

[Home](#) » [Learn Linux](#) » [Linux Tutorials](#) » **How to Choose the Best Linux Desktop for You**

## How to Choose the Best Linux Desktop for You

Tuesday, 05 August 2014 14:32 Jack Wallen | Exclusive

Like {579} Tweet {177} {+1} {593}

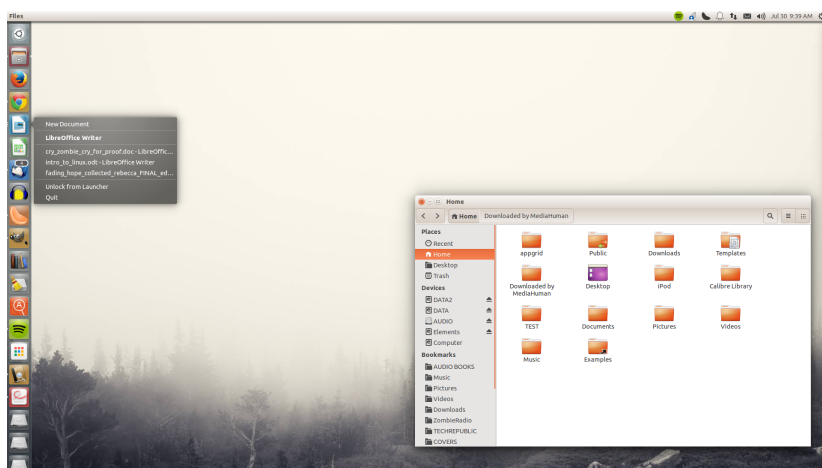
With Linux comes choice. Along with that choice, comes debate. Which desktop is the best? Which offers the most user-friendly experience? The questions are not only never-ending, but date back over a decade where the “war” between KDE, GNOME, and every other desktop was given voice. I would, contend, however, that there is a desktop for every kind of user to be found within the Linux landscape. To that end, I want to take some of the most popular desktops and match them to end users.

Of course, this is not science. There are no hard and fast rules, tests to take, or wizards to walk you through to your final Linux desktop destination. For most people it's about taste and features. But if you look at each desktop long enough, you discover there is a clear connection between desktop and end user. I will examine the following Linux desktops:

- Ubuntu Unity
- GNOME 3
- Cinnamon
- KDE
- Enlightenment
- XFCE
- Deepin Desktop

Each of the above desktops has a strong following (with good reason). As well, each desktop offers a wholly unique experience with plenty of features to please anyone. However – getting connected with the right desktop, up front, can go a very long way to ensuring an overall positive experience with the Linux desktop. With that said, let's connect users with desktops.

### Ubuntu Unity



Ubuntu Unity is the ideal desktop for any user wanting a modern interface that connects them to not only their local data, but data from over 100 remote sources. Users who want to be connected and have quick access to social networks, shopping, Wikipedia, and more will find Ubuntu Unity to be a welcome environment. Ubuntu Unity should also be given serious consideration by any user who prefers to spend most of their time on the keyboard and not switching back and forth between keyboard and mouse. With the help of the Head Up Display (HUD), you no longer have to reach for the mouse to interact with application menus. Tap the Alt key and type a search string to bring up application menu options. It's an incredibly efficient means of interacting with applications.

**Best user for Ubuntu Unity:** New user who wants as much information at their fingertips as possible and doesn't care too much about a highly individual look and feel to their desktop.



