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The 10 Best Linux Desktop Environments

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Introduction To Cairo Dock.

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Updated July 07, 2017

A desktop environment is a suite of tools which make it easier for you to use your computer. The components of a desktop environment include some or all of the following components:

- Window manager
- Panels
- Menus
- Widgets
- File Manager
- Browser
- Office Suite
- Text Editor
- Terminal
- Display Manager

The window manager determines how application windows behave. Panels are usually display on the edges or the screen and contain the system tray, menu and quick launch icons.

Widgets are used to display useful information such as the weather, news snippets or system information.

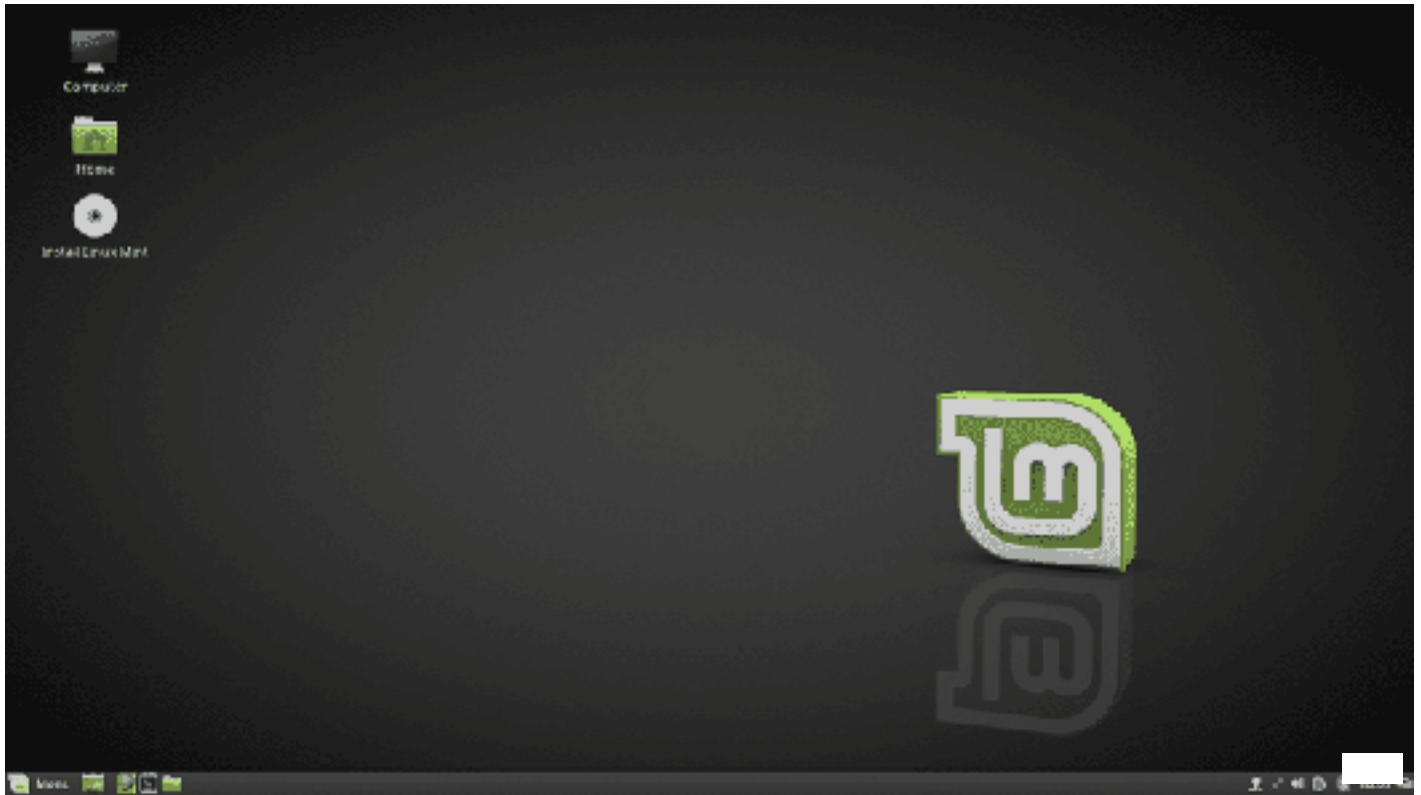
The file manager lets you navigate around the folders on your computer. A browser lets you browse the internet.

logging into your computer.

This guide provides a list of the most commonly used desktop environments.

01 | Cinnamon

of 10



📷 Cinnamon Desktop Environment.

