- Many two-way radios include weather reception channels
- Generally, these models include 10 channels to obtain the latest weather information from the NOAA (National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration)

Lock feature

- A lock key ensures that you stay on your channel even when moving around
- Auto squelch keeps a radio quiet at all times except when a signal is received

Range

- Most two-way radios carry a range of 1 to 2 miles, which really depends on the terrain and weather conditions
- You can buy extended-range radios but they exceed the FCC's (Federal Communications Commission) maximum wattage of 500mW and employ a GMRS frequency
- If you need the added distance, though, you'll have to buy a GMRS (General Mobil Radio Service) license, issued by the FCC, and pay a fee required for use of the extended-distance radio
- Manufacturers will list both the range and let you know if a license is required. That's why most models fall in the 1 to 2 mile range, without any licensing fee required.

FRS/UHF

- FRS, which stands for Family Radio Service, is a reclassified band of radio frequencies set aside by the FCC specifically for family and recreational use, hence, the limitation on power (watts) and frequency

- Two-way radios also use UHF (Ultra High Frequency) to provide clearer reception
- A few select models can extend range by using a bigger power source and another frequency called GMRS. This extra power and frequency requires a license from the FCC and a fee for use of the radio.

Size

- You can find a two-way radio that fits inside the palm of your hand easily or barely extends beyond it
- Sizes range from 3 ½ to 6 ½ inches tall (excluding the antenna) to generally 2 to 2 ½ inches wide and 1 to 1 ⅓ inches deep
- Weight typically falls between 5 and 12 ounces
- In general, the bigger and heavier the radio, the more features incorporated

Display Screen

- Most models use a display screen to indicate a number of factors: receive, transmit, battery life, time and more
- Newer models are incorporating features such as a clock with timer, alarm and stopwatch, digital compass, thermometer and altimeter/barometer
- Look for a backlit LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) display screen that can be easier to read in various lighting conditions
- Manufacturers also note if the model's screen uses LED (Light Emitting Diode) displays or icons, or a combination of both

Usage Life

- Some two-way radio models operate off alkaline batteries only while others will allow nickel cadmium batteries as well
- Nickel cadmium batteries are more expensive and, unless the radio comes with one, requires purchasing an optional charger, but over the long haul you'll save money
- Manufacturers will note the battery life, which generally assumes 5 percent transmission, 5 percent reception, and 90 percent standby