#### Upcoming Linux Foundation Courses

**LFD331 Developing Linux Device Drivers**

13 Oct » 17 Oct - Virtual

[DETAILS](#)**LFS220 Linux System Administration**

14 Oct » 17 Oct - Denver

[DETAILS](#)**LFS425 Linux Performance Tuning Crash Course**

16 Oct » 16 Oct - Düsseldorf, Germany

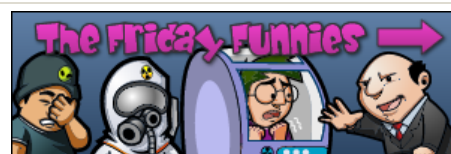
[DETAILS](#)[View All Upcoming Courses](#)

#### Tweets

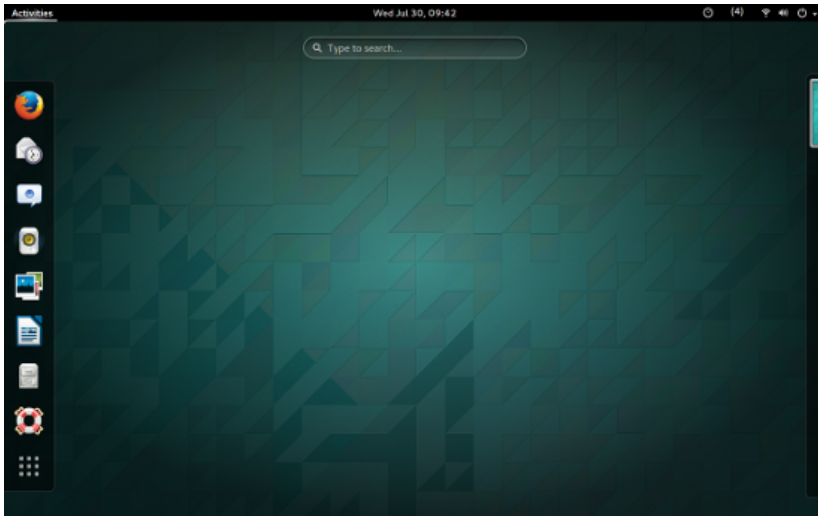
**StackOverflowCareers** @StackCareers 3m  
Systems Engineer - Security Operations at Amazon (@InsideAmazon) [Dublin, Ireland] [careers.stackoverflow.com/jobs/6916](https://careers.stackoverflow.com/jobs/6916) #linux  
[Show Summary](#)

**LinuxQuestions Feed** @lq\_feed 4m  
What does the 'guava' do? [linuxquestions.org/questions/linu...](https://linuxquestions.org/questions/linu...) #Linux #Software

**Linux Kernel Mail** @linuxlkm1 6m  
#kernelnewbies Re: Query on IIO

[Compose new Tweet...](#)

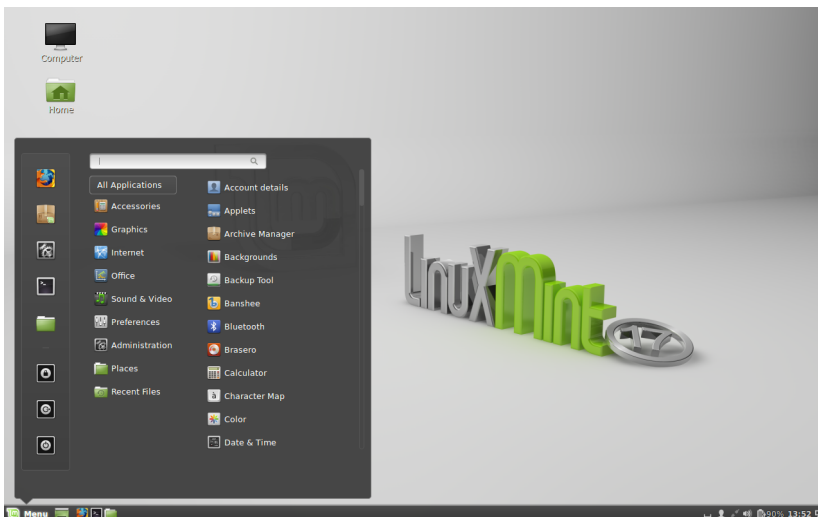
## GNOME 3



GNOME 3 is a bit of an anomaly - a sort of minimalist approach to a full-featured desktop environment. On the surface, you have what looks like very little to interact with. Open the Dash, however, and you find plenty to use. Where Ubuntu Unity locks down the majority of its interface, GNOME 3 allows for a bit more tinkering. Specifically, the addition of GNOME Shell Extensions helps the end user refine the experience to better match their needs. So if you're looking for a Ubuntu Unity-level modern take on the desktop, but want to be able to tweak it to your tastes, GNOME 3 is for you.