The Cinnamon desktop environment is modern and stylish. The interface will be very familiar to people who have used any version of Windows prior to version 8.

Cinnamon is the default desktop environment for Linux Mint and it is one of the main reasons why Mint is so popular.

There is a single panel at the bottom and a stylish menu with quick launch icons and a system tray in the bottom right corner.

There are a range of keyboard shortcuts that can be used and the desktop had lots of visual effects.

Cinnamon can be customised and moulded to work the way you want it to. You can change the wallpaper, add and position panels, add applets to the panels, Desklets can also be added to the desktop which provide news, weather and other key information.

Memory Usage:

Around 175 megabytes

Pros:

- Instant familiarity to anybody who has used Windows.
- Looks great
- Lots of features
- Lots of desktop effects
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Can be customised

Cons:



02
of 10

Unity



As with Cinnamon, Unity is great for modern computers.

Around 300 megabytes

Great search features and filtering

Fairly rigid with minimal customisation

03 GNOME

of 10



GNOME Desktop.

The GNOME desktop environment is much like the Unity desktop environment.

The main difference is that the desktop by default contains a single panel. To bring up the GNO.ME dashboard you need to press the super key on the keyboard which on most computers shows the Windows logo.

GNOME has a core set of applications that are built as part of it but there are a huge number of other applications specifically written for GTK3.

Control Center (bit like Windows control panel)

Tweak tool (for customising GNOME)

Chat

Contacts

Mail

IRC

Files

Documents

Photos

Music

Videos

Transfers

Boxes (virtual machines)

Credentials

Disk Utility

Disk Usage Analyser

Software (package manager)

Clock

Maps

Weather

Web (Web browser)

Calculator

Calendar

Dictionary

Notes

Gitg (front end for GIT)

Gedit (text editor)

As with Unity GNOME isn't hugely customisable but the sheer range of utilities makes for a great desktop experience.

There is a set of default keyboard shortcuts which can be used to navigate the system.

Great for modern computers

Memory Usage:

Around 250 megabytes

Pros:

Modern

Has a large number of core applications and a development kit making it easy for developers to create rich applications

