The best tower defense games in 2026: eight top-ten lists

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Eight top tens of tower defense games in 2026 (overall, for kids, free, maze-building, phones, Roblox, rising and co-op), with the numbers, what's rising and why.

The best tower defense game right now is still Bloons TD 6, eight years after it came out, and the most interesting new ones let you build the road, fight huge hordes or both. This guide has eight top-ten lists: best overall, best for kids, best free, best for building a maze, best on phones, best on Roblox, the ones rising fastest and the best to play with friends. Every list says what the ranking is based on.

Peabody (peabody.kids) wrote this guide, and Peabody has a tower defense game of its own, Clank Attack! (called Onslaught until 27 October). That is a conflict of interest, so here is how we handled it. Clank Attack! is on four of the eight lists, only where it meets the list's own rule, and we say where we put it and why it isn't higher. On the other four lists it isn't included, and we say why. Nobody paid to be listed. Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

Every fact about another game was read from its store page, a tracker or a named source between 20 and 27 October 2026. Steam figures are all-language review counts and average concurrent players over the last 30 days (from Raijin and SteamCharts). Roblox figures come from a 3 October 2026 snapshot of Rolimons data. Trackers disagree with each other, and their sales estimates run low where a developer has published real numbers, so treat every number as a good guess, and a ranking as our view.

The state of tower defense in 2026

Tower defense is a game where you place defenders along a path to stop waves of enemies. It is a 20-year-old genre, and it split in three directions this year.

The old champions are not going anywhere. Bloons TD 6 averages about 8,800 players at a time on Steam, the same as a year ago, with 97% positive reviews out of about 398,000 and an estimated 8.8 million Steam copies. Its latest big free update was number 57, on 8 October 2026. The 2009 Plants vs. Zombies ($4.99, 98% of about 157,000 reviews) still has about five times the players of its 2025 remake, Plants vs. Zombies: Replanted ($19.99, 67%). In late September 2026 the original Kingdom Rush, on sale for $0.99, peaked at about 17,300 players at once, more than the brand-new Kingdom Rush 6 managed, which launched on 24 September at 75% positive. Players said it gives too little gold to experiment and that three stars need one exact tower layout.

Adding luck to a loved game keeps failing. Bloons TD 6's roguelite add-on sits at 47%

positive, Dungeon Defenders: Going Rogue at 39%, and Orcs Must Die! Deathtrap at 71% with 91% of its launch players gone. The complaint is the same each time: random draws replaced a puzzle the player could solve.

What is rising is small, cheap and about the map.

- Build the road yourself. Emberward (walls made of Tetris-like pieces, 97% positive, full release 17 September 2026), Tower Dominion (a new map tile every two waves) and Rogue Tower (a path that keeps growing).
- Huge hordes. Sir, We Have an Orc Problem, made by two people, sold about 128,000 copies in its first week at $9.99, with enemies flowing like liquid and an upgrade tree between runs.
- Build by day, defend by night. Thronefall has sold more than a million copies; The King Is Watching passed 500,000.
- Price. Every breakout cost $7 to $15. The $30 games sold modestly.

On Roblox, the fair game outlasts the flashy one. The most-played Roblox tower defense for seven years, Tower Defense Simulator, has no summoning and no trading: you unlock towers by beating bosses. It had a 104,000-player peak in the 30 days to 3 October 2026. The games built on random summons launch much bigger (Toilet Tower Defense peaked at 522,000 in March 2024) and then lose 85% to 99% of those players. Toilet Tower Defense's monthly peak is now about 7,000 to 8,000.

What makes a tower defense game worth coming back to

Across the evidence, the same things keep players returning:

- Something new on a schedule. Anime Vanguards' player count has climbed from about 55,000 to over 100,000 around its updates, which land every two to four weeks, and Bloons TD 6 has had 57 big ones.
- Playing with someone. Tower Defense Simulator and Bloons TD 6 both have four-player co-op. In a November 2025 industry survey, 73% of 5 to 7 year olds said they want to play more with their parents.
- Upgrades you can see. In Bloons TD 6 and Tower Defense Simulator every tier changes how a tower looks, so a child reads power at a glance.
- Something to do during the wave. Kingdom Rush was built around heroes, spells and calling the next wave early, because watching towers shoot gets dull.
- Towers that each do one clear thing. An analysis of Kingdom Rush's level design found that every tower type has a strength and a blind spot, so players must combine them. X-Morph's developers cut from 58 towers to far fewer because overlapping ones were redundant.