**Best user for GNOME 3:** Somewhat experienced user who wants a modern desktop but still wants to tweak the look and feel.

## Cinnamon



Cinnamon came to be because the Linux Mint team did not feel the direction of GNOME 3 fit in with theirs. So they forked GNOME 3 and completely reworked the interface. What came of that was an interface that seems a melding of GNOME 3 and GNOME 2. Cinnamon allows even more configuration than does GNOME 3 and does a great job of harkening back to GNOME 2, but does so with a nod to a more modern look. Even though Cinnamon has a decidedly Linux look and feel, any user would instantly be at home working within this environment. With a "start button", panel, and system tray, Cinnamon holds strong to the desktop metaphor that has worked so well for so long. But if you don't like that look... change it. Cinnamon can be highly tweaked in numerous ways (move panels, add desklets, add/remove effects, and more).

**Best user for Cinnamon:** Anyone. If you're familiar with the standard desktop, you'll be right at home with Cinnamon.

## KDE

### Latest Tutorials

[Unix Commands: stat - More Than Is](#)

[How to Get Analog Input on the BeagleBone Black](#)

[Understanding and Using Systemd](#)

[How to Install Arch Linux the Easy Way with Evo/Lution](#)

[Systemd for Developers I](#)

### Sign Up For the Linux.com Newsletter

**First Name**

**Last Name**

**Email**

**Country**

[View our Privacy Policy](#)

### Latest Software News

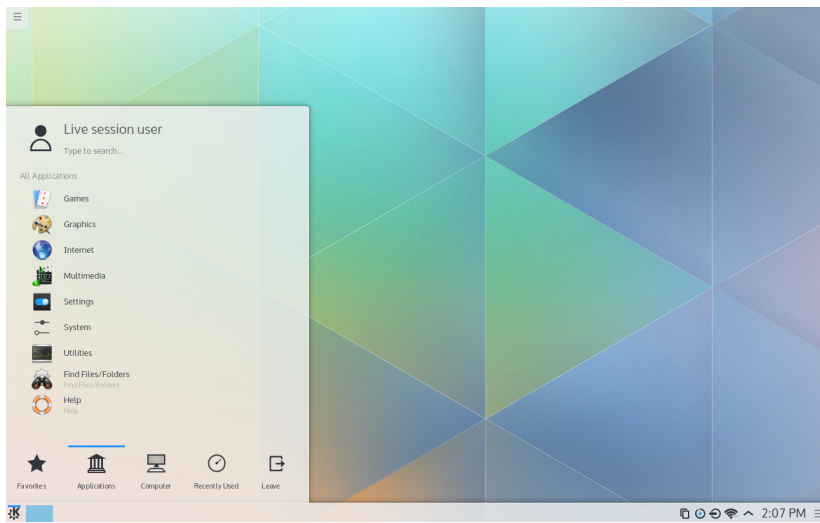
[Free Software Foundation Statement on the GNU Bash "Shellshock" Vulnerability](#)

[Linux 3.18 Should Let Radeon GPUs Clock Higher For OC'ed Cards](#)

[Kubuntu 14.10 Beta 2 Released](#)

[Ubuntu 14.10 Final Beta Released](#)

[BSD Release: MidnightBSD 0.5](#)



KDE was one of the first “full-blown” desktop environments for the Linux operating system. It’s only been through a couple of major changes (from 3.x to 4.x being the largest), so what it does... it does very well. The KDE desktop is about to flip the switch on the latest version of this long-standing environment -- a change that brings a serious speed increase to the environment. Even with the new major version releasing, you won’t find much change in the interface. KDE has always held fast with the old metaphor. This desktop lives and dies by the start menu/panel/system tray model. Even though it has a bit of modern flair, KDE always seems like a holdover from the Windows XP/7 generation. That’s not a bad thing -- especially for those that resist change.

