

CHANGE THE LOOK OF WINDOWS 10

Change Your Windows Background

The first set of options you can change control your desktop background and they should look pretty familiar to you if you've been using Windows for a while.

Go to Settings (Windows + I), then Personalization, and finally Background. To use a picture as your background, choose "Picture" from the "Background" drop-down menu. Just like in previous versions, Windows 10 comes with a few pictures from which to choose or you can click "Browse" and locate your own picture.

Once you choose a picture, you can decide how your picture will fit on your desktop—whether it fills, fits, stretches, tiles, and so on. If you're using multiple monitors, you can also choose a "Span" option that uses a single picture across all your monitors.

If you want to rotate through a set of pictures for your background, choose "Slideshow" from the "Background" drop-down menu. To create a slideshow, you'll need to select a folder from which Windows can retrieve pictures. You can't select individual pictures—only folders—so go ahead and set up a folder with your favorite background pictures before selecting this option. After selecting your folder, you can also specify how often Windows changes the background picture, whether it shuffles the pictures randomly, and how the pictures should fit your desktop.

And if you prefer to keep things simple, you can just use a solid color as your background. Choose "Solid color" from the "Background" drop-down menu and then choose one of the offered background colors.

Change What Colors Windows Uses and Where

The next set of personalization options control how Windows uses color for various on-screen elements. You'll start by picking an accent color. You can pick an accent color from the predefined pallet of colors, or you can select the "Automatically pick an accent color from my background" to have Windows automatically match a color based on the picture you're using as your background.

After picking an accent color, your next step is choosing where that color gets used. Your two options are "Show color on Start, taskbar, and action center" and "Show color on title bar." The first option uses the accent color as the background for your Start menu, taskbar, and action center and also highlights certain items on those elements—such as app icons on the Start menu—with the same accent color. Unfortunately, those three elements are grouped together and not individually selectable.

Back on the Colors personalization screen, you'll also find an option for making your Start menu, taskbar, and action center transparent or not. This option does not affect the accent color if it's used on those elements.

And finally, with the Windows 10 Anniversary Update, you can now enable a dark mode for settings and apps. While this app mode setting doesn't affect every app, there are some tricks that you might enjoy for using a dark theme almost everywhere in Windows 10.

Enable Dark Mode for Windows 10 Settings and Apps

To enable the new dark theme, head to Settings > Personalization > Colors. Scroll down and select "Dark" under "Choose your app mode".

The Settings application itself will immediately turn dark, as will many other "Universal Windows Platform" applications. However, it's up to each app developer to support the dark theme, and some applications will continue using their normal colors.

This option also doesn't affect desktop applications, including Windows 10's File Explorer, which will remain white.

Enable the Dark Theme in Microsoft Edge

The Microsoft Edge web browser included with Windows 10 also has a dark theme. However, its dark theme option is entirely separate from the main option in Settings, for no apparent reason.

To activate a dark theme in Edge, open the Microsoft Edge web browser, open the menu, and select "Settings". Select "Dark" under "Choose a theme".

Enable the Dark Theme in Microsoft Office

Microsoft Office 2016 also contains a dark theme that isn't enabled by default, and must be manually enabled.

To enable it, open an Office application like Word or Excel and head to File > Options. On the General tab, click the "Office Theme" box under "Personalize your copy of Microsoft Office" and select the "Black" office theme.

Your theme choice will apply to all Office applications. So, if you set this option in Word and later open Excel, Excel will also be using a dark theme.

Enable a Dark Theme for Windows Desktop Applications

The real problem with the new "dark mode" setting is that it doesn't affect the Windows desktop theme at all. Desktop applications like File Explorer will continue using the normal, light theme.

Windows does have a built-in dark theme for desktop applications, but it probably isn't ideal. To enable it, open the Control Panel (Windows + X, then P) and head to Appearance and Personalization > Change the Theme. Scroll down and choose one of the High Contrast themes, such as "High Contrast Black".

This will make applications like File Explorer have a dark background. However, they won't look all that great—high contrast themes are an accessibility feature designed to increase contrast so the screen is easier to read and understand. They don't look as slick as a modern dark theme would.

Change Your Lock Screen (the Lock Screen is not required with a Local Account as long as the account does not have a password).

The lock screen (Windows + I, then Personalization, finally Lock Screen) is the screen you click to slide out of the way so you can get to the sign in screen where you enter your user name and password. By default, your lock screen background is set to "Windows Spotlight," which downloads and displays a rotating set of backgrounds from Microsoft.

You can also set the lock screen background to be one of your own pictures or a slideshow of pictures in a folder on your computer. It works the same way as setting your desktop background. Choose the option you want from the "Background" drop-down menu. If you select a picture, just point Windows to the file you want to use.

If you decide on the slideshow option, you'll first need to select one or more albums (or folders) with pictures to use for the slideshow. Click the "Add a folder" button to add new folders until you're satisfied with your selections. You can also click the "Advanced slideshow settings" link to access some additional options.

The advanced settings let you include your camera roll as a source for pictures, use only pictures that fit your screen, and select whether to show the lock screen instead of turning off the screen when the PC is inactive. If you select this last option, you can also set the screen to turn off after a set amount of time, or not at all.

The other two settings, "Choose an app to show detailed status" and "Choose apps to show quick status," let you control what apps provide status information on the lock screen. You can remove apps that are already there by clicking them and then choosing "None" or change them by picking any of the preselected apps from the pop-up menu. Add an additional app by clicking one of the plus (+) icons and choosing apps from that same menu.

Use a Theme to Change Multiple Personalization Settings at Once

Next on the list of personalization settings, you'll find Themes, which lets you coordinate and save a desktop background, accent color, and other personalization options as a set you can reload more easily. This page is really just a placeholder with a link to the tried-and-true personalization control panel. Just click the "Theme settings" link to open it up.

Windows comes with a number of preselected themes and gives you the option to download more. Just browse through the list and pick the theme you want to use or click the "Get more themes online" link to see what else is offered. If you have your system already set up the way you want, you can also click the "Save theme" link to give your theme a name and make it easy to reapply those options as a group later.