Windows 11: Personalise Your PC
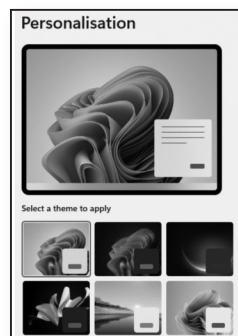
Make Windows 11 Your Own with Wallpapers, Colours, Themes and More!

This article shows you how to:
- Choose a background picture or set up a slideshow
- Select a colour scheme and colour mode for Windows
- Get a quick change of style with free 'themes'

You may have the same Windows 11 as everyone else, but that doesn't mean it has to look like everyone else's! With a few clicks, you can choose your own pictures for the desktop and lock screen (or even set up a slideshow of photos) and pick your favourite colour scheme.

You can also tweak all sorts of other options to make your PC more personal, and in this article I'll explain what you can change and how to go about it.

Contents:

Choose Your Wallpaper – Or Create a Slideshow!

Choose a background for your desktop

The thing that really makes the biggest difference to your PC is your desktop background picture, or 'wallpaper'. You'll see this a lot, so it ought to be a picture you like!

Just as in all previous versions of Windows, you can choose a picture to fill your desktop's background – either one of the pictures provided with Windows 11 or one of your own photos. But you don't have to stick with just one picture: you can also choose an entire folder of pictures to use as a 'desktop slideshow' and Windows will switch smoothly between them at regular intervals.

Follow these steps to set up your desktop background:

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise** from the menu that appears. This opens the Settings app and takes you to its 'Personalisation' section.

2. On the right, below the little pictures, click on **Background**.

A colour, a single picture, or a slideshow

3. To the right of the words 'Personalise your background', open the drop-down list and choose the option you'd like to use:

    • **Solid colour:** if you prefer not to use a picture, you can fill your desktop with a single colour.

    • **Picture:** a single picture that doesn't change (until you come back here to pick a different one).

    • **Slideshow:** a folder of pictures, with Windows changing from one picture to another at regular intervals.

Now we'll run through what to do for each option:

Solid colour

Windows has just changed your desktop to a solid black, which looks a bit mournful, but you can now see a collection of colour swatches. Click a colour to switch to it until you find one you like.

Choose a desktop colour

> If none of those swatches quite fits the bill, you can choose a custom colour by clicking the **View colours** button. Start by dragging the slider all the way to the right, then click or drag in the rainbow box above to find a shade you like (shown in the upper panel to the right). When you find roughly the right shade, you might like to drag the slider around to choose the precise level of brightness. Finally, click **Done**.

Picture

You can see small versions of five pictures supplied with Windows (and/or pictures you've previously used as your desktop background). To use one of these, just click it and Windows will apply it to your desktop straight away.

Use a recent image…

Choose a picture album for a slideshow	Browse
☁ Pictures	
Change picture every	30 minutes ⌄
Shuffle the picture order	Off ⬤
Choose a fit for your desktop image	Fill ⌄

Alternatively, you can pick a picture you've saved on your hard drive. Click the **Browse photos** button, and in the dialog that appears you can navigate to a picture of your own, click it once to select it and then click **Choose picture**: the dialog closes and the picture you've chosen is set as your desktop background.

… or a photo of your own

(Again, if you're not keen on the result, click **Browse photos** again to choose a different picture.)

Choose how it fits on your screen

Lastly, beside the words 'Choose a fit for your desktop image', you can choose how your picture appears on your desktop. You'll almost certainly decide the **Fill** option is best (the picture completely fills your desktop), but feel free to experiment with the other options on the drop-down list: as soon as you pick a different option, Windows puts it into effect.