**Best user for KDE:** Windows users who want the easiest transition from XP or 7 but prefer the traditional desktop metaphor over the modern look and feel.

## Enlightenment

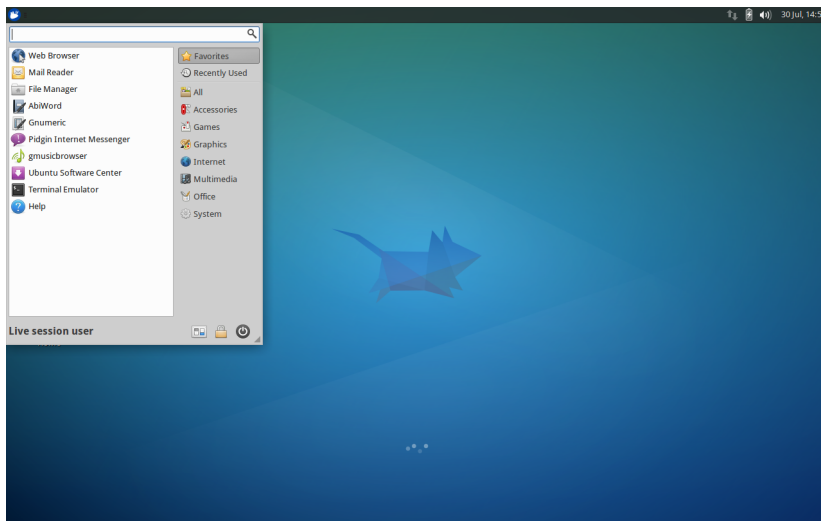


The Enlightenment is a different beast altogether. When you use Enlightenment, you know you’re working within a different environment. It’s as vastly different as it is unique. Gone are the standard start menus and panels. In their place, you’ll find a desktop menu, shelves, and other one-of-a-kind elements. To that end, Enlightenment isn’t for everyone. But if having a desktop that is a beautiful as it is configurable sounds like your cup of tea -- this might be a perfect match. Of course, all of that uniqueness and tweak-ability comes with a price... a learning curve. Many users will find Enlightenment a bit tedious out of the box. Users who like to tinker will find Enlightenment a desktop dream come true.

One great element of Enlightenment is the vast amount of themes available. These themes don’t just change the color of the desktop -- some change the shape of windows and more.

**Best user for Enlightenment:** Advanced user who fancies themselves a tinkerer and always likes to change up the look and feel of their desktop.

## XFCE



This is a perfect example of just one of the ways in which Linux shines. XFCE is a very lightweight desktop environment. If you have older hardware you want to keep using, XFCE might be the ideal environment. Or, if speed is your primary concern... XFCE will give you just that. But don't think XFCE skimps on either the features of the customization -- you get both. In fact, XFCE offers as much customization as any desktop available yet doesn't sacrifice speed and stability. But XFCE isn't for everyone. Although not nearly as challenging as Enlightenment, XFCE would present a bit of a configuration challenge for the new user.

**Best user for XFCE:** Moderately experienced user looking to get the most out of old hardware who just wants as much speed from their desktop as possible.

## Deepin Desktop



Deepin is a new entry to the Linux landscape, but has already turned a lot of heads. The Deepin Desktop is an incredibly modern take on the interface. This desktop takes bits and pieces from some of the best desktops available and blends them into one, cohesive unit. Deepin Desktop is inspired by GNOME 3, but completely built in-house. It adds an outstanding Dock and one of the finest control panels you'll see. With the addition of the Dock, the Deepin desktop is easily used by any skill-level user. As the new users continue exploring this new desktop, they'll be delighted with the features and the modern approach to the interface.

