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TV

11 Best K-Dramas of 2020

These shows are must-watch television.



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Korean dramas – or K-dramas as they are more commonly called – have come a long way since my parents’ days. In the 1980s and 1990s, just about every Korean-owned grocery store in the U.S. had a little section where shoppers could rent a VHS tape of illegally copied South Korean programs. Yes, the quality was awful. But when that’s all you had to get a taste of home, you’ll gladly rent it for a buck or two.

Flash forward to 2020, when K-dramas **are accessible to stream** 24/7 with a variety of subtitles for viewers who don’t understand Korean. While they may not understand the original language, fans worldwide have fallen in love with the K-drama trifecta: the one-season-and-done concept, the second male lead who threatens to win the female lead’s heart, and the gorgeous actors and actresses who pretend that their 20- and 30-something characters have never been in relationships. Ever. What’s not to love, right?

Below, check out 11 shows from 2020 that should definitely be on your watch list.

It’s Okay to Not Be Okay

Kim Soo-hyun’s first series since **being discharged** from mandatory military duty beautifully tackles mental health issues within its vigorous storyline, in which he plays Moon Gang-tae, who is struggling to keep up the facade that he’s okay with being the selfless guardian for his older brother. Seo Ye-ji is icy perfection in her portrayal of a macabre children’s book author. And as Gang-tae’s autistic older brother, Sang-tae, Oh Jung-se is phenomenal in his portrayal of the *hyung* who doesn’t want to be a burden. The series finale offers hope and a sense of peace. But it will also make even the most stoic viewers tear up. (**Netflix**)

The Penthouse

This K-drama starts off with the most *makjang* (or exaggerated) storyline of the year. As a very rich woman takes the elevator down from her 100th floor penthouse apartment, she witnesses a young girl falling, surely to her death. The teenager lands in the arms of a statue. This deliciously gripping female-centric series revolves around rival classical singers and includes a (*dun dun dun!*) switched-at-birth plot twist. Did I mention that one of male characters has a torture chamber in his home, because, *why not?* Mixed in with the outrageous content is a parable about the haves and the have nots. (KOCOWA)

Hyena

The sexual tension between Kim Hye-soo and Ju Ji-hoon is palatable in this fast-moving legal procedural. She is a scrappy attorney who isn't above getting dirty to get the job done. He believes he's better than her in every way, yet he can't manage to beat her in court. When they team up, they appear unstoppable, as they attempt to take down the head of a tony law firm that is anything but above board. ([Netflix](#))

Start-Up

After their parents divorce, one daughter (played by Bae Suzy) stays with their idealistic father, while the other (Kang Han-na) moves to the U.S. with their mother and rich stepdad. In their 20s, both sisters end up competing with each other as they start up their own tech businesses. More than any series in recent memory, this K-drama has a second male lead (Kim Seon-ho) who is so charismatic that his storyline often overshadows that of the very handsome lead (Nam Joo-hyuk). *Start-Up* reinforces the idea that no matter how fractured a family is, the ties remain – for better or worse. ([Netflix](#))

Flower of Evil

Lee Joon-gi's character Hee-Sung is an artist who has a past he's trying to keep hidden. Moon Chae-won is his detective wife Ji-Won, who has loved him since she was a teenager. Even when he appears to be a serial killer, she can't help but call him *jagiya*—which literally means that he is hers. The ending is ambiguous, but leaves room for a positive future. ([Wiki](#))

When the Weather is Fine

It's beautiful to watch the romance between Park Min-Young and Seo Kang-Joon's Hae-won and Eun-Seob slowly unfold. Once high school classmates, the cellist and indie bookstore owner are reunited in the small town where they grew up. But just as heartwarming is the camaraderie between the townspeople, which harkens to a time when neighbors watched out for one another and had a real sense of community. The series also tackles how debilitating past traumas can be when they are pushed aside, rather than dealt with and acknowledged. ([Viki](#))

Stranger 2

It's a rarity for K-dramas to have more than one season, but this one was well deserved. Cho Seung-woo and Bae Doona return as a meticulous attorney and a scrupulous detective, respectively, who work together to solve cases their superiors would prefer they dropped. Politics, murder, and varying degrees of subterfuge drive this excellent second season. You don't have to watch the first season to understand what's going on, but you'll want to binge both. They're that good. ([Netflix](#))

Hospital Playlist

Brought to you by the showrunners behind the excellent *Reply* trilogy, this K-drama centers on five friends who are all experts in their fields and somehow land jobs at the same hospital. Go figure. The series does a fine job of balancing arcs about their friendship, while also focusing on societal issues. For instance, one indigent parent contemplates suicide when he realizes that there are programs that will pay for his children's medical care if they are orphans, but not if he is alive. ([Netflix](#))

Itaewon Class

As with most K-dramas, there is a love triangle. But that's the least interesting part of this series. Park Seo-joon plays an orphaned teen, whose life's goal is to take down his late father's immoral employer (Yoo Jae-myung). The series tackles poverty, classism, racial discrimination and transphobia in a matter of fact manner that is refreshing. ([Netflix](#))

Crash Landing On You

This series premiered in December 2019, but since the majority of episodes aired in 2020, we're including it! It is a fish-out-of-water tale told from the perspective of a North Korean officer (Hyun Bin) and a South Korean heiress (Son Ye-Jin), who fall in love but can't realistically spend the rest of their lives together. The two Koreas may still technically be at war, but the underlying theme of *CLOY* is that there are real-life people on both sides who are more alike than not. ([Netflix](#))

Hi Bye, Mama

If you had the chance to come back from the dead and reclaim life as you knew it, would you? There's a catch. In order to do so, you have to disrupt the lives of your loved ones, who have already moved on. Kim Tae-hee stars as the love of Lee Kyu-hyung's life. After her death, he's shattered to the point that he can't function as a surgeon or show his new wife the love she deserves. The plot moves along slowly to a satisfying finish, which includes an ending that felt right for everyone. ([Netflix](#))

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