

Gold standard for investors



SHUTTERSTOCK

Interest in buying precious metals strong even as prices spike

Roxanne Downer USA TODAY

From first-time buyers to retirement savers, many Americans are turning to gold as a hedge against uncertainty. • Prices recently have climbed to historic highs, as investors flock to traditional safe-haven assets such as gold and silver. Those precious metals are in demand amid renewed international tensions that have unsettled investors. • Gold prices jumped nearly 3% in a single day in early January after the United States captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Spot gold rose to a one-week high of \$4,455.42 per ounce, putting it within about \$100 of the record high set in late 2025.

This kind of move follows a familiar market pattern: When geopolitical events threaten global stability or energy supplies, many investors turn to assets like gold and silver to protect their money.

Even with prices already near record levels, interest in buying gold remains strong. Some buyers value gold for its long history as a hedge during times of conflict, while others use it to diversify their portfolios when stocks, bonds and currencies feel unstable.

Buying gold at record highs isn't necessarily a mistake if the goal is long-term diversification rather than short-term gains.

And financial professionals say buying physical gold can be safe if you work with reputable dealers, understand pricing and store your gold securely. It's important to factor in storage, insurance and liquidity

before purchasing gold.

There's no universal rule to how much gold you should own, but many professionals suggest limiting it to a portion of a broader portfolio. The right amount depends on your risk tolerance, investment goals and overall financial situation.

If you're thinking about buying gold in 2026, one of the first decisions you'll face is what type of gold to buy. There's a wide range of options to invest in, from physical gold bullion like coins and bars, to retirement accounts that hold gold on your behalf.

Understandably, choosing the right one can feel overwhelming, especially for beginners.

Understanding the differences between coins, bars, and Gold IRAs can help you decide which option best fits your budget, financial goals, and plan for incorporating gold into your portfolio. Each option serves a different purpose and comes with its own trade-offs.

Gold bullion coins

Gold coins are often the starting point for first-time buyers and collectors. Popular options like government-issued American Gold Eagles or Canadian Maple Leafs are widely recognized, easy to resell and available in smaller sizes, though they typically cost more per ounce than bars and require secure storage.

Many buyers work with established dealers such as American Hartford Gold, Thor Metals and Priority Gold to compare coin options and pricing.

Gold coins are often easier to resell.

Gold

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Gold bullion bars

Gold bars are often chosen by buyers making larger, long-term investments who want to maximize the amount of gold they receive for their money. Bars usually offer a lower cost per ounce and simple, weight-based pricing. However, they can be harder to resell and require secure storage and insurance.

Dealers like Thor Metals and Priority Gold offer a range of bar sizes, allowing buyers to choose options that match their budget and storage plans.

Gold IRAs

A Gold IRA lets you hold physical gold inside a retirement account, such as an IRA or a 401(k) rollover, with the metal stored in an IRS-approved facility rather than at home. These accounts are designed for long-term retirement savings. They offer potential tax advantages, portfolio diversification and professional storage, but they also involve setup and custodial fees and must follow IRS rules.

Companies like Goldco and American Hartford Gold specialize in Gold IRAs. They can help guide investors through the rollover and setup process.

There's no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to buying gold. The right choice depends on your goals, budget and how long you plan to hold your investment.

In general, gold coins tend to work best for first-time buyers or those investing smaller amounts, while gold bars may make more sense for larger, long-term purchases. For investors focused on retirement savings, Gold IRAs offer a way to hold physical gold inside a tax-advantaged account.

Deciding to buy gold

Whether you're buying physical gold bullion or investing through a Gold IRA, consider these tips to help you approach gold buying with clarity and confidence – even in a high-price environment – and avoid common mistakes.

• Know the spot price and dealer premiums: The spot price reflects gold's current market value, while deal-



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er premiums cover costs such as minting, distribution and service. Premiums can vary widely by product and seller, so it's worth comparing prices.

• Decide how you want to own gold: Choose between physical gold bullion (coins or bars you own directly) and a Gold IRA, which holds gold in a retirement account with professional storage. Your choice should reflect your goals, time horizon and comfort with storage.