**Best user for Deepin Desktop:** Any user looking for something different, elegant, and easy to use.

The landscape of the Linux desktop looks stellar at the moment. With so many solid choices to pick from, you'll find there's a desktop for anyone -- no matter your skill level, no matter your needs. Anyone who says Linux isn't ready to take over the desktop, hasn't spent much time working with any of these environments. Linux is ready to be your desktop of choice...which choice will you make?

Jack Wallen

## Comments





John :

07 Aug

What about MATE desktop?

Report

Reply



Julius :

07 Aug

I love MATE

Report

Reply



carl draper :

07 Aug

MATE is for those who can't let go of the past ;)

Report

Reply



Josh Mason :

07 Aug

That depends on how you configure it, MATE can be configured to be fairly modern-looking, case-in-point, Mint's implementation of it, which can also be emulated in other distros, or the former Fuduntu's implementation of it, which, just like with Mint's implementation, can also be emulated in other distros. I'm currently using the Mint-style configuration on Arch, albeit with a couple tweaks to the look-and-feel: gear icon for MintMenu replaced with an Arch logo, and the "Menu" text deleted, to make it look slightly more modern than the default-style start button (gear icon with the "Menu" text beside it).

Report

Reply



Gordon :

07 Aug

MATE is for awesome.

Report

Reply



Travis :

11 Aug

MATE is my default desktop because it's - stable - user friendly - you can customize it better than any others

Report

Reply



Bomyne :

9 hours ago

MATE is so awesome that we just don't need to let go of the past. Not everything has to be modernized. MATE may be "the past" but it is superior to Unity, Gnome, KDE, etc. That said, i have had MATE looking like Windows 7 before. Just because i can. (PS They can keep that horrible Win8 interface though... If that's what modern is, i want no part of it!)

Report

Reply



Martin :

07 Aug

You have overlooked MATE, which is brilliant.

Report

Reply



Ryein :

07 Aug

KDE is the community. Plasma is the desktop.

Report

Reply



vini :

07 Aug

KDE: Knoppix desktop environment. Plasma is version of kde

Report

Reply



Greg Donald :

07 Aug

The K stands for K, not Knoppix.

Report

Reply



jinrok :

07 Aug

definitely not Knoppix... Knoppix is named after Klaus Knopper and KDE was there before Knoppix even started.

Report

Reply



Jose Luis :

07 Aug

No, KDE was independent from Knoppix, the K was for "Kool" the later they changed to be just the K Desktop Environment.

Report

Reply



noahadubato :

12 Aug

what about apple

Report

Reply



Nikolas :

13 Aug

These are \*linux\* desktop environments, in other words, "mostly free". Apple and Microsoft do not produce free software at all.

Report

Reply



A Real Jerk :

14 Aug

Not true. Apple supplies a lot of free and open software through Darwin. Hell, just check out [opensource.apple.com](http://opensource.apple.com) Now, I don't know if Microsoft has released "free"/open source software at all, but Apple sure as hell does. And, hell, the poor fellow may have had a misconception about Darwin (Mac OS X or iOS) being derived from Linux instead of BSD and NeXTSTEP (other UNIX-likes).

Report

Reply



gojul :

15 hours ago

They did. Wix is a builder for .MSI package and is open source, and many parts of the .Net framework have become open source. Now it's true that it is crapped with software patents...

Report

Reply



kit :

9 hours ago

Microsoft Research also released an operating system that might be called a .NET OS. It was more of a proof-of-concept test, but if Sun can build a Java-based OS, why can't Microsoft do the same with .NET?

Report

Reply

**Bomyne :**

9 hours ago

<http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/openness/default.aspx#projects> Microsoft's open source site. Those project links lead to codeplex, where Microsoft has released code.

