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Top Ten Distributions

An overview of today's top distributions

Introduction

The bewildering choice and the ever increasing number of Linux distributions can be confusing for those who are new to Linux. This is why this page was created. It lists 10 Linux distributions (plus an honourable mention of FreeBSD, by far the most popular of all of the BSDs), which are generally considered as most widely-used by Linux users around the world. There are no figures to back it up and there are many other distributions that might suit your particular purpose better, but as a general rule, all of these are popular and have very active forums or mailing lists where you can ask questions if you get stuck.

Ubuntu, **Linux Mint** and **PCLinuxOS** are considered the easiest for new users who want to get productive in Linux as soon as possible without having to master all its complexities. On the other end of the spectrum, **Slackware Linux**, **Arch Linux** and **FreeBSD** are more advanced distributions that require plenty of learning before they can be used effectively. **openSUSE**, **Fedora**, **Debian GNU/Linux** and **Mageia** can be classified as good "middle-road" distributions. **CentOS** is an enterprise distribution, suitable for those who prefer stability, reliability and long-term support over cutting-edge features and software.

A Guide to Choosing a Distribution

Linux Mint



Linux [Mint](#), a distribution based on Ubuntu, was first launched in 2006 by Clement Lefebvre, a French-born IT specialist living in Ireland. Originally maintaining a Linux web site dedicated to providing help, tips and documentation to new Linux users, the author saw the potential of developing a Linux distribution that would address the many usability drawbacks associated with the generally more technical, mainstream products. After soliciting feedback from the visitors on his web site, he proceeded with building what many refer to today as an "improved Ubuntu" or "Ubuntu done right".

But Linux Mint is not just an Ubuntu with a new set of applications and an updated desktop theme. Since its beginnings, the developers have been adding a variety of graphical "mint" tools for enhanced usability; this includes mintDesktop - a utility for configuring the desktop environment, mintMenu - a new and elegant menu structure for easier navigation, mintInstall - an easy-to-use software installer, and mintUpdate - a software updater, just to mention a few more prominent ones among several other tools and hundreds of additional improvements. The project also designs its own artwork. Mint's reputation for ease of use has been further enhanced by the inclusion of proprietary and patent-encumbered multimedia codecs that are often absent from larger distributions due to potential legal threats. Perhaps one of the best features of Linux Mint is the fact that the developers listen to the users and are always fast in implementing good suggestions.

While Linux Mint is available as a free download, the project generates revenue from donations, advertising and professional support services. It doesn't have a fixed release schedule or a list of planned features, but one can expect a new version of Linux Mint several weeks after each Ubuntu long term support release. Besides Mint's two "Main" editions which feature the MATE and Cinnamon desktops, the project also builds editions with alternative desktops, including KDE and Xfce. These editions are often completed several weeks after the two "Main" editions and may sometimes miss some of the "minty" tools and other features found in the project's flagship products. Another variant of the Mint line-up is a "Debian Edition" based on Debian's Stable branch. The Debian edition of Linux Mint provides a very stable base while the desktop packages are updated more quickly than in Mint's "Main" editions. Linux Mint does not adhere to the principles of software freedom and it does not publish security advisories.

- **Pros:** Superb collection of "minty" tools developed in-house, hundreds of user-friendly enhancements, inclusion of multimedia codecs, open to users' suggestions
- **Cons:** The alternative "community" editions don't always include the latest features, the project does not issue security advisories
- **Software package management:** Advanced Package Tool (APT) with mintInstall using DEB packages (compatible with Ubuntu repositories)
- **Available editions:** A "Main" edition (with MATE and Cinnamon), "Community" editions (with KDE and Xfce), Linux Mint "Debian" edition (with MATE or Cinnamon)
- **Possible alternatives:** [Ubuntu](#), [elementary OS](#), [Zorin OS](#), [Lubuntu](#), [Xubuntu](#), [Peppermint OS](#)

Translations

This article is available in

- [English \(English\)](#)
- [German \(Deutsch\)](#)

Linux Media



Linux Mint 18.2	\$5.95
Ubuntu 17.04	\$5.95
Debian 9.1.0	\$5.95
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Linux Media

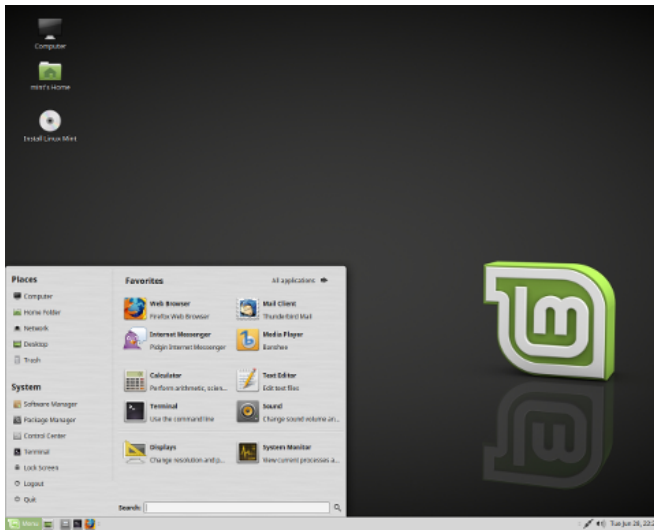


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Linux Mint

[Ubuntu](#)

