

The Vinyl Records Starter Guide

Build a setup that actually sounds good (and protect your records)

Vinyl is back because it sounds warm, looks great, and slows you down. But a bad setup damages records. This guide helps you start right and keep your collection alive.

A starter setup that won't wreck records

- Skip all-in-one suitcase players — heavy tonearms and ceramic cartridges grind grooves.
- Minimum good setup: a belt-drive turntable with a counterweight + a real cartridge, an amp, and speakers (or powered speakers).
- Set tracking force and anti-skate per your cartridge spec — don't eyeball it.

Care = longevity

- Always use a dust brush before each play; deep-clean with a record-cleaning solution.
- Store records VERTICALLY, never stacked — stacking warps them.
- Handle by the edges and label; keep them out of heat and direct sun.

Buy smart

- Check used records under light for deep scratches; surface dust cleans off, scratches don't.
- Grading: NM (near mint) > VG+ > VG. Know the scale before paying NM prices.
- Original pressings aren't always better — many modern reissues sound excellent.

Insider glossary

Tonearm — The arm holding the cartridge/stylus.

Tracking force — Downward weight of the stylus; too high/low damages records.

Pressing — A specific manufacturing run of a record.

NM/VG+ — Grading shorthand for record condition.

Starter checklist

- Belt-drive turntable w/ counterweight
- Phono preamp or amp w/ phono in
- Speakers
- Carbon dust brush

- Cleaning solution
- Vertical storage

It's all fun until someone touches it: 'Don't Touch My Vinyl' at 15d0.com/shop/vinyl/