



## Entertaining at home: the smart way

Need some extra assistance while hosting a dinner party? As voice-command devices prove more popular than ever in our homes, **Yvette Murrell** sounds out the latest tech helpers

**T**he oven is on, drinks are chilling, and you're setting the table when the doorbell suddenly rings – an all too familiar scene come the festive season, when dinner parties are rife. And while they are enjoyable, I can't help but wonder if evenings like these could be made a little easier on the host. Wouldn't it be great if you could sit with your guests and control everything around you without having to get up? Well, this could be your new reality, thanks to the development of smart voice-command devices.

Two main contenders provide a helping hand in this area – Amazon's Alexa and the Google Assistant, which we've likely all heard about. Having launched in 2014 and 2016 respectively, the technology is only now really making strides in our homes, and it's starting to top many a gift list. Both are assistants you can have conversations with. They answer questions, offer useful information, and help you control other smart devices with simple voice commands.

For example, Amazon's latest smart speaker, the Echo Spot, has a screen to show you everything, from the time and current song playing to who is at the front door via a connected smart doorbell. While cooking, it can show you recipes and convert any measurement you ask it to. Likewise, Google's Assistant can be found in products such as the newest Google Home Mini.

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The compact device can play songs through YouTube Music, Spotify and iHeartRadio (to name a few), and allows you to control your TV hands-free if you add the Google Chromecast. Both types of voice-command technology can connect to your smart lighting, such as the Philips Hue, or Nest's smart thermostat so you can adjust

light and heating with only your voice – ideal for when your hands are full or you don't want to abandon dinner guests. And if you have smart-enabled kitchen appliances, commands such as “turn on the oven” or “show me the inside of the fridge” will do the trick, too. Pretty smart, don't you think? New developments mean many other products offer the same services. Take Bang & Olufsen's latest smart speaker, Beosound 2. It has full Google Assistant capabilities built in, so you can not only control your music through it but everything else is voice enabled too. Plus, acoustic echo-cancelling technology incorporated into the design allows Google Assistant to hear your commands, even over loud music. The Riva Stadium full-range tabletop smart speaker also uses Amazon Alexa for full voice control. Over the coming year, more and more devices and appliances will have voice-command capabilities as standard – including ovens, fridge-freezers and lights – so you'll talk directly to them. They may not be able to help you dish up just yet, but it is only a matter of time... **KBB**

1 Echo Spot in black, £11999, Amazon. [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

2 Google Home Mini in Chalk, Charcoal, and Coral, £49, Google. [store.google.com/gb](https://store.google.com/gb)

3 Riva Stadium tabletop smart speaker, £449, Riva. [rivaaudio.co.uk](https://rivaaudio.co.uk)

4 Beosound 2 speaker in Brass, £1650, Bang & Olufsen. [bang-olufsen.com](https://bang-olufsen.com)