What makes them boring or frustrating

- Watching instead of acting.
- Not seeing what is coming next. Tower Dominion's sharpest criticism is that it doesn't show how many enemies each entrance will send.
- Enemies that only one tower can stop, especially flyers.
- Too many near-identical towers.
- Threats off screen. A design article on Defender's Quest says scrolling maps and hidden threats shatter focus. That is why the best-loved games keep the whole map on one screen.
- Stingy gold, and one right answer.
- Luck deciding a run before you've chosen anything.
- For young players: walls of text. George Fan, who made Plants vs. Zombies, kept to at most eight words on screen and taught by doing.

List 1: The best tower defense games right now

Ranked by reviews, how many people still play and how long the game has lasted, on Steam on 27 October 2026. Roblox and phone games have their own lists.

1. Bloons TD 6 (PC, phone, consoles; $13.99 plus optional in-app purchases). Popping balloons with monkeys, with three upgrade paths of five tiers on every tower, heroes and four-player co-op. The most-played premium tower defense by a wide margin, and it keeps growing through free updates. The usual complaints are co-op lag, slowdown on very late rounds and purchases in a paid game.
2. Plants vs. Zombies (PC, $4.99; 2009). The benchmark for lane-based tower defense with personality. 98% positive and about 2,400 players on an ordinary day, 17 years on.
3. Kingdom Rush (PC, phone; $9.99, and $0.99 on a September sale). Fixed paths, heroes, spells and jokes. 97% positive of about 19,700 reviews, and that late-September spike when it went on sale.
4. Thronefall (PC, $12.99). You build and upgrade a small kingdom by day and defend it by night, and steer one hero. 96% positive of about 24,000. Players are up about 50% on a year ago.
5. Kingdom Two Crowns (PC and consoles, $19.99; a kingdom builder with tower defense nights). Average players grew from about 2,900 to about 5,100 over the year on new expansions.
6. They Are Billions (PC, $29.99). A harder, grown-up one: hold a steampunk colony against a zombie horde. 85% positive of about 51,600 and a very steady 2,100 players a day.
7. Mindustry (free and open source on its developer's site; $9.99 on Steam). Build factories that feed ammunition to your turrets. 96% positive, up about 65% on a year ago.

8. Tower Dominion (PC, about $10 to $17; May 2025). A soft clay-blocks look, and a new map tile every two waves. 86% positive. Cooling from its launch but still a Steam top seller 17 months on.
9. Emberward (PC, $19.99; full release 17 September 2026). Your maze is built from a hand of Tetris-like pieces. 97% positive, the best score on this list among newer games.
10. Sir, We Have an Orc Problem (PC, $9.99; July 2026). Thousands of orcs pour through while you call in bombs and lasers. 86% positive. Players call the upgrade tree bloated, and the makers admit it's ugly.

Where Clank Attack! stands: not on this list. It is a young free browser game with no store reviews or player counts to set beside these. We think the lists below are where it can be judged fairly.

List 2: The best tower defense games for kids

Our view, from what a child can see and do: easy to start, a clear picture of what is happening, humour instead of gore, and fair unlocks. We have not rated these for age. Check each game's own rating and settings.

1. Plants vs. Zombies (PC, $4.99). Lanes you can read in a second, plants with faces, and teaching by doing. Its designer's rule of at most eight words on screen is why a six-year-old can pick it up.
2. Bloons TD 6 (PC, phone, consoles). Popping balloons has no gore, every upgrade changes how a monkey looks, and the whole map stays on one screen. Note the in-app purchases and read the co-op settings before a child plays online.
3. Kingdom Rush (PC, phone). Funny, with easter eggs on every map and early levels that teach one thing at a time. Later levels get hard. Kingdom Rush 6 added a Classic Mode after players asked for the simpler original rules.
4. Plants vs. Zombies 2 (phone, free with in-app purchases). About 7.8 million monthly players, per AppMagic. Easy to start, and it sells in-app purchases, so look at the settings.
5. Tower Defense Simulator (Roblox, free). Towers unlock by playing and beating bosses, with no summoning and no trading, and four-player co-op. A Roblox game, so set Roblox's own parental controls first.
6. Thronefall (PC, $12.99). Almost no menus: build, upgrade, then watch your hero and soldiers fight. Mild cartoon combat.
7. Clank Attack! (browser, free through the end of 2026). Our own. The enemies are wind-up toy robots called Clankers that burst into cogs and springs, and nothing is hurt. You build towers on a field where the towers are the maze, on 7 short maps of 8 to 12 waves, with 19 towers and 25 kinds of Clanker. A new player's first map opens with two towers already built and the first Clankers walking, so they are firing within seconds. We put it seventh because it is new, has fewer maps than the leaders, has no co-op yet and has no