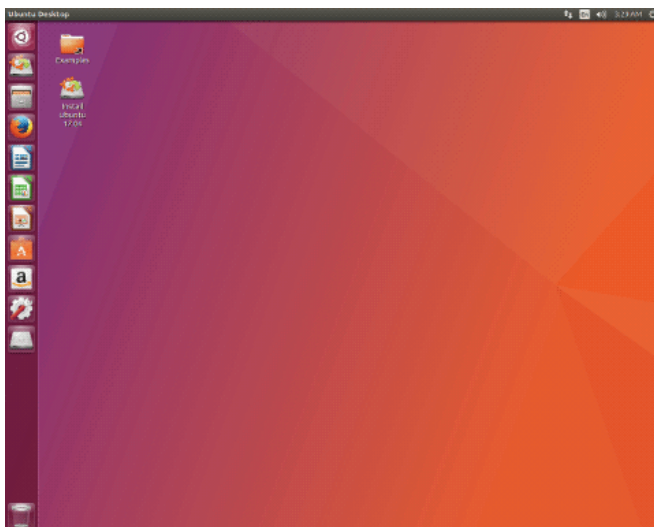


The launch of [Ubuntu](#) was first announced in September 2004. Although a relative newcomer to the Linux distribution scene, the project took off like no other before, with its mailing lists soon filled in with discussions by eager users and enthusiastic developers. In the years that followed, Ubuntu grew to become the most popular desktop Linux distribution and has greatly contributed towards developing an easy-to-use and free desktop operating system that can compete well with any proprietary ones available on the market.

What was the reason for Ubuntu's stunning success? Firstly, the project was created by Mark Shuttleworth, a charismatic South African multimillionaire, a former Debian developer and the world's second space tourist, whose company, the Isle of Man-based Canonical Ltd, is currently financing the project. Secondly, Ubuntu had learned from the mistakes of other similar projects and avoided them from the start - it created an excellent web-based infrastructure with a Wiki-style documentation, creative bug-reporting facility, and professional approach to the end users. And thirdly, thanks to its wealthy founder, Ubuntu was able to ship free CDs to all interested users, thus contributing to the rapid spread of the distribution.

On the technical side of things, Ubuntu is based on Debian "Sid" (unstable branch), but with some prominent packages, such as GNOME, Firefox and LibreOffice, updated to their latest versions. It uses a custom user interface called "Unity". It has a predictable, 6-month release schedule, with an occasional Long Term Support (LTS) release that is supported with security updates for 5 years, depending on the edition (non-LTS release are supported for 9 months). Other special features of Ubuntu include an installable live DVD, creative artwork and desktop themes, migration assistant for Windows users, support for the latest technologies, such as 3D desktop effects, easy installation of proprietary device drivers for ATI and NVIDIA graphics cards and wireless networking, and on-demand support for non-free or patent-encumbered media codecs.

- **Pros:** Fixed release cycle and support period; long-term support (LTS) variants with 5 years of security updates; novice-friendly; wealth of documentation, both official and user-contributed
- **Cons:** Lacks compatibility with Debian; frequent major changes tend to drive some users away, the Unity user interface has been criticised as being more suitable for mobile devices than desktop computers; non-LTS releases come with only 9 months of security support
- **Software package management:** Advanced Package Tool (APT) using DEB packages
- **Available variants:** [Ubuntu](#), [Kubuntu](#), [Xubuntu](#), [Lubuntu](#), [Ubuntu GNOME](#), [Ubuntu MATE](#), [Edubuntu](#), [Ubuntu Kylin](#), [Ubuntu Studio](#) and [Mythbuntu](#) for 32-bit (i386) and 64-bit (x86_64) processors;
- **Suggested Ubuntu-based alternatives:** [Linux Mint](#) (desktop), [elementary OS](#) (desktop), [Zorin OS](#) (desktop), [Pingu OS](#) (desktop), [Trisquel GNU/Linux](#) (free software), [Bodhi Linux](#) (desktop with Enlightenment)



Ubuntu

[Debian GNU/Linux](#)

Publicità

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[Debian](#) GNU/Linux was first announced in 1993. Its founder, Ian Murdock, envisaged the creation of a completely non-commercial project developed by hundreds of volunteer developers in their spare time. With sceptics far outnumbering optimists at the time, it seemed destined to disintegrate and collapse, but the reality was very different. Debian not only survived, it thrived and, in less than a decade, it became the largest Linux distribution and possibly the largest collaborative software project ever created!