Report

Reply

**Bomyne :**

9 hours ago

Apple is a company. The OSX desktop (The dock) can't be used in a Linux environment any more than Explorer (Microsoft's desktop) can.

Report

Reply

**K :**

07 Aug

Pantheon desktop/Elementary OS?

Report

Reply

**spg666 :**

08 Aug

Agree with you, I stumbled across the pantheon desktop and elementary OS six months ago, it now live on both of my laptops and desktop PC. Not sure you can separate the desktop from the OS though, the work as a package.

Report

Reply

**waqas :**

09 Aug

You wrote what I was thinking about. I think pantheon of Elementary OS is best of LI and Uthor overlooked it.

Report

Reply

**christopher :**

9 hours ago

Pantheon desktop is fresh, user-friendly and innovative. i am using elementary since i first saw it.

Report

Reply

**David Watson :**

07 Aug

Personally, I like the direction the Black Lab Linux team has taken with XFCE. It is fast, its modern and it looks cool. They do really good work there.

Report

Reply

**James :**

07 Aug

What about LXDE?

Report

Reply

**Honulele :**

07 Aug

After taking about XFCE, I'm afraid most of people will agree there's no need to talk about LXDE. And yes, I have tried both :)

Report

Reply

**Rob :**

07 Aug

No need to talk about LXDE? LXDE is much lighter and capable than XFCE in old/low resources computers, and each day gets better. Just

check LXLE, Peppermint, Zorin, just to name a few.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

Arthur :

08 Aug

Agreed. The misconception that XFCE is more resource intensive than LXDE comes from Xubuntu mostly. Their distribution uses a some outside resources, like Gnome, and adds a lot of polish to the default install that translates into more resource usage. I've done extensive testing, and LXDE and "pure" XFCE (not Xubuntu) use about the same amount of resources. If you installed a basic distro and installed just the XFCE components, it doesn't use any more resources than LXDE.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

lunarcloud :

07 Aug

Correction "Plasma" or "KDE's Plasma" NOT KDE or "The KDE desktop" That changed \*5\* years ago <https://dot.kde.org/2009/11/24/repositioning-kde-brand>

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

lunarcloud :

07 Aug

Also, this was clearly written by someone who doesn't actually USE Plasma and Windows. They call it Windows-like but I've been using Windows 7 at work and the two act very different. Plasma is a lot more intuitive and gives you useful hardware controls in the system tray and it's actually simple to find things in the kickoff menu as opposed to the awful start menu.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

lunarcloud :

07 Aug

Also, this was clearly written by someone who doesn't actually USE Plasma and Windows. They call it Windows-like but I've been using Windows 7 at work and the two act very different. Plasma is a lot more intuitive and gives you useful hardware controls in the system tray and it's actually simple to find things in the kickoff menu as opposed to the awful start menu.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

waflessnet :

07 Aug

and openbox ????? !!!

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

mlcohen :

08 Aug

I LOVE LOVE LOVE #!/openbox on my 10 year old hand me up laptop. Elegant, and fast as lightening. I just installed CentOS to use for the Linux Foundation EdX course, and I'm continually irritated when I right click and don't get a menu (Thankfully, Alt-F2 still works in Gnome).

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

Dimitar :

07 Aug

Mate +1

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

buzzmandt :

07 Aug

the only difference between mate and cinnamon is one is old and one is new. I'm glad the OP left off mate. It should have been noted that KDE is both the easiest to



Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



07 Aug

Report Reply



08 Aug

Report Reply



**mokhtarone :**  
KDE and Mate

07 Aug

Report

Reply



**ramzy :**  
ubuntu.deepin.kde

07 Aug

Report

Reply



**Hugo :**  
MATE! Tried the others, always get back to MATE with Mint touch...

07 Aug

Report

Reply



**Serge :**  
Gnome 3 is the best. :)

07 Aug

Report

Reply



**Michael :**  
This will make the deal: <https://www.google.be/#q=awsome+windows+manager>  
AWESOME will change your desktop perception and you will find an answer to the meaning of playing with linux. If you want to level up your linux skills this is the answer.