reviews. Because it lives on Peabody, a crate of coins between waves asks one math or reading question; a Just play setting turns the questions off.
8. Bloons TD Battles 2 (PC, phone). One-on-one: build defences and send bloons at a friend. It only got a friends list in 2025, so check how a child would be matched with others.
9. Plants vs. Zombies: Replanted (PC and consoles, $19.99; 2025). A faithful remake, 67% positive, with complaints about its price (four times the original's) and its lack of online play. A parent reviewer found their 10-year-old liked the zombie side best.
10. Garden Tower Defense (Roblox, free). The favourite of 2025 with a 98.2% approval rating, the highest of the 26 Roblox tower defense games one tracker checked, but it uses random seed summons and trading, which is where scams happen. A caution more than a recommendation.

List 3: The best free tower defense games

"Free" often means "free with purchases", so each entry says what you can pay for. Ranked by how fair the free version is, then by how many people play.

1. Tower Defense Simulator (Roblox). The best free one by a distance: no summoning, no trading, unlock by playing, 104,000-player 30-day peak, 94% approval.
2. Mindustry (PC, phone; free and open source on its developer's site). Build drills and conveyors that feed turrets. Deep, and aimed at older kids.
3. Plants vs. Zombies 2 (phone; free with in-app purchases). The kid default, with purchase prompts.
4. Infinitode 2 (PC; free with optional purchases). Endless maps. 91% positive of about 4,300.
5. Dungeon Defenders II (PC; free to play). Co-op action tower defense. 77% positive of about 22,000, and slowly shrinking.
6. Wittle Defender (phone; free with in-app purchases). A cute roguelike that took $10 million in its first month in 2025.
7. Clank Attack! (browser, free through the end of 2026). Our own, with no download and nothing to buy. Ranked here because it's the free list's only game that plays in a web page, and below the established ones because they have far more content and years of updates.
8. The Tower: Idle Tower Defense (phone; free). One tower you upgrade between runs. More than 5 million Google Play downloads. It is an idle game: it plays itself and rewards patience.
9. Garden Tower Defense (Roblox; free). Popular and well rated, with random summons and trading. Read the Roblox settings first.
10. Rush Royale (phone; free). Merge towers against another player. Reported at 105 million downloads, and also reported to depend heavily on random draws and spending.

List 4: The best tower defense games where you build the road

In these, your towers or walls decide where the enemies go. Ranked by how well the maze works and how well loved the game is.

1. Defense Grid: The Awakening (PC, $9.99; 2008, and a sequel in 2014). The enemies walk around what you build, and the sequel shows the predicted route as you place. 96% positive of about 5,400.
2. Emberward (PC). The walls come in Tetris-like pieces from a deck. 97% positive.
3. Tower Dominion (PC). You place a terrain tile every two waves, so the map grows with you. 86% positive.
4. Desktop Tower Defense (a 2007 browser game). The one that made mazing famous: 15 million plays in four months, with up to 4,000 people playing at once. Its Flash original is hard to find now.
5. Rogue Tower (PC, $8.99). The path keeps growing and you shape it. 83% positive of about 5,900.
6. Isle of Arrows (PC, $12.99). A small floating island where you place road tiles and towers from a hand of cards. 79% positive, a quiet one.
7. Cataclismo (PC, $29.99). You build real castle walls from pieces, with physics, and bricks that fall crush enemies. 88% positive.
8. Clank Attack! (browser, free through the end of 2026). Our own, and its roots are here. Ground Clankers always take the shortest way around your towers, so the towers are the maze. A tower that would shut the road isn't allowed ("They need a way through!"), and flyers ignore the maze. Faint footprints show the way through as it changes. It is eighth because the maze is only towers so far, with no walls and nothing like Emberward's pieces. Walls are what we plan to add.
9. Fieldrunners (a 2008 phone classic, since on PC). The game that taught a generation that the towers can be the maze. It is old now, but it is where this list starts.
10. Sanctum 2 (PC, 2013). A first-person maze builder: you build, then shoot. 90% positive, and almost nobody plays it any more (about a dozen at a time).