The success of Debian GNU/Linux can be illustrated by the following numbers. It is developed by over 1,000 volunteer developers, its software repositories contain close to 50,000 binary packages (compiled for 8 processor architectures), and it is responsible for inspiring over 120 Debian-based distributions and live CDs. These figures are unmatched by any other Linux-based operating system. The actual development of Debian takes place in three main branches (or four if one includes the bleeding-edge "experimental" branch) of increasing levels of stability: "unstable" (also known as "sid"), "testing" and "stable". This progressive integration and stabilisation of packages and features, together with the project's well-established quality control mechanisms, has earned Debian its reputation of being one of the best-tested and most bug-free distributions available today.

However, this lengthy and complex development style also has some drawbacks: the stable releases of Debian are not particularly up-to-date and they age rapidly, especially since new stable releases are only published once every 1 - 3 years. Those users who prefer the latest packages and technologies are forced to use the potentially buggy Debian testing or unstable branches. The highly democratic structures of Debian have led to controversial decisions and gives rise to infighting among the developers. This has contributed to stagnation and reluctance to make radical decisions that would take the project forward.

- **Pros:** Very stable; remarkable quality control; includes over 30,000 software packages; supports more processor architectures than any other Linux distribution
- **Cons:** Conservative - due to its support for many processor architectures, newer technologies are not always included; slow release cycle (one stable release every 1 - 3 years); discussions on developer mailing lists and blogs can be uncultured at times
- **Software package management:** Advanced Package Tool (APT) using DEB packages
- **Available editions:** Installation CD/DVD and live CD images for 12 processor architectures, including all 32-bit and 64-bit processors from Intel, AMD, Power and others
- **Suggested Debian-based alternatives:** [Ubuntu](#), [SparkyLinux](#) (Enlightenment, JWM, LXDE, MATE, Openbox, Razor-qt, Xfce), [SolvydXK](#) (Xfce or KDE), [KNOPPIX](#) (LXDE), [Tanglu](#) (GNOME, KDE), [siduction](#) (LXQt)



Debian GNU/Linux



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[Mageia](#)



[Mageia](#) might be the newest distribution on this list, but its roots go back to July 1998 when Gaël Duval launched Mandrake Linux. At the time it was just a fork of Red Hat Linux with KDE as the default desktop, better hardware detection and some user-friendly features, but it gained instant popularity due to positive reviews in the media. Mandrake was later turned into a commercial enterprise and renamed to Mandriva (to avoid some trademark-related hassles and to celebrate its merger with Brazil's Conectiva) before almost going bankrupt in 2010. It was eventually saved by a

Russian venture capital firm, but this came at a cost when the new management decided to lay off most of the established Mandriva developers at the company's Paris headquarters. Upon finding themselves without work, they decided to form Mageia, a community project which is a logical continuation of Mandrake and Mandriva, perhaps more so than Mandriva itself.

Mageia is primarily a desktop distribution. Its best-loved features are cutting-edge software, superb system administration suite (Mageia Control Centre), ability to attract a large number of volunteer contributors, and extensive internationalisation support. It features one of the easiest, yet powerful system installers on its installation DVD, while it also releases a set of live images with either KDE or GNOME desktops and comprehensive language support, with the ability to install it onto a hard disk directly from the live desktop session. The distribution's well-established package management features, with powerful command-line options and a graphical software management module, allow easy access to thousands of software packages. The unique Mageia Control Center continues to improve with each release, offering newcomers to Linux a powerful tool for configuring just about any aspect of their computer without ever reaching for the terminal.

While Mageia has been off to a flying start since it was established in September 2010, there is some concern over the developers' ability to maintain the distribution over the long term where much of the work is done on a volunteer basis. Also, it lacks the buzz and infrastructure accompanying some of the bigger and more profligate Linux distributions. The project's documentation could also do with some improvement, while its 9-months release cycle can also be viewed as a disadvantage in terms of generating news and media excitement, especially when compared to other major distributions which use a shorter, 6-month development process.

- **Pros:** Beginner-friendly; excellent central configuration utility; very good out-of-the-box support for dozens of languages; installable live media
- **Cons:** Lacks reputation and mindshare following its fork from Mandriva, some concern over the developers' ability to maintain the distribution long-term on a volunteer basis
- **Software package management:** URPMI with Rpm-drake (a graphical front-end for URPMI) using RPM packages
- **Available editions:** installation DVDs for 32-bit (i586) and 64-bit (x86_64) processors; installable live CDs for 32-bit (i586) processors
- **Possible alternatives:** [OpenMandriva](#), [ROSA](#)



Mageia

[Fedora](#)



Although [Fedora](#) was formally unveiled only in September 2004, its origins effectively date back to 1995 when it was launched by two Linux visionaries -- Bob Young and Marc Ewing -- under the name of Red Hat Linux. The company's first product, Red Hat Linux 1.0 "Mother's Day", was released in the same year and was quickly followed by several bug-fix updates. In 1997, Red Hat introduced its revolutionary RPM package management system with dependency resolution and other advanced features which greatly contributed to the distribution's rapid rise in popularity and its overtaking of

Slackware Linux as the most widely-used Linux distribution in the world. In later years, Red Hat standardised on a regular, 6-month release schedule.

