

# The best weather forecasting apps



Chances are you won't want to spend more than a few minutes each day consulting your preferred weather app... so it pays to ensure you choose a good one. After all, it's likely to inform all sorts of decisions. **Neil Barrett** downloaded six popular apps and spent some time playing with them during the wet and windy spell at the start of October



Pics: Amelia Barrett

USUALLY, IT'S worth introducing an article involving the great British weather by referring to it as a national obsession. We have had other collective preoccupations this year but whether we're getting out and about for work or leisure, in the car or otherwise, the elements are still a talking point. Believe it or not, it's an amazing 33 years since that Michael Fish weather forecast. It's fair to say that the length and accuracy of predictions has improved beyond recognition since the Great Storm of 1987. Now, thanks to the smartphone, it's in the palm of our hands.

We probably think nothing about looking ahead, hour by hour, over the next few days. It's no longer a novelty to see early predictions of the scene in a fortnight's time. However, not all weather apps are created equal, so even though it might only take a couple of

minutes to find out whether we should expect sunshine or showers over the next week, it's worth taking a bit more time to settle on an app that provides what you need, when you need it, in the way you need it.

In the first week of October we popped down to Maidstone in the heart of Kent to give six apps a try. We used an iPhone for most of them but to widen the sample we fired up the weather app, known as the Android native, that's included with that type of phone.

To make the comparison as useful as possible, we ran them all within a few

seconds of each other and for the same location. *So did we get wet? Here's what we found:*

## The weather now

It's the first thing you see when you open most weather apps and it's so important that it'll pop up as a little widget without the need to open an app on many phones, tablets and smartwatches. All the apps make easy work of finding out what the conditions are right now. But we've already found some differences.

AccuWeather lets us know what temperature it probably feels like, based on the conditions. This taps through to a super-specific bar graph covering the next two hours in fine detail, with colour-coded graphs for rain, snow and ice.

Weather & Radar presents what we call a "polo mint of weather": a circle outline with simple pictograms covering each 15 minutes of the next 90. Definitely one we would prefer when time is tight. The on-screen temperature has a two degree variance between apps - quite a wide range considering it's the live





weather and not a future prediction. We don't think we can be too forgiving about this although we have seen bigger discrepancies before. The quick summary varies between "cloudy" and "light rain". I think it's fair to accept both descriptions, as the rain is intermittent.

### **The next few days**

We turn next to the predicted patterns over the coming days. We like the simplicity of the iPhone native app, possibly because of familiarity. High, low, a little picture and a chance of rain percentage. Simple. Weather & Radar is gaining popularity, though: wind direction and hours of sunshine are quite useful. There is variance in the predictions; we will update you later on how good they are.

### **Radar and satellite**

This is where we think the official Met Office app is strong. There's an hour-by-hour satellite playback for the last six hours which you can scroll through using a simple timeline. A similar approach is taken for the next 24 hours. Options in other apps include a water vapour map.

### **Air quality and allergies**

One thing not previously available on the native iOS weather app was air quality information and alerts. iOS 14, a

recent update to iPhone models 6s and above, has rectified this, with details of where things stand on the air quality scale.

The BBC Weather app, with its air of design familiarity due to the use of similar graphics to TV forecasts, shows us the latest air quality information – and ultraviolet ray strength, for that matter – on the first page.

### **Warnings**

We're in the right part of the year for severe weather and flooding at the moment, so there's curiosity to look at how warnings for these are presented. We expected the Met Office app to perform well at delivering weather warnings and we were right – the relevant page is permanently accessible from all screens and the alerts are presented using the UK's official traffic light severity rating.

BBC Weather presents weather and flood warnings via a pop-out sidebar.

### **Free vs paid**

All of the apps we have mentioned are free to download and to use the core functions. Some make extensive use of advertising to help fund their free versions, so you'll see some of the screen taken up with an ad or - in some cases - a full-screen promotion which you need to watch in order to continue. Some of

the apps have an optional subscription which unlocks more features and removes advertising. You would need to be a hard core weather spotter to choose this, especially when the free version of AccuWeather is telling you how long you're likely to be waiting until the next bout of rain, to the nearest minute.

### **Multimedia**

This is one of the areas where the native apps are left behind. Weather & Radar impresses us here, with local weather webcam clips delivering a real-life view of the local skies. The app also has image-rich links to weather news from around the world.

On the subject of imagery, the native Android weather app has a nice illustration of the current weather scene on its main page.

### **A little update...**

Jump ahead to two days after our test. The prediction made for today was broadly a mixture of sunshine and showers with a moderate breeze and high-low combinations including 16-9, 16-10 and 15-8. It looks as though Maidstone has indeed experienced what we amateur weather experts, with information at our fingertips, would call "autumn".