• Choose a reputable dealer: Look for clear pricing, transparent policies and responsive customer support. Be cautious of high-pressure sales tactics or claims that urge you to buy immediately because of short-term price moves.

• Understand storage and insurance options: Physical gold requires secure storage, whether that's a home safe or an insured third-party vault. Gold IRAs require IRS-approved storage facilities.

• Review all fees before purchasing: Factor in shipping, storage and in-

surance costs, as well as setup and custodial fees for Gold IRAs. These expenses can affect your total investment over time.

• Think long term: Gold is often used as a hedge and diversification tool, not a short-term investment. Consider how gold fits into your broader financial plan rather than focusing solely on current prices.

Trusted gold dealers

Choosing a reputable gold dealer is an important part of buying gold safely. The following companies offer a range of options, from physical gold coins and bars to Gold IRAs, along with customer support to help buyers understand pricing, storage and rollover requirements. While each dealer serves a slightly different type of investor, all are established providers that can help you add gold to your financial plan in 2026.

• American Hartford Gold: This well-known precious metals dealer spe-

cializes in physical gold and silver, as well as Gold IRAs. The company focuses heavily on education, making it a popular choice for first-time buyers who want clear explanations of pricing, products and the buying process. American Hartford Gold also assists customers with retirement account rollovers and works with IRS-approved custodians for secure storage. Its emphasis on customer service, transparency and guided support helps investors feel more confident when adding gold to their portfolios.

• Goldco: The company is best known for its focus on Gold and Silver IRAs, helping investors use precious metals to diversify retirement savings. The company specializes in rollovers from existing IRAs and 401(k)s and provides hands-on support throughout the setup process. Goldco's value proposition centers on retirement planning rather than short-term buying, with an emphasis on compliance, secure storage and long-term diversification. This makes it a strong option for investors primarily interested in using gold as a hedge within a tax-advantaged retirement account.

• Priority Gold: This well-established precious metals dealer that offers both physical gold coins and bars and Precious Metals IRAs to help investors diversify portfolios and plan for retirement. The company combines personalized service with educational support to guide buyers through product selection, premiums, and rollover or IRA setup. Priority Gold also offers buyback programs, which can be appealing to investors who want added liquidity down the line. Its combination of products, customer guidance and resale options makes it a solid option for investors focused on physical gold ownership.

• Thor Metals: The company offers both physical bullion and Precious Metals IRA options, providing flexibility for investors who want direct ownership as well as tax-advantaged retirement exposure. The company carries a range of gold coins, bars and IRA-eligible products, making it suitable for both smaller purchases and larger allocations. Thor Metals stands out for competitive pricing and a straightforward buying experience, helping buyers compare options and understand premiums. Its combined retail and IRA offerings appeal to investors who want a single partner for multiple gold investment paths.

GOLD STARS

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A gold IRA is a type of self-directed individual retirement account that lets an investor buy physical gold (and sometimes other precious metals like silver, platinum and palladium) as part of their retirement savings. • Instead of stocks or mutual funds, a gold IRA holds real metal while still following the same IRS rules for individual retirement accounts and offering similar tax advantages. • Many investors look to gold because it has historically acted as a hedge during times of economic uncertainty and volatility, making it a potential diversifier within a retirement portfolio. • A 2024 article from the nonprofit Economics Observatory describes gold as a reliable investment and buffer in uncertain markets. • That said, gold IRAs aren't a fit for every investor. • They come with added fees, strict IRS requirements and risks that don't apply to traditional retirement accounts. • Understanding how they work and what to watch out for is crucial before deciding whether a gold IRA belongs in an investor's long-term retirement plan.

How gold IRAs work

A gold IRA works through a few coordinated steps: An investor funds the account (usually with a rollover), purchases IRS-approved gold and has that gold stored securely at an approved facility.

Because it's a self-directed IRA, the investor chooses the investment, while specialized companies handle the administration, storage and required paperwork. Different companies handle each part of the process, so understanding how the pieces fit together can make gold IRAs feel far less complicated.