In 2003, just after the release of Red Hat Linux 9, the company introduced some radical changes to its product line-up. It retained the Red Hat trademark for its commercial products, notably Red Hat Enterprise Linux, and introduced Fedora Core (later renamed to Fedora), a Red Hat-sponsored, but community-oriented distribution designed for the "Linux hobbyist". After the initial criticism of the changes, the Linux community accepted the "new" distribution as a logical continuation of Red Hat Linux. A few quality releases was all it took for Fedora to regain its former status as one of the best-loved operating systems on the market. At the same time, Red Hat quickly became the biggest and most profitable Linux company in the world, with an innovative product line-up, excellent customer support, and other popular initiatives, such as its Red Hat Certified Engineer (RHCE) certification programme.

Although Fedora's direction is still largely controlled by Red Hat, Inc. and the product is sometimes seen -- rightly or wrongly -- as a test bed for Red Hat Enterprise Linux, there is no denying that Fedora is one of the most innovative distributions available today. Its contributions to the Linux kernel, glibc and GCC are well-known and its more recent integration of SELinux functionality, virtualisation technologies, systemd service manager, cutting-edge journaled file systems, and other enterprise-level features are much appreciated among the company's customers. On a negative side, Fedora still lacks a clear desktop-oriented strategy that would make the product easier to use for those beyond the "Linux hobbyist" target.

- **Pros:** Highly innovative; outstanding security features; large number of supported packages; strict adherence to the free software philosophy; availability of live CDs featuring many popular desktop environments
- **Cons:** Fedora's priorities tend to lean towards enterprise features, rather than desktop usability; some bleeding edge features, such as early switch to KDE 4 and GNOME 3, occasionally alienate some desktop users
- **Software package management:** YUM graphical and command line utility using RPM packages
- **Available editions:** [Fedora](#) for 32-bit (i386) and 64-bit (x86_64) processors; also live CD editions with GNOME, KDE, LXDE, MATE and Xfce desktops
- **Suggested Fedora-based alternatives:** [Korora](#) (live DVD with GNOME, KDE, LXDE or Xfce)
- **Suggested Red Hat-based alternatives:** [CentOS](#), [Scientific Linux](#)



Fedora

[openSUSE](#)

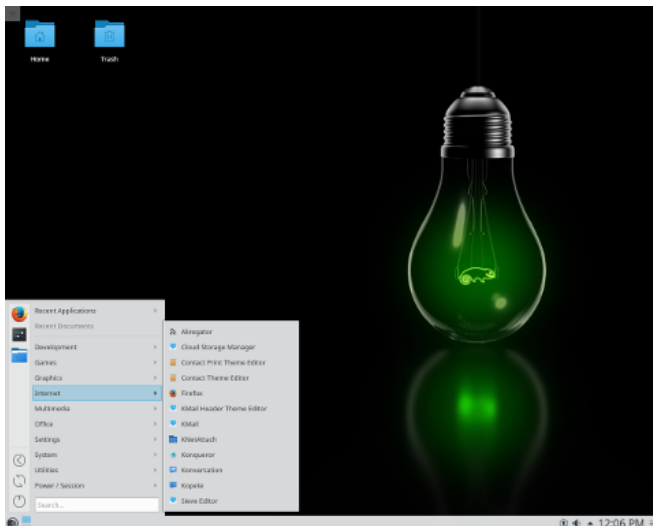


The beginnings of [openSUSE](#) date back to 1992 when four German Linux enthusiasts -- Roland Dyroff, Thomas Fehr, Hubert Mantel and Burchard Steinbild -- launched the project under the name of SuSE (Software und System Entwicklung) Linux. In the early days, the young company sold sets of floppy disks containing a German edition of Slackware Linux, but it wasn't long before SuSE Linux became an independent distribution with the launch of version 4.2 in May 1996. In the following years, the developers adopted the RPM package management format and introduced YaST, an easy-to-use graphical system administration tool. Frequent releases, excellent printed documentation, and easy availability of SuSE Linux in stores across Europe and North America resulted in growing popularity for the distribution.

SuSE Linux was acquired by Novell, Inc. in late 2003, then fell into the hands of Attachmate in November 2010. Major changes in the development, licensing and availability of SUSE Linux followed shortly after the first acquisition - YaST was released under the General Public License (GPL), the ISO images were freely distributed from public download servers, and, most significantly, the development of the distribution was opened to public participation for the first time. Since the launch of the openSUSE project and the release of version 10.0 in October 2005, the distribution became completely free in both senses of the word. The openSUSE code has become a base system for Novell's commercial products, first named as Novell Linux, but later renamed to SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server.

