

Deciding How Many Megapixels You Need

From [Michael Carr](#),
Your Guide to [Digital Cameras](#).

Get the Perfect Amount for Your Photo Needs

Probably the most significant feature when choosing a digital camera is the number of **megapixels**, which determines the quality of your photos. Choose too few for your needs, and your images will suffer. Choose too many, and you might be spending more cash than necessary.

For most people, however, deciding on the elusive perfect number can be tough. Below is a guide to help you choose, including what size prints you can expect to get and basic prices. (The prices, however, can fluctuate wildly based on extra features, and the cost per megapixel is constantly getting lower and lower):

2 megapixels or less

- This is typically found on smaller, inexpensive cameras or cameras in combination with other devices (such as cellphones or PDAs).
- **It will be hard to make a high-quality print of any size, but these are just fine for e-mailing photos or posting photos for a personal web site.**
- **I wouldn't recommend it for family portraits or if you really need a nice-looking print.**
- **Expect to pay \$100 to \$150 for the camera alone, more for a combo unit.**

3 megapixels

:

- This is actually a good compromise between picture quality and low price for most casual photographers.
- You can print lovely 4x6 images, decent 5x7s and, depending on the camera, might even knock out a good 6x9 or 8x10.
- You will pay around \$150 to \$250.

4 megapixels

- You're getting nicer. These images make practically photo-lab quality 4x6s, and great 5x7s and 6x9s.
- You can print a nice 8x10.
- You'll typically pay about \$250 to \$350.

5 megapixels

- Hello, enlargements! This will produce beautiful 8x10s, and even a nice 11x14.
- Now you are getting closer to professional photographer levels, and the quality shows it.
- And you'll pay the price, around \$350 to \$450.

6 megapixels and up

- Wonderful image quality, but high price tags. You can print large photos, even 11x14 or perhaps more, with satisfying results.
- There are some high-megapixel cameras coming out with lower price tags than most, but they usually have very few features.
- Unless megapixels are the only thing you care about (it shouldn't be), don't get a camera that sounds outrageously inexpensive for its megapixel range.
- In this category, expect to pay \$450 and up, up, up.

Yes, I know it would be really cool to get that hot new 6 megapixel camera. If you have unlimited funds, great. If you're like the rest of us working stiffs, you don't want to waste money on extras you don't need. And I can tell you right now, if you're just e-mailing pictures to your buddies, you don't need it.

A couple things to keep in mind. People get nuts about megapixels, but more isn't always better. Higher megapixels means larger image sizes, which in turn means more expensive memory cards and more space devoured on your computer's hard drive.

<http://cameras.about.com/cs/choosingcamera/a/megapixels.htm>

Storing Your Digital Images

From [Michael Carr](#),
Your Guide to [Digital Cameras](#).

Where to Put Those Endless Picture Files

Once you have a digital camera, you eliminate the pesky need to keep track of endless prints and negative sheets. While it might be tidier to store digital images, you aren't done with organizing and storing images. There are various options for data storage, and no one answer is right for everyone. In fact, there may be more than one right answer for you.

However you store your images, be sure to file them so they are easy to organize and find. Choose one system (by date, by theme, and so on) and stick to it. Create named folders on your hard drive or name compact discs, for instance, to store them. ALWAYS make copies of your images, leaving the originals intact, before you edit, alter or crop them.

The major storage methods are:

- Memory card, which is the method used to store it as you shoot.

Memory cards are inserted into your digital camera, and will have a set capacity (say, for instance, 256 MB). If you rarely shoot and if you shoot images at a low setting (say 1 or 2 megapixels), you may actually be able to keep your pictures on the card until you run out. For most people, this method will be used for what it was intended: temporary storage. After you are ready to shift the images over to your computer, they will then be located on your hard drive.

- **The hard drive is where most people store the bulk of their images. This is a good option, but isn't without problems. For instance, if you have all of your images on your hard drive and it crashes or becomes infected with a virus, you've lost all your precious images. A horrible thought, of course! Do use the hard drive, but also back up all images right as you transfer them to the hard drive by any secondary method (there are some listed below).**
- **Printing images is, I suppose, another way of storing them. Never use this as the only method, however, because a scanned photo print will always have far less quality than the original image file. It is one way to create a backup, and is an easy way to quickly see what the images look like. Additionally, prints are prone to all sorts of potential damage from water, heat, light, etc.**

- **The compact disc is a wonderful way to store images, it can be rather efficient and it is relatively easy to set up. The downside is you need a CD-burner to use this method. If you do have one, simply keep a running backup of all your images. Be sure to pay special attention to organization so you don't wind up popping ten CDs in just to hunt down one photo. When you burn a new CD of images, write down the dates and descriptions of the photos on the CD. Or name the CDs and keep a notebook that lists what is on each CD. Better yet, make an index print of images on each CD and write the CD name on top of the print.**
- **The DVD is even better, as it can probably store all your images on one disc. If you have a DVD burner, buy a rewritable DVD and just keep adding your image files (preferably organized in folders) to the DVD.**
- **Online storage is also great, although there are sometimes limits to image file size. This is also a great way to share images with friends and family, and avoids the need to e-mail large files**

Whatever you do, don't neglect this issue and take a relaxed attitude towards photo storage. I would select two of the above images at the least, and consistently store your images with those methods.

<http://cameras.about.com/cs/printing/a/storage.htm>