07 Aug

Report

Reply



**apurvjyotirmay :**  
I'm not much of an experienced linux user, but I've been trying to learn it on my own and with the help of our linux community. And I believe, that it's an awesome desktop to go for. I'm a computer science student, and linux provides me with the tools I need to work with. Anyone who says linux isn't ready for the os war is just another fool. Linux is ready and heavily armed for this os war. OPEN SOURCE ROX!!!

08 Aug

Report

Reply



**Mostafa :**  
It's disappointing to see Mate is absent from this review.

08 Aug

Report

Reply



**om :**  
Lxde for old computers...it uses significantly less resources than xfce in my long experience.

08 Aug

Report

Reply



**strange1712 :**  
This is the worst description of the "KDE desktop" I've read. KDE is far much more than a Windows-like desktop (some concepts were first implemented in KDE than in Windows) and can do most of the things featured in other desktops, by the numerous elements in plasma, not to mention KDE is more an ecosystem of programs, not just a menu and a tray. Even if KDE is easy to use by a Windows user, an advanced user can heavily customize KDE and take advantage of its lots of possibilities, so the target is not just "windows users transitioning". The current default look and feel is a little aged now, but it was modern once it was first shown in kde4.0, and many modern features were first implemented, if maybe not perfectly from the first version. In KDE, like the integrated search and execution tool, integrated file indexer, integrated desktop composition, social desktop, and the integrated notifications were

08 Aug

there before GNOME3 or Unity were in plans.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Deazel :**

08 Aug

I find myself really enjoying MATE over all the other desktops I've tried, which is pretty much all of them. Openbox Fluxbox Gnome Ratposion WindowMaker Awesome JVM FVM or whatever, etc. I still go to MATE after all of those. Something about it is just so perfect. XFCE is good too, and KDE 5 looks really amazing but it's still unstable on my machine. I'll have to try the neon5 project soon though. Looks really nice.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Z. :**

08 Aug

My persobal Linux Os is Peppermint 5 It is lightweight and blazing fast. The system code is Based onUbuntu 14.04 Simple core ibstallation and a good clmunity suport

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**George :**

08 Aug

i use MATE at this old machine. is very nice, it should take place in this list

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Stoycho Ganev :**

08 Aug

"Best user for GNOME 3: Somewhat experienced user who wants a modern desktop but still wants to tweak the look and feel." This whole sentence is total rubbish. Gnome 3 does not require "somewhat experienced" users. It requires totally dumb and stupid users who have absolutely no idea how a desktop environment works and what to do with it. And it is for users who DON'T want to tweak the look and feel of their desktop, because this is nearly impossible to do with Gnome 3. You get ZERO possibilities of customization. That's how I see it.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Shreya Dahal :**

08 Aug

I used Unity for some time and really liked it. Gnome 3 was a little difficult to get used to, but once I got the hang of it, I'm in love. I have always wanted to try KDE more, but haven't got the chance. I tried Mageia, wasn't impressed in the live session. What distro is it in this KDE screenshot? This looks nice.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**L. Cavalheiro :**

08 Aug

Ok, but there are much more in window managers than these ones. The \*boxes, good old Window Maker, i3, Ratpoison...

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Bqck :**

08 Aug

Awesome WM +1

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**Bqck :**

08 Aug

Awesome WM +1

[Report](#)[Reply](#)

**mrknify :**

09 Aug

Awesome wm +1 on arch!

Report

Reply

**UUNET :**

09 Aug

What about OpenCDE and CDE desktop :trollface:

Report

Reply

**Arun :**

09 Aug

cinnamon in Mint, &amp; Gnome 3 in opensuse .....