Today, openSUSE has a large following of satisfied users. The principal reason for openSUSE getting high marks from its users are pleasant and polished desktop environments (KDE and GNOME), excellent system administration utility (YaST), and, for those who buy the boxed edition, some of the best printed documentation available with any distribution. However, the infamous deal between Novell and Microsoft, which apparently concedes to Microsoft's argument that it has intellectual property rights over Linux, has resulted in a string of condemnation by many Linux personalities and has prompted some users to switch distributions. Although Novell has downplayed the deal and Microsoft has yet to exercise any rights, this issue remains a thorn in the side of the otherwise very community-friendly Linux company.

- **Pros:** Comprehensive and intuitive configuration tool; large repository of software packages, excellent web site infrastructure and printed documentation
- **Cons:** Novell's patent deal with Microsoft in November 2006 seemingly legitimised Microsoft's intellectual property claims over Linux; its resource-heavy desktop setup and graphical utilities are sometimes seen as "bloated and slow"
- **Software package management:** YaST graphical and command-line utility using RPM packages
- **Available editions:** [openSUSE](#) for 32-bit (i386), 64-bit (x86_64) processors (also installable live CD edition); [SUSE Linux Enterprise](#) Desktop/Server for i586, IA64, PowerPC, s390, s390x and x86_64 architectures



openSUSE

[Arch Linux](#)



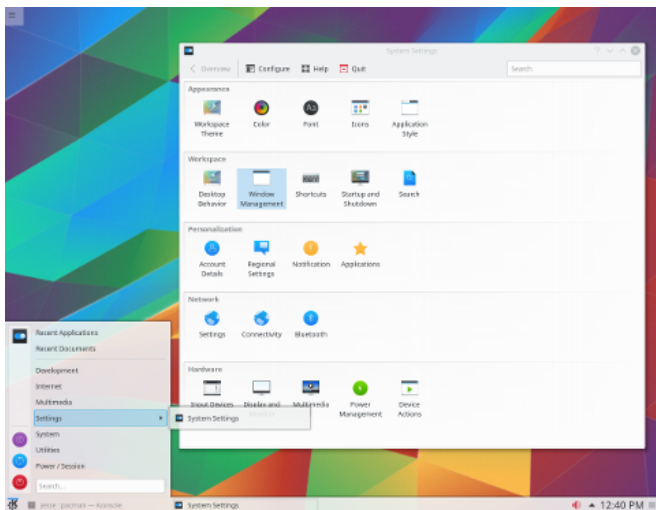
The KISS (keep it simple, stupid) philosophy of [Arch](#) Linux was devised around the year 2002 by Judd Vinet, a Canadian computer science graduate who launched the distribution in the same year. For several years it lived as a marginal project designed for intermediate and advanced Linux users and only shot to stardom when it began promoting itself as a "rolling-release" distribution that only needs to be installed once and which is then kept up-to-date thanks to its powerful package manager and an always fresh software repository. As a result, Arch Linux "releases" are few and far between and are now limited to a basic installation CD that is issued only when considerable changes in the base system warrant a new install media.

Besides featuring the much-loved "rolling-release" update mechanism, Arch Linux is also renowned for its fast and powerful package manager called "Pacman", the ability to install software packages from source code, easy creation of binary packages thanks to its AUR infrastructure, and the ever increasing software repository of well-tested packages. Its highly-regarded documentation, complemented by the excellent Arch Linux Handbook makes it possible for even less experienced Linux users to install and customise the distribution. The powerful tools available at the user's disposal mean that the distro is infinitely customisable to the most minute detail and that no two installations can possibly be the same.

On the negative side, any rolling-release update mechanism has its dangers: a human mistake creeps in, a library or dependency goes missing, a new version of an application already in the repository has a yet-to-be-reported critical bug... It's not unheard of to end up with an unbootable system following a Pacman upgrade. As such, Arch Linux is a kind of distribution that requires its users to be alert and to have enough knowledge to fix any such possible problems. Also, the infrequent install media releases mean that sometimes it is no longer possible to use the old media to install the distribution due to important system changes or lack of hardware support in the older Linux kernel.