*[Find out Neil's ratings results overleaf >>](#)*



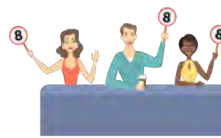
**FORECASTING APPS**

**Easy to use**

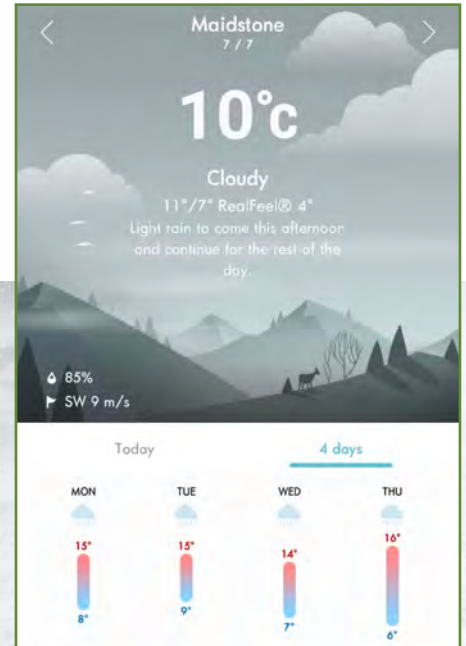
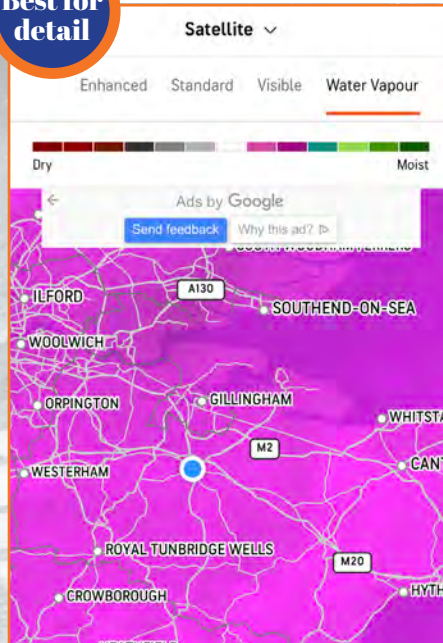


**AccuWeather**

Plenty of data to get stuck into  
**Ease of use 7/10**  
**Style 8/10**  
**Features 9/10**  
**OVERALL 8/10**



**Best for detail**



**Android native weather app**

(Data from AccuWeather)  
 Nice design; straightforward and friendly  
**Ease of use 9/10**  
**Style 7/10**  
**Features 6/10**  
**OVERALL 7/10**



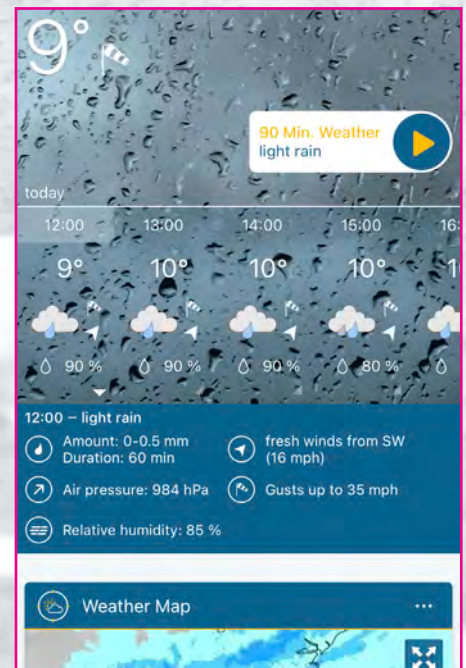
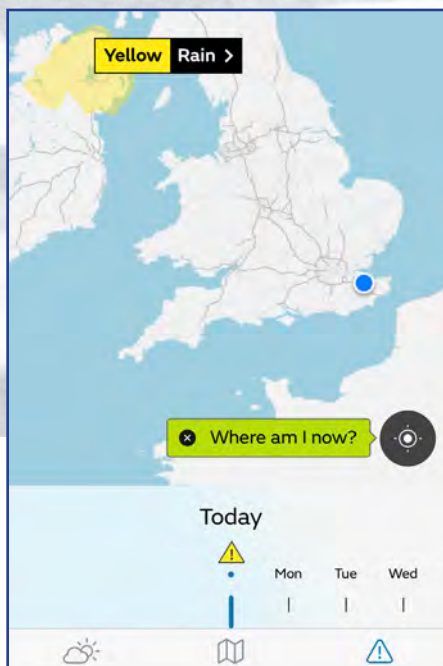
**iPhone native weather app**

Data from The Weather Channel  
 Ready out of the box, regularly updated  
**Ease of use 10/10**  
**Style 6/10**  
**Features 6/10**  
**OVERALL 8/10**



**Met Office**

UK-focused app from the official source  
**Ease of use 8/10**  
**Style 5/10**  
**Features 5/10**  
**OVERALL 6/10**



**Weather & Radar**

Lots of information, lots of photos  
**Ease of use 6/10**  
**Style 5/10**  
**Features 9/10**  
**OVERALL 7/10**