List 5: The best tower defense games on phones and tablets

Ranked by how well the game works on a touch screen and how many people play. Phone-first games lean heavily on purchases, so each says what it costs.

1. Bloons TD 6 (iOS and Android; paid, with optional purchases). Built for taps, with a big content library and about 5.5 million Google Play downloads at a 4.8 rating.
2. Plants vs. Zombies 2 (free with in-app purchases). Easy to pick up, about 7.8 million monthly players.
3. Kingdom Rush (paid; Kingdom Rush 6 launched 24 September 2026). Built for taps and pinches, with a map that fits one screen.

4. Bloons TD Battles 2 (paid, with purchases). Quick one-on-one matches.
5. Rush Royale (free). Merge-and-battle. Reported at 105 million downloads and $500 million, and heavy on random draws.
6. Arknights (free; for teens and adults). Beautifully drawn, with heroes instead of towers, and about $678 million made from about 17 million downloads, through a gacha (random draw) system.
7. Wittle Defender (free with purchases). A cute roguelike, $10 million in its first month.
8. The Tower: Idle Tower Defense (free). One tower, upgrades between runs.
9. Clank Attack! (a phone's web browser, free through the end of 2026). Our own: nothing to install, it runs full screen sideways on a phone, and you can drag, pinch and tap to build. It is ninth because we have not yet tuned its frame rate on older phones, and big late-game waves are heavy. Honest, and being worked on.
10. Random Dice (free). A merge-dice one-on-one game, in the same family as Rush Royale.

List 6: The top ten tower defense games on Roblox

Roblox is where many kids actually play this genre. Ranked by 30-day peak players on 3 October 2026 (SpongeBob's is a lower bound), with what each one asks of a child in a sentence. We are not on Roblox, so Clank Attack! is not on this list.

1. Tower Defense Simulator: 104,491 players at the peak, 94.1% approval, launched in June 2019, with a record of 159,824 on 4 October 2025, set on the day of a live event that gave everyone online free skins. No summoning, no trading.
2. Anime Vanguards: 44,979. Summons and evolves characters; the longest average session on the list, 37 minutes, and updates every two to four weeks.
3. Tower Defense X: 26,207, 94.3% approval, launched in 2022.
4. Slop TD: 25,122, launched July 2026 with the lowest approval on the list, 79.3%. It's a "money first" design: summon and craft.
5. SpongeBob Tower Defense: a 30-day peak above 22,000, and an all-time peak above 113,000 in November 2025, nearly a year after launch, after updates to "performance, pacing, and new content".
6. Alliance TD: 20,822, launched June 2026.
7. Garden Tower Defense: 18,606 now, but 197,872 at its September 2025 peak. Approval 98.2%.
8. Retro TD: 16,564, with a record of 35,470 in August 2026.
9. All Star Tower Defense: 12,281, down from 164,029 in 2021. Its sequel peaked at about 340,000 in July 2025 and had about 350 players eight months later.
10. Toilet Tower Defense: about 7,000 to 8,000, down from a record of 522,376 on 9 March 2024.

The ranking's lesson is in the gaps. The game that keeps the most children has no gambling in it, and the ones that peaked highest lost most of their crowd.

List 7: The tower defense games rising fastest in 2025 and 2026

Ranked by how much each has grown or sold in the past year, and how well reviewed it is. Clank Attack! is not on this list: it is not rising on any measure that we can show yet.

1. Emberward: 97% positive, 573 average players this month against 186 during early access.
2. Sir, We Have an Orc Problem: about 128,000 copies and about $1 million in its first week, from a two-person team.
3. Mindustry: up about 65% on last year, with a record peak in March 2026 after its version 8.
4. Kingdom Two Crowns: average players about 5,100 against about 2,900 a year ago.
5. Thronefall: average players about 450 against about 290 a year ago, with more than a million copies sold.
6. The King Is Watching: 500,000 copies, and a peak of about 17,900 players in July 2025. Its hook is that your workers only work when you look at them.
7. Monsters Are Coming! Rock & Road (November 2025): a city that rolls along a road, in the style of Vampire Survivors.
8. Zero Stress King: Idle Defense ($6.99, March 2026): 88% positive, an idle tower defense you can play with half your attention.
9. Outhold (December 2025): a short, cheap horde game that Sir, We Have an Orc Problem credits as its inspiration.
10. GemCraft Legacy Collection (21 October 2026): a Steam top-ten seller in its first week.