- **Pros:** Excellent software management infrastructure; unparalleled customisation and tweaking options; superb online documentation
- **Cons:** Occasional instability and risk of breakdown
- **Software package management:** "Pacman" using TAR.XZ packages
- **Available editions:** Minimal installation CD and network installation CD images for 32-bit (i686) and 64-bit (x86_64) processors

- **Suggested Arch-based and Arch-like alternatives:** [Manjaro](#) Linux (live with Cinnamon, Enlightenment, KDE, LXDE, MATE, Openbox, Xfce), [Antergos](#) (live with GNOME 3), [ArchBang](#) Linux (lightweight with Openbox), [Chakra](#) GNU/Linux (live CD with KDE), [Bridge](#) Linux (live with GNOME, KDE, LXDE and Xfce), [Parabola](#) GNU/Linux (free software), [KaOS \(live with KDE\)](#)



Arch Linux (an example desktop)

CentOS



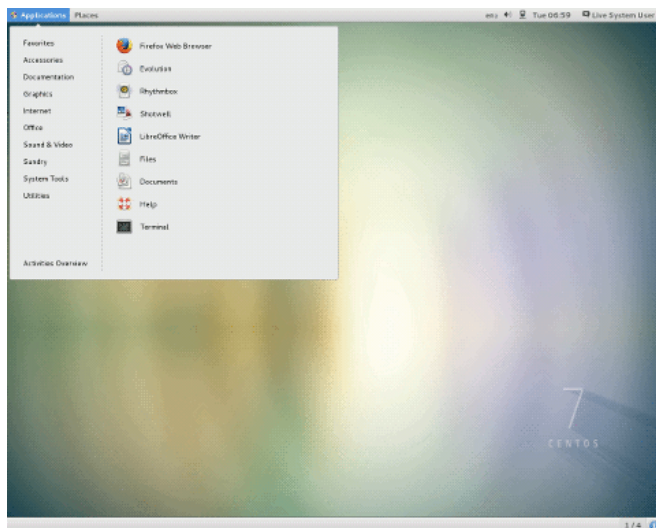
Launched in late 2003, [CentOS](#) is a community project with the goals of rebuilding the source code for Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL) into an installable Linux distribution and to provide timely security updates for all included software packages. To put in more bluntly, CentOS is a RHEL clone. The only technical difference between the two distributions is branding - CentOS replaces all Red Hat trademarks and logos with its own. Nevertheless, the relations between Red Hat and CentOS remain amicable and many CentOS developers are in active contact with, or even employed directly by, Red

Hat.

CentOS is often seen as a reliable server distribution. It comes with the same set of well-tested and stable Linux kernel and software packages that form the basis of its parent, Red Hat Enterprise Linux. Despite being a community project run by volunteers, it has gained a reputation for being a solid, free alternative to the more costly server products on the market, especially among experienced Linux system administrators. CentOS is also suitable as an enterprise desktop solution, specifically where stability, reliability and long-term support are preferred over latest software and features. Like RHEL, CentOS is supported with approximately 7-10 years of security updates.

Despite its advantages, CentOS might not be the best solution in all deployment scenarios. Those users who prefer a distribution with the latest Linux technologies and newest software packages should look elsewhere. Major CentOS versions, which follow RHEL versioning, are only released every 2 - 3 years, while "point" releases (e.g. 5.1) tend to arrive in 6 - 9 month intervals. The point releases do not usually contain any major features (although they do sometimes include support for more recent hardware) and only a handful of software packages may get updated to newer versions. The Linux kernel, the base system and most application versions remain unchanged, but occasionally a newer version of an important software package (e.g. LibreOffice or Firefox) may be provided on an experimental basis. As a side project, CentOS also builds updated packages for the users of its distributions, but the repositories containing them are not enabled by default as they may break upstream compatibility.

- **Pros:** Extremely well-tested, stable and reliable; free to download and use; comes with 7+ years of free security updates;
- **Cons:** Lacks latest Linux technologies; occasionally the project fails to live up its promise to deliver timely security updates and new stable releases
- **Software package management:** YUM graphical and command line utility using RPM packages
- **Available editions:** Installation DVDs and installable live CDs (with GNOME) for i386 and x86_64 processors; older versions (3.x and 4.x) also available for Alpha, IA64 and IBM z-series (s390, s390x) processors.
- **Other RHEL clones and CentOS-based distributions:** [Scientific](#) Linux, [Springdale](#) Linux, [SME Server](#), [Rocks Cluster](#) Distribution, [Oracle](#) Enterprise Linux



CentOS

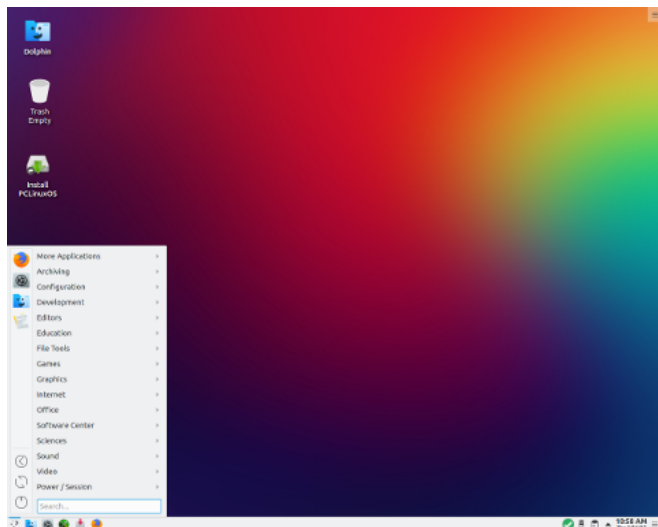
[PCLinuxOS](#)