Slideshow

Choose a folder of pictures

You'll see the name of the folder Windows proposes to look in for pictures – probably your 'Pictures' folder. However, this only works if you really do have pictures directly in that folder: if you've sorted your pictures into other folders inside that one, this won't work. Instead, click the **Browse** button and find your way to a folder containing pictures in the dialog that appears. When you find the folder whose pictures you want to use as a slideshow, click it and then click **Choose this folder**. One of the photos from that folder will immediately appear on your desktop.
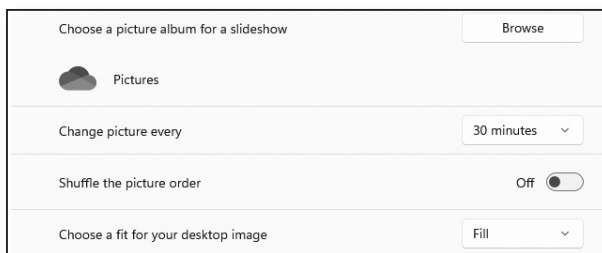
Select a time interval

Alongside the words 'Change picture every', choose how often Windows should switch from one picture to another. Note that although you can have your picture changed every minute or every 10 minutes, that could be distracting when you're trying to work! I'd suggest treating 30 minutes as the shortest practical interval.

You can choose to shuffle the picture order with a simple On/Off switch (so that pictures don't always appear in the same – alphabetical – order). Finally, choose how pictures should fit to your desktop, as explained on the previous page, with Fill likely being the best option.

> If you've chosen the 'Slideshow' option, Windows has an extra little feature you may like to keep in mind. If you're not keen on the picture you're currently seeing as your background, right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Next desktop background**. Windows will immediately switch to a different picture – hopefully one you like better!

Select a 'Colour Mode' and 'Accent Colour'

Unless you've previously dealt with this in Windows 10, you're probably wondering what a 'colour mode' is. In fact, it's a fairly straightforward choice between two colour schemes – Light or Dark.
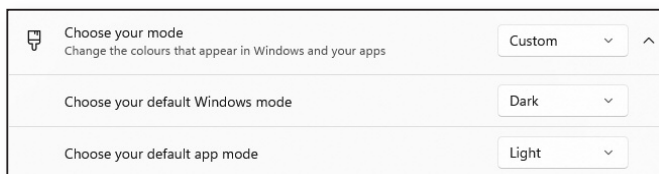
Mode: Light or Dark

You choose one of these modes for Windows 11 itself, and that determines the style and colour of your taskbar, Start menu, notifications panel, menus and so on. And separately you can choose a mode for the apps you use (such as the Settings app you're currently using) which determines whether their windows look mostly-white (or light grey) or mostly-black.

Let's go and adjust those colour schemes:

1. If you still have the Settings window opening after choosing your background, click the arrow in the extreme top-left corner of the window, then click **Colours** on the right. If you've closed the app, right-click your desktop, choose **Personalise** and then click on **Colours**.

*Choose **Custom*** **2.** Alongside the words 'Choose your mode', you'll see that you can choose one mode (either **Light** or **Dark**) for absolutely everything. But let's experiment and see how these really work: choose **Custom**.

	Choose your mode Change the colours that appear in Windows and your apps	Custom ∨	∧
	Choose your default Windows mode	Dark ∨	
	Choose your default app mode	Light ∨	

Set a mode **3.** Now, as you can see in the screenshot above, you'll
for apps see extra options that let you choose a different 'mode' for Windows and apps (if you choose to). Let's start with apps. Beside 'Choose your default app mode', open the drop-down list and choose whichever option isn't currently selected. After a second or two, the colour of the Settings app will change accordingly. What do you think? Is this how you'd like your apps to look? If not, switch back to the other mode for apps.

> If you've chosen 'Dark mode' for apps, you'll find that not all apps take notice of it. Some do – such as apps you install from the Microsoft Store along with Microsoft Edge and File Explorer – while others such as Notepad and Paint don't.

Set a mode for **4.** Now try switching your 'default Windows mode' to
Windows itself the alternative option. After giving Windows a couple of seconds to adjust, look at your taskbar and Start menu, and see what you think. Not keen? Just switch it back again. (Quick tip: if you've chosen Dark mode for Windows and you don't like having your taskbar and Start menu black, keep reading: there's an easy way to make them more colourful!)

> You'll see there's also a simple On/Off switch for **