According to precious metals dealer Goldco, most gold IRAs are funded through rollovers or transfers from existing retirement accounts. A rollover allows the investor to move money from a 401(k) or traditional IRA into a gold IRA without triggering taxes or early withdrawal penalties, as long as the transfer follows IRS rollover rules.

New contributions are also allowed, but they're subject to annual IRA contribution limits set by the IRS. Because those limits are relatively low, rollovers are often the primary way investors fund gold IRAs, especially when moving retirement savings accumulated over many years.

Storage at IRS-approved depositories

Gold held in a gold IRA can't be stored at home or in a personal safe. The IRS requires that it be kept at an approved third-party depository – a secure facility designed for precious metals.

Depositories usually offer two storage options. The type of storage chosen can affect annual storage fees, which are typically billed through the account's custodian:

- **Commingled** storage means the gold is stored with metals belonging to other investors.
- **Segregated** storage keeps the metals separate and labeled in the investor's name.

The next step is understanding who's involved in buying the gold and managing the account.

Dealer vs. custodian: Who does what?

One of the most common points of confusion with gold IRAs is the difference between a dealer and a custodian. They work together, but they play very different roles.

Dealers sell the metals, while custodians administer the retirement account and ensure it complies with IRS rules. Even when a company markets itself as a "gold IRA company," the dealer and custodian remain separate entities un-

der federal regulations. The distinction matters because fees, responsibilities and legal obligations differ.

• **Dealers:** Some well-known precious metals dealers, such as American Hartford Gold and Priority Gold, help investors purchase metals for gold IRAs and often guide them through the rollover process.

Dealers set the price of the metals and may help coordinate the purchase with the custodian. However, they do not administer the IRA itself or control how the account is structured under IRS rules.

• **Custodians:** The custodian is the financial institution responsible for administering the retirement account, processing transactions and ensuring that everything complies with federal retirement regulations.

One of the largest and longest-running examples is Equity Trust Company, which administers self-directed IRAs for a wide range of alternative assets, including precious metals. Custodians don't offer investment advice or choose which metals are bought. Their role is administrative, helping move money into the account, coordinating purchases with the dealer and handling required reporting and storage arrangements.

How much does a gold IRA cost per year?

Most gold IRAs include two ongoing annual costs: a custodial fee and a storage fee. Custodial fees cover account administration, recordkeeping and IRS reporting. Storage fees are charged by the depository that holds the physical gold and reflect insurance, security and auditing costs.

Combined, these annual fees often range from a few hundred dollars to more than \$1,000 per year, depending on the size of the account, the custodian and whether the gold is stored in commingled or segregated storage. Larger account balances may qualify for lower percentage-based fees, while smaller accounts can feel the impact of flat fees more acutely.

Some providers also charge a one-time setup fee when the account is opened, along with transaction fees when metals are purchased or sold. Transaction costs are typically structured as a flat \$25 to \$50 per trade charged by the custodian. Or they can be built into the dealer's pricing, often around 1% to 2% of the metals' value. Because fee structures vary, reviewing a full fee schedule upfront can help avoid surprises.

Gold IRAs follow the same withdrawal rules as other IRAs. Taking distributions before age 59½ may result in taxes and penalties. In retirement, an investor can sell the gold for cash or take a taxable in-kind distribution of the metal.

How to open a gold IRA

Opening a gold IRA involves several steps, but the process is relatively straightforward when done correctly.

1. Choose an IRS-approved custodian that offers self-directed gold IRAs. Compare custodial fees, account minimums and customer support.

2. Fund the account through a rollover, transfer or new contribution. Rollovers from employer plans often require coordination with the plan administrator.

3. Once the account is funded, select a gold dealer and choose IRS-approved metals. The custodian processes the purchase, and the metals are shipped directly to an approved depository for storage.

4. Throughout the process, keep records and confirm that all transactions are handled directly between custodians to avoid triggering taxes or penalties.

Before investing, it can also help to understand broader market conditions.