[PCLinuxOS](#) was first announced in 2003 by Bill Reynolds, better known as "Texstar". Prior to creating his own distribution, Texstar was already a well-known developer in the Mandrake Linux community of users for building up-to-date RPM packages for the popular distribution and providing them as a free download. In 2003 he decided to build a new distribution, initially based on Mandrake Linux, but with several significant usability improvements. The goals? It should be beginner-friendly, have out-of-the-box support for proprietary kernel modules, browser plugins and media codecs, and should function as a live CD with a simple and intuitive graphical installer.

Several years and development releases later, PCLinuxOS is rapidly approaching its intended state. In terms of usability, the project offers out-of-the-box support for many technologies most Windows-to-Linux migrants would expect from their new operating system. On the software side of things, PCLinuxOS is a KDE-oriented distribution, with a customised and always up-to-date version of the popular desktop environment. Its growing software repository contains other desktops, however, and offers a great variety of desktop packages for many common tasks. For system configuration, PCLinuxOS has retained much of Mandriva's excellent Control Centre, but has replaced its package management system with APT and Synaptic, a graphical package management front-end.

On the negative side, PCLinuxOS lacks any form of roadmap or release goals. Despite growing community involvement in the project, most development and decision-making remains in the hands of Texstar who tends to be on the conservative side when judging the stability of a release. As a result, the development process of PCLinuxOS is often arduous. For example, despite frequent calls for a 64-bit edition, the developers held off producing a 64-bit build until fairly recently. Furthermore, the project does not provide any security advisories, relying instead on the users' willingness to keep their system up-to-date via the included package management tools.

- **Pros:** Out-of-the-box support for graphics drivers, browser plugins and media codecs; rolling-release update mechanism; up-to-date software
- **Cons:** no out-of-the-box support for non-English languages; lacks release planning and security advisories
- **Software package management:** Advanced Package Tool (APT) using RPM packages
- **Available editions:** KDE, KDE Full Monty, KDE Minime, LXDE, LXDE Mini, Openbox, Openbox Bonsai, Phinx, Phoenix for 32-bit (i586) processor architectures, KDE for 64-bit (x86_64) processor architectures



PCLinuxOS

[Slackware Linux](#)

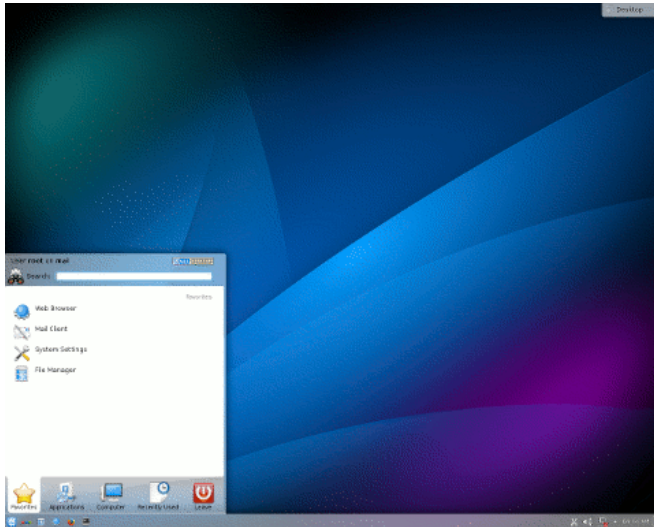
[Slackware](#) Linux, created by Patrick Volkerding in 1992, is the oldest surviving Linux distribution. Forked from the now-discontinued SLS project, Slackware 1.0 came on 24 floppy disks and was built on top of Linux kernel version 0.99pl11-alpha. It quickly became the most popular Linux distribution, with some estimates putting its market share to as much as 80% of all Linux installations in 1995. Its popularity decreased dramatically with the arrival of Red Hat Linux and other, more user-friendly distributions, but Slackware Linux still remains a much-appreciated operating system among the more technically-oriented system administrators and desktop users.

Slackware Linux is a highly technical, clean distribution, with only a very limited number of custom utilities. It uses a simple, text-based system installer and a comparatively primitive package management system that does not resolve software dependencies. As a result, Slackware is considered one of the cleanest and least buggy distributions available today - the lack of Slackware-specific enhancements reduces the likelihood of new bugs being introduced into the system. All configuration is done by editing text files. There is a saying in the Linux community that if you learn Red Hat, you'll know Red Hat, but if you learn Slackware, you'll know Linux. This is particularly true today when many other Linux distributions keep developing heavily customised products to meet the needs of less technical Linux users.