Report

Reply

**Western Sudan :**

09 Aug

You forgot Elementary's Desktop

Report

Reply

**spowww :**

10 Aug

Window Maker , try <http://wmlive.sourceforge.net/>

Report

Reply

**Nongeeek linuxer :**

15 Aug

I use MATE with Arch Linux on my laptop. I've made MATE look exactly like Gnome2 in Ubuntu in the good ol' days of Lucid Lynx--before the Unity abomination.

Report

Reply

**Wei Wang :**

24 Aug

deepin desktop. elegant

Report

Reply

**alecdc272 :**

30 Aug

You forgot to mention how configurable KDE is

Report

Reply

**Eddie G. :**

01 Sep

As much as configurability seems to be the selling point for a lot of people and the KDE desktop, I'm just looking to get things done on my machine.....not spend hours trying to get everything "Just Right". So for me XFCE....Cinnamon....Gnome....and Unity work just fine.....of those listed here I would go with XFCE first and then Gnome....that's how good those two really are!!!

Report

Reply

**Peter Bratton :**

02 Sep

Whether or not your comments on these desktop environments are good, bad, or indifferent, they are a good overview of what's available. I'm currently trying out Debian Jessie SID. I like Debian's stability and reliability, but not their choice of xfce for desktop environment. I'm looking for something like Mate (I've tried it with LinuxMint 17, but find it slowly erodes) but more stable. Thanks to your overview, I'll be looking at KDE, Cinnamon, and Enlightenment.



[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Fang Zhou :**

09 Sep

Deepin Desktop is not based on GNOME, and the screenshot CANNOT show the most wonderful changes compared with other desktop.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Youth.Lin :**

09 Sep

各个桌面环境都各有所长，不过DDE(Deepin Desktop Environment)在国内来看显然是最佳选择。。

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Chris :**

09 Sep

Mate is my favorite desktop.By the way,Deepin Desktop is not based on GNOME3.

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Omid :**

7 days ago

which of them use lower than other from system resource?

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Nanda :**

16 hours ago

GNOME

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Lorna :**

16 hours ago

MATE for me :-) And I have tried the others.....

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Amira.93 :**

16 hours ago

I like LINUX MINT Desktop ,it's elegant

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Martin :**

16 hours ago

I agree with most of the post, but I prefer mate :-D

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**Tony Manero :**

15 hours ago

KDE+Fedora 20 for ever!!!!

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**hector :**

11 hours ago

I love Mate

[Report](#)[Reply](#)**SimcA :**

10 hours ago

I would like to add to that list Phanteom, from the proyect ElementaryOS. I really like it, and it is simple, and in my opinion an excelent combination of Gnome3, MacOSX and their own ideas. It is easy, really beautiful and very very fast and functional. For those who would like to try like me: <http://elementaryos.org/>

Report

Reply



SimcA: :

10 hours ago

CORRECTION: "For those who want to try"..... not "try like me"

Report

Reply



dipanjan dey :

6 hours ago

cool i love ubuntu

Report

Reply

Name :

Email :

Comment :

☐ Subscribe to Comments

Post Comment

WHO WE ARE ?

The Linux Foundation is a non-profit consortium dedicated to the growth of Linux.

[More About the foundation...](#)

[Frequent Questions](#)

[Join / Linux Training / Board](#)

EXPLORE

[Answers](#)

[Blogs](#)

[Forums](#)

[Directory](#)

STAY CURRENT

[Netbooks](#)

[Cloud Computing](#)

[Enterprise](#)

[Embedded & Mobile](#)

ABOUT LINUX.COM

[How to Participate](#)

[Contact / About](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Privacy / Terms / Editorial Policy](#)

Linux.com © 2012 Linux.com. All rights reserved.  
The Linux Foundation Symbol is a trademark of the Linux Foundation.  
Linux is a registered trademark of Linus Torvalds.