pickwise

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Espresso setup planner

What does a first home espresso setup really need? We compared beginner machines and grinders from Breville, De'Longhi, Baratza and more.

The 10 at a glance

#	Pick	Best for	Type	Milk	Good for
1	Breville Barista Express Impress	Best all-in-one	Machine + grinder	Manual steam wand	Learning in one box
2	Breville Bambino Plus	Best for milk drinks	Machine	Automatic steam wand	Lattes and flat whites
3	Baratza Encore ESP	Best grinder for beginners	Grinder	Not applicable	Pairing with a Bambino
4	De'Longhi La Specialista Touch	Best guided machine	Machine + grinder	Manual or automatic	Step-by-step help
5	Ninja Luxe Cafe Mini Plus	Easiest to learn	Machine + grinder	Manual or automatic	Total beginners
6	Breville Bambino	Best compact	Machine	Manual steam wand	Small kitchens
7	De'Longhi Stilosa	Best budget machine	Machine	Manual steam wand	Trying espresso cheaply
8	Gaggia Classic E24	Best to grow into	Machine	Manual steam wand	Hands-on learners
9	Baratza Sette 270	Best step-up grinder	Grinder	Not applicable	Espresso only
10	1Zpresso JX-Pro	Best hand grinder	Manual grinder	Not applicable	Tight budgets

Quick answers

Do I need a separate grinder for espresso?

Yes, unless your machine has one built in. Espresso needs a much finer, more even grind than most drip grinders can make.

What's the easiest espresso machine for a beginner?

Guided machines like the De'Longhi La Specialista Touch or Ninja Luxe Cafe Mini Plus do the most work for you.

Is a machine with a built-in grinder worth it?

It saves space and makes buying simpler. A separate grinder usually gives better results and is easier to upgrade later.

How to build a beginner espresso setup

Three ways to start

Typical beginner routes. Check current prices before you buy.

All-in-one	Machine + grinder	Budget start	Push-button
Machine with built-in grinder	Separate electric grinder	Cheap machine + hand grinder	Guided or automatic
One box	Best shots	Lowest cost	Least learning

1 Budget for the grinder too

Espresso needs a fine, even grind. A machine without a grinder needs a separate espresso-capable one, so add that to your budget from the start.

2 Decide how hands-on you want to be

Manual machines teach you more but take practice. Guided machines like the La Specialista Touch or Ninja Luxe Cafe do more of the work for you.

3 Think about milk drinks

If you mostly drink lattes, an automatic steam wand saves time and gives more consistent milk. If you drink straight espresso, a manual wand is fine.

4 Buy fresh beans

Beans roasted in the last few weeks make a big difference. Pre-ground coffee goes stale fast and makes it hard to dial in.

5 Get a few small extras

A small scale, a decent tamper and a milk jug make learning much easier. A scale is the most useful upgrade for consistent shots.

6 Dial in one change at a time

Keep the dose the same and change only the grind. Too fast and sour means grind finer. Too slow and bitter means grind coarser.

Your checklist

Tick things off as you go.

BEFORE YOU BUY

- [ ] Set a budget for machine and grinder
- [ ] Decide: milk drinks or straight espresso
- [ ] Measure counter space and cabinet height
- [ ] Check for a nearby socket

DIALLING IN

- [ ] Keep the dose the same
- [ ] Change only the grind
- [ ] Sour and fast: grind finer
- [ ] Bitter and slow: grind coarser

EXTRAS

- [ ] Small scale (0.1 g)
- [ ] Tamper that fits your basket
- [ ] Milk jug
- [ ] Fresh beans roasted in the last few weeks

CARE

- [ ] Rinse the group head after use
- [ ] Purge and wipe the steam wand
- [ ] Backflush or clean as the manual says
- [ ] Descale on schedule

See the full list online

All 10, with pros and cons and who each one suits.

pickwiseguides.com/kitchen/beginner-espresso-setup

Open the list

Setup budget and shot-dialling log

Add up the whole setup before you buy, then log each shot while you dial in. Change only one thing at a time.

SETUP BUDGET

Item	Model	Price
Machine		
Grinder		
Scale		
Tamper		
Milk jug		
Beans		
Total		

SHOT LOG

Shot	Dose (g)	Yield (g)	Time (s)	Grind	Taste