While this philosophy of simplicity has its fans, the fact is that in today's world, Slackware Linux is increasingly becoming a "core system" upon which new, custom solutions are built, rather than a complete distribution with a wide variety of supported software. The only exception is the server market, where Slackware remains popular, though even here, the distribution's complex upgrade procedure and lack of officially supported automated tools for security updates makes it increasingly uncompetitive. Slackware's conservative attitude towards the system's base components means that it requires much manual post-installation work before it can be tuned into a modern desktop system.

- **Pros:** Considered highly stable, clean and largely bug-free, strong adherence to UNIX principles
- **Cons:** Limited number of officially supported applications; conservative in terms of base package selection; complex upgrade procedure
- **Software package management:** "pkgtool" using TXZ packages
- **Available editions:** Installation CDs and DVD for 32-bit (i486) and 64-bit (x86_64) processors
- **Suggested Slackware-based alternatives:** [Zenwalk Linux](#) (desktop), [Salix](#) (desktop, live CD), [Porteus](#) (live CD with KDE, LXDE, MATE, Razor-qt or Xfce), [VectorLinux](#) (desktop)

- Other distributions with similar philosophies: [Arch Linux](#), [Frugalware Linux](#)



Slackware Linux

[FreeBSD](#)

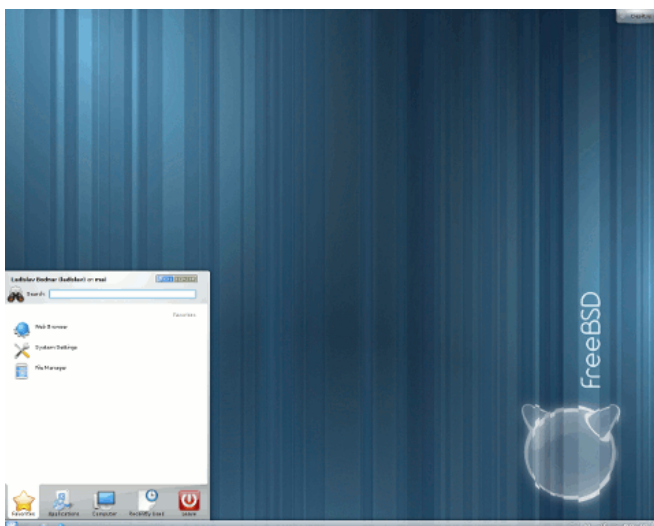


[FreeBSD](#), an indirect descendant of AT&T UNIX via the Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD), has a long and turbulent history dating back to 1993. Unlike Linux distributions, which are defined as integrated software solutions consisting of the Linux kernel and thousands of software applications, FreeBSD is a tightly integrated operating system built from a BSD kernel and the so-called "userland" (therefore usable even without extra applications). This distinction is largely lost once installed on an average computer system - like many Linux distributions, a large collection of easily installed, (mostly) open source applications are available for extending the FreeBSD core, but these are usually provided by third-party contributors and aren't strictly part of FreeBSD.

FreeBSD has developed a reputation for being a fast, high-performance and extremely stable operating system, especially suitable for web serving and similar tasks. Many large web search engines and organisations with mission-critical computing infrastructures have deployed and used FreeBSD on their computer systems for years. Compared to Linux, FreeBSD is distributed under a much less restrictive license, which allows virtually unrestricted re-use and modification of the source code for any purpose. Even Apple's Mac OS X is known to have been derived from FreeBSD. Besides the core operating system, the project also provides over 24,000 software applications in binary and source code forms for easy installation on top of the core FreeBSD.

While FreeBSD can certainly be used as a desktop operating system, it doesn't compare well with popular Linux distributions in this department. The text-mode system installer offers little in terms of hardware detection or system configuration, leaving much of the dirty work to the user in a post-installation setup. In terms of support for modern hardware, FreeBSD generally lags behind Linux, especially in supporting cutting-edge desktop and laptop gadgets, such as wireless network cards or digital cameras. Those users seeking to exploit the speed and stability of FreeBSD on a desktop or workstation should consider one of the available desktop FreeBSD projects, rather than FreeBSD itself.

- **Pros:** Fast and stable; availability of over 24,000 software applications (or "ports") for installation; very good documentation
- **Cons:** Tends to lag behind Linux in terms of support for new and exotic hardware, limited availability of commercial applications; lacks graphical configuration tools
- **Software package management:** A complete command-line package management infrastructure using either binary packages or source-based "ports" (TBZ)
- **Available editions:** Installation CDs for AMD64, ARM/ARMEL, i386, IA64, MIPS/MIPSEL, PC98 PowerPC, SPARC64 and Xbox processors
- **Suggested FreeBSD-based alternatives:** [PC-BSD](#) (desktop), [GhostBSD](#) (live DVD with GNOME)
- **Other BSD alternatives:** [OpenBSD](#), [NetBSD](#), [DragonFly BSD](#)



FreeBSD (an example desktop)

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