Lots of keyboard shortcuts

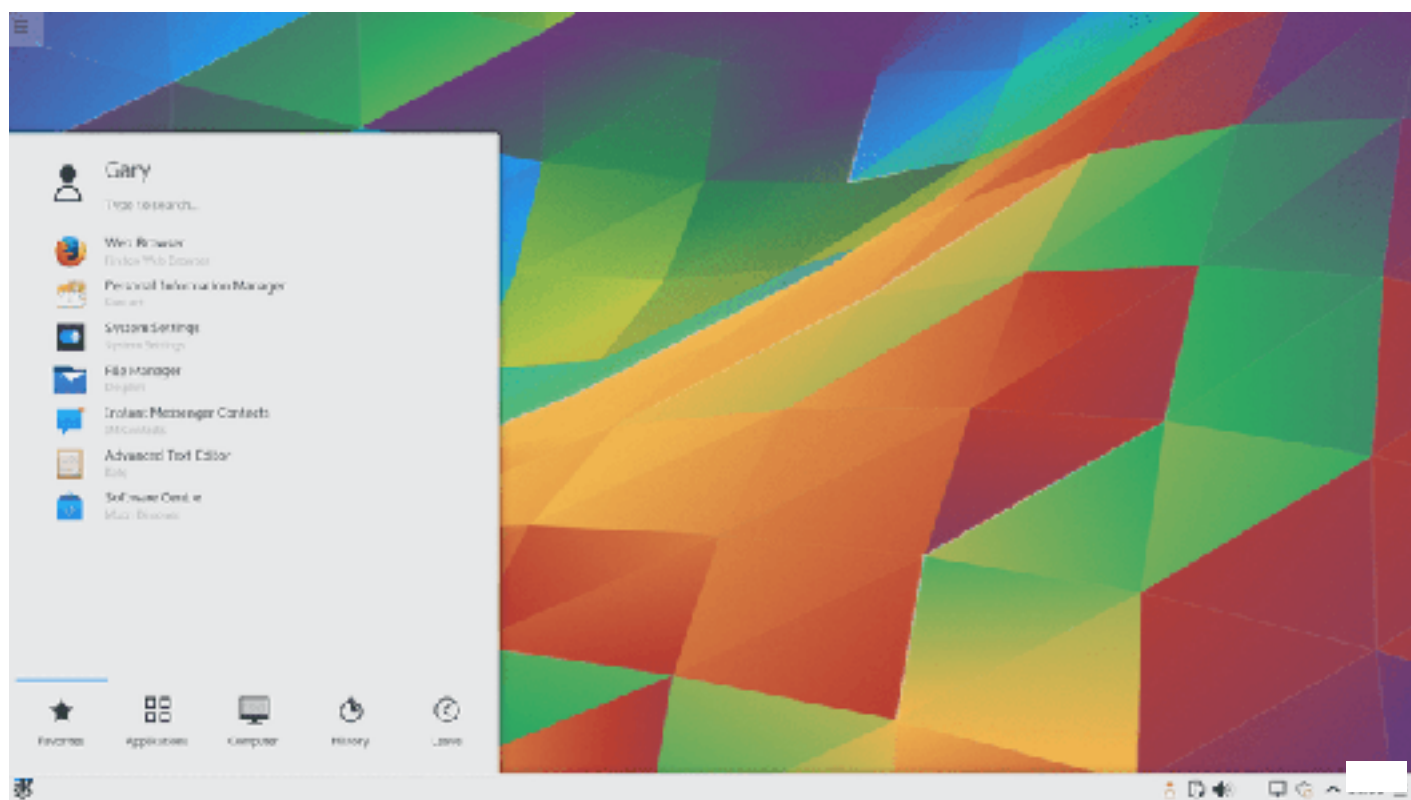
Great search features and filtering

High memory usage

Fairly rigid with minimal customisation

04 KDE Plasma

of 10



KDE Plasma Desktop.

For every yin there is a yang and KDE is definitely the yang to GNOME.

KDE Plasma provides a desktop interface similar to Cinnamon but with a little bit extra in the guise of Activities.

Generally speaking it follows the more traditional route with a single panel at the bottom, menus, quick launch bars and system tray icons.

You can add widgets to the desktop for providing information such as news and weather.

Ark - Compression utility
Dolphin - File manager
Gwenview - Image viewer
KAccounts - Accounts
kCalc - Calculator
Kdenlive - Video editor
Kontact - Contact manager
kMail - Mail
Akgregator - RSS reader
Kopete - Instant Messenger
Kate - Text editor
Konqueror - Web browser

The look and feel of the KDE applications are all very similar and they all have a huge array of features and are highly customisable.

KDE is great for modern computers.

Memory Usage:

Around 300 megabytes

Pros:

Looks instantly familiar to people used to Windows operating systems
Provides a great set of default applications including web browsers and mail clients
Lots of widgets
Can be heavily customised

Cons:

High memory usage

05 | **XFCE**
of 10



XFCE Whisker Menu.

XFCE is a light weight desktop environment which looks good on older computers and modern computers.

The best part about XFCE is the fact that it is highly customisable. Absolutely everything can be adjusted so that it looks and feels the way you want it to.

By default there is a single panel with a menu and system tray icons but you can add docker style panels or place other panels at the top, bottom or sides of the screen.

There are a number of widgets that can be added to the panels.

XFCE comes with a window manager, desktop manager, the Thunar file manager, the Midori web browser, Xfburn DVD burner, an image viewer, terminal manager and a calendar.

Memory Usage:

Around 100 megabytes

Pros:

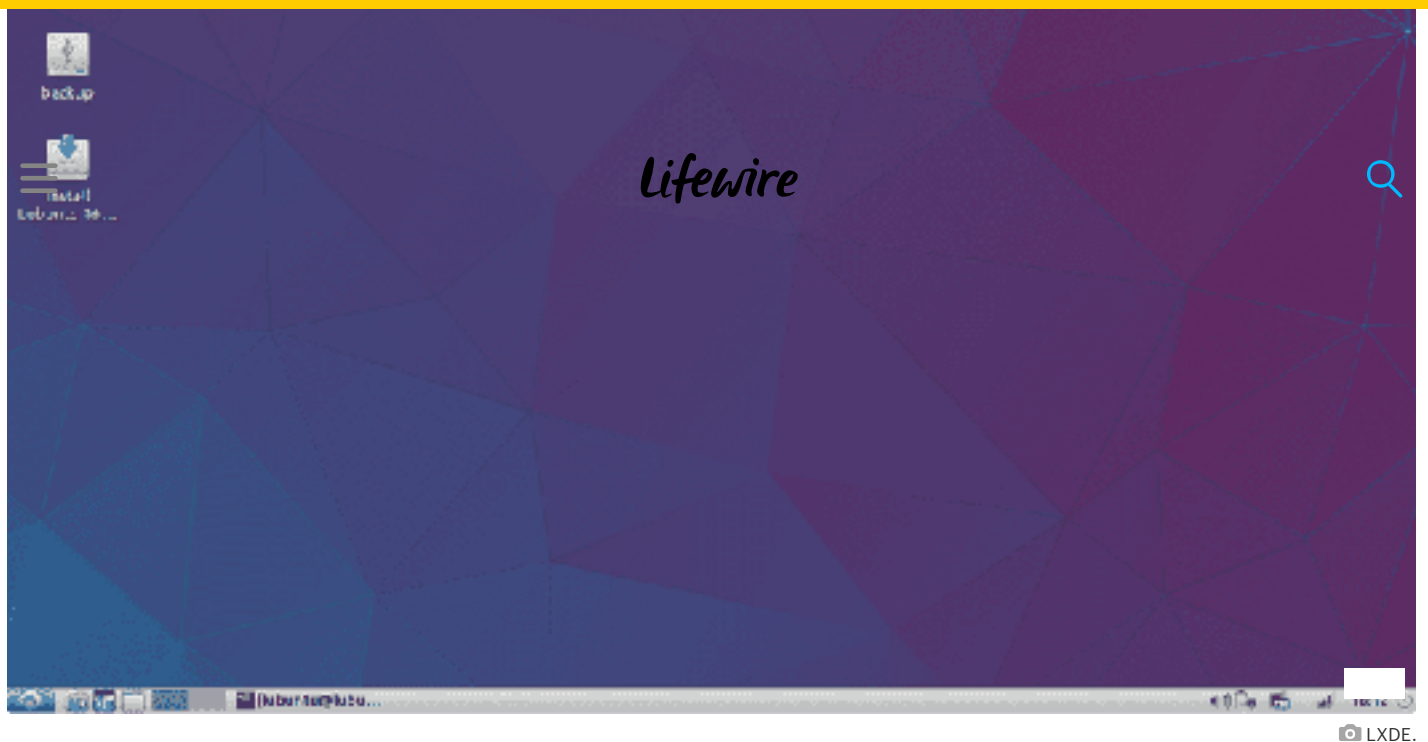
- Lightweight compared to most desktop environments
- Everything can be customised
- Lots of good widgets

Cons:

- By default looks old compared to other desktops (although can be customised to look great)
- Not as many default applications as GNOME or KDE

06 | LXDE

of 10



The LXDE desktop environment is great for older computers.

As with the XFCE desktop environment it is highly customisable with the ability to add panels in any position and customise them to behave as docks.

The following components make up the LXDE desktop environment:

- PCManFM - File Manager
- Panels
- Session Manager
- Theme Changer
- Window Manager
- GPicView Image Viewer
- Leafpad Text Editor

This desktop is very basic in its nature and is therefore recommended more for older hardware. For newer hardware XFCE would be the better option.

Memory Usage:

Around 85 megabytes

Pros:

- Very lightweight and great for very old and lower range computers
- Lots of customisable features

Cons:

- Looks old (although can be made to look better)
- The menu system isn't as good as the Whisker menu which is part of XFCE
- Not many default applications and the ones that are available aren't as good as for other desktop environments



MATE looks and behaves like the GNOME desktop environment prior to version 3

It is great for older and modern hardware and contains panels and menus in much the same way as XFCE.

MATE is provided as an alternative to Cinnamon as part of the Linux Mint distribution.

The MATE desktop environment is highly customisable and you can add panels, change the desktop wallpaper and generally make it look and behave the way you want it to.

The components of the MATE desktop are as follows:

Caja - File Manager

Pluma - Text Editor

Atril - Document Viewer

Engrampa - Archive Manager

MATE terminal - Terminal Manager

Marco - Window Manager

Mozo - Menu Item Editor

Memory Usage:

Around 125 megabytes

Pros:

A good middle of the range desktop environment in terms of memory usage

Lots of customisable features

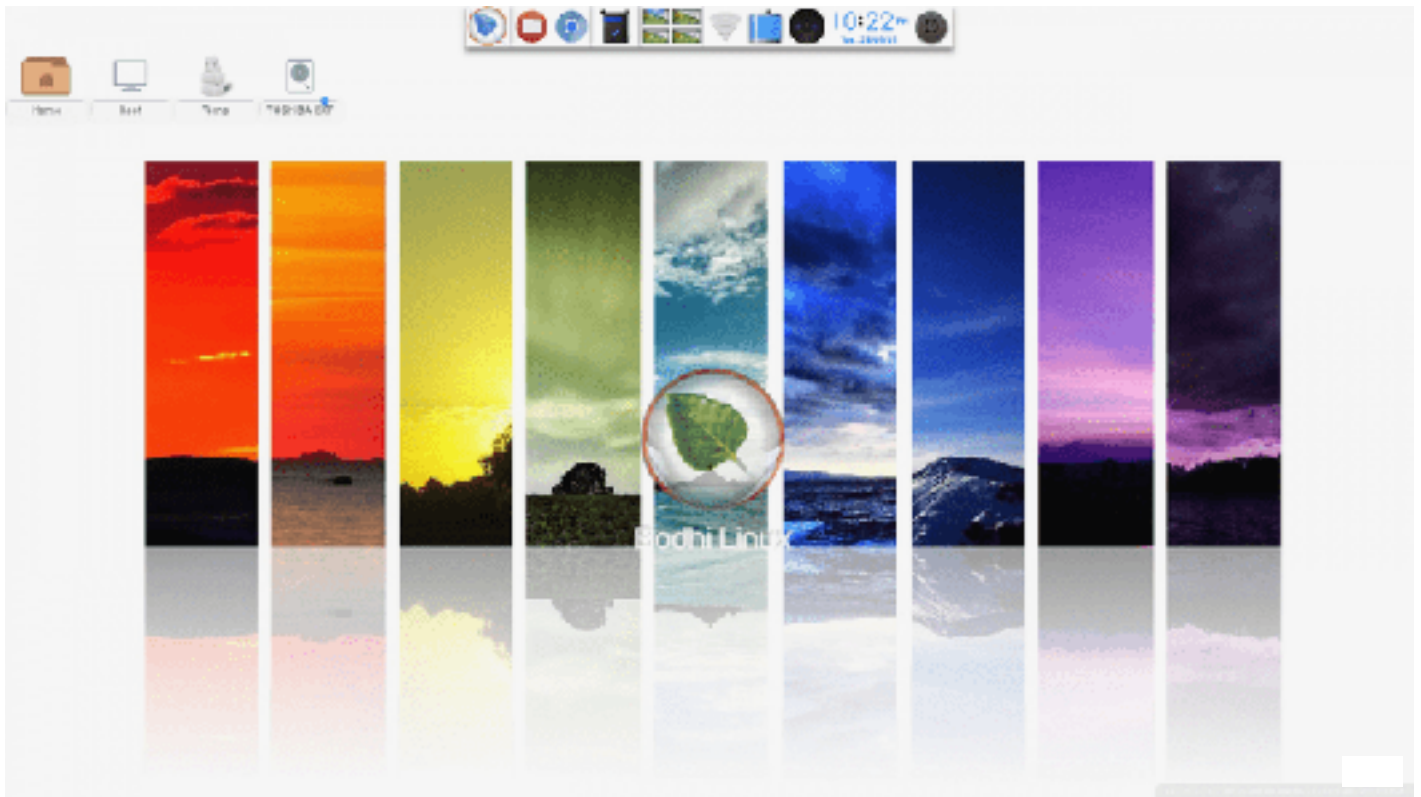
A developer kit is available for developers to write rich applications

Has a strong history as it is based on the old GNOME 2

Cons:

08 Enlightenment

of 10



Enlightenment.

Enlightenment is one of the oldest desktop environments and is very lightweight.

Absolutely every part of the Enlightenment desktop environment can be customised and there are settings for absolutely everything which means you can really make it work how you want it to.

This is a great desktop environment to use on older computers and is one to consider over LXDE.

Virtual desktops feature prominently as part of the Enlightenment desktop and you can easily create a massive grid of workspaces.

Enlightenment doesn't come with many applications by default as it started out as a window manager.

Memory Usage:

Around 85 megabytes

Pros:

- Very lightweight. Great for older and low powered computers

- Everything can be customised

Cons:

- Many of the features are undocumented especially when it comes to customising the desktop

- Looks old and dated

- Can feel a bit quirky when compared to other desktops

09 Pantheon

of 10



Pantheon.

The Pantheon Desktop Environment was developed for the Elementary OS project.

The term pixel perfect springs to mind when I think of Pantheon. Everything in Elementary has been designed to look great and therefore the Pantheon desktop looks and behaves brilliantly.

There is a panel at the top with system tray icons and a menu.

At the bottom is a docker style panel for launching your favourite applications.

The menu looks incredibly crisp.

If desktop environments were a work of art then Pantheon would be a masterpiece.

Functionality-wise it doesn't have the customisable features of XFCE and Enlightenment and it doesn't have the applications available with GNOME or KDE but if your desktop experience is merely launching applications such as a web browser then this is definitely worth using.

Memory Usage:

Around 120 megabytes

Pros:

- Lightweight yet looks great

- Smooth animations

Cons:

- Not really customisable beyond the basics

10 | **Trinity** of 10