

CR-Rs (Best of breed)

Listed in order of quality

Mitsui

Taiyo Yuden

Fujifilm (only if made in Japan, not Taiwan)

Maxell (only if made in Japan, not Taiwan)

Verbatim

TDK

Are you scratching your head over which blank CD-Rs to purchase? First let me explain a little about the composition of the CD-Rs themselves. As you've probably noticed when you flip over a CD-R, it's colored, as opposed to being silver or gold like the pre-recorded CDs you own. The reason for this is that home recording equipment can't handle recording directly to the metal, unlike the prerecorded CDs, so they developed an organic dye layer for CD-Rs. The dye layer makes quite a difference in terms of archival quality.

The absolute best CD-R media you can get is Mitsui (or MAM-A, as they're now called), which uses Phthalocyanine dye. Mitsui CD-Rs have the longest archival life of any of the recordable media out there--rated at 100 years for the silver CD-Rs and 300 years for the gold. As you can probably guess, Mitsui are pretty expensive--they can cost over twice the amount of regular media.

Never fear, Taiyo Yuden is here and they are actually the first manufacturer of CD-Rs. They worked with Sony and Phillips to develop the standard for recordable media. The dye layer on their CD-Rs is Cyanine, the most common type of dye layer. Cyanine dye exists in several different colors, the most common being the pale green you are accustomed to. These however, are a pale blue with just a hint of green. I have yet to get a coaster (a CD-R that failed to burn properly) using this brand of media.

Taiyo Yuden manufactures CD-Rs for several other companies, two of them being Fuji and Maxell. However, I have a word of warning here--not all Fuji's and Maxell's are Taiyo Yuden, but there is an easy way to tell. Look for where the CD-Rs were manufactured--if it says "Made in Japan", then you've got some Taiyo Yuden, but if it's "Made in Taiwan", you've got Ritek or some other lesser manufacturer.

Try Verbatim next. Their Azo blue dye is pretty good stuff--not quite as good as Mitsui's Phthalocyanine, or plain old Cyanine in the capable hands of Taiyo Yuden, but it's right below those two. It has a longer archival life than most of the media on the market, but it's not in the realm of Mitsui. Your options are the DataLifePlus: and Digital Vinyl.

If you're still stuck, you can always try TDK. Their dye layer is pale green Cyanine (looks just like most of the other CD-Rs you've probably tried), but these are better made than the other pale greens. If you're in a real pinch, these will do.

One point I should make very clear is that the brand of CD-R media does not affect sound quality --at least not directly. As long as there are no burn errors, there won't be any difference in sound quality between brands--anyone who thinks they can hear the difference between brands of CD-R media from properly burned discs is fooling themselves. However, if you use crappy media, you run a greater risk of burn errors--so stick to the good stuff mentioned above.

Another important point is burn speed. I know a lot of you out there have those really fast 48X or 52X burners and love to be able to burn an audio CD in about a minute or so. Guess what? Those really high speeds cause a lot of burn errors. So don't burn at anything faster than 16X or 24x.