List 8: The best tower defense games to play with friends

Ranked by how well the multiplayer works, from reviews and design writing. Co-op is the most asked-for feature in the genre and the biggest source of complaints, mostly lag and strangers who rush. Clank Attack! is not on this list: it is single player today, and co-op is the biggest thing we haven't built.

1. Bloons TD 6: four-player online co-op. The top complaint in its reviews is co-op lag.
2. Tower Defense Simulator (Roblox): four players, and the game that keeps the most children coming back.
3. Legion TD 2 (PC, $24.99): in team games each of you defends a lane, you spend on soldiers to send at the other team, and your sends raise your own income. 86% positive of about 15,400.
4. Kingdom Two Crowns: two monarchs share one screen and can throw coins to each other. A player who loses their crown can keep collecting for the other.

5. Orcs Must Die! 3 (PC, $29.99): action and traps with friends. 86% positive of about 15,000.
6. Dungeon Defenders (PC, $14.99): the original co-op tower defense with loot. 93% positive of about 19,000.
7. Mindustry: co-op and player-versus-player factory defence.
8. Orcs Must Die! Deathtrap (PC, $29.99): one to four players. 71% positive, and the most players have already left.
9. Anime Vanguards (Roblox): group play, built on random summons.
10. Sanctum 2 (PC): co-op first-person tower defense. Its shared resources led strangers to rush, and few play it now.

Where tower defense is going

These are our predictions, drawn from the evidence above, not facts.

1. You will build the road, not just the towers. Almost every well-reviewed new game lets the player shape the path.
2. Hordes will be normal. Browsers can now draw huge crowds: a February 2026 three.js demo drew 100,000 animated characters in one draw call.
3. Towers will leave marks that other towers use. A soaked enemy takes more from lightning; oil burns. It is the most readable kind of teamwork for a child.
4. A hero you steer, and something to do in every wave.
5. Short runs, with a pick of one from three between waves, instead of an hour-long map.
6. Family play on one screen: a TV or laptop shows the board and each phone is a pair of hands.
7. Kid-made maps, checked by a computer player so none is unbeatable.
8. Playing the monsters instead of the towers.
9. Fair unlocks. The evidence says gambling buys a launch spike and fairness buys years.

What we're doing with Clank Attack!

On 27 October 2026 we shipped a first round of changes to our game (and renamed it): maps shortened to 8 to 12 waves, a first ten seconds that gets a new player firing at once, buttons for pause and one, two and three times speed, an early-start bonus, a free move for towers between waves, a strip showing what's coming next, painted ground instead of a board of tiles, bigger Clankers whose plating shows how tough they are, and a camera that follows the fight. Next we plan to add walls, towers that react to each other and a hero. These are plans, not promises, and we will check each against children playing it.

To try Clank Attack!, start from the front page and find it in the Arcade, or go straight to the game.

Questions people ask

What is the best tower defense game?

Bloons TD 6 is the most played and the best reviewed premium one, with about 8,800 players at a time on Steam eight years after launch. For a first-timer, the original Plants vs. Zombies ($4.99) and the original Kingdom Rush ($9.99, and $0.99 in a September sale) are the best places to start.

What is the best tower defense game for kids?

The original Plants vs. Zombies is the easiest to learn, and Bloons TD 6 has the most to do. Tower Defense Simulator is the best-kept free one on Roblox. Check each game's rating and purchase settings first.

What are the best free tower defense games?

Tower Defense Simulator on Roblox, Mindustry (free on its developer's site), Plants vs. Zombies 2 and Infinitode 2 are the best-known. Free often means free with purchases, and some free games rely on random summons. Peabody's Clank Attack! is a free browser game through the end of 2026.

What is the best tower defense game where you build a maze?

Defense Grid: The Awakening is the classic, with a route you can preview. Emberward (Tetris-like walls) is the best of the newer ones.

What is the best tower defense game on Roblox?

Tower Defense Simulator. It has had the most players for seven years and has no summoning or trading.

What is the best tower defense game to play with friends?

Bloons TD 6 for four-player co-op, Tower Defense Simulator on Roblox, and Legion TD 2 if you want to send enemies at each other.

Why are tower defense games so popular?

Because they reward planning in a way a child can see: you build something, you watch it work, and you fix what failed. The best ones add a new thing to try every few weeks, something to do during each wave and someone to play with.

Is Clank Attack! free?

Yes. Peabody, including Clank Attack!, is free through the end of 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/best-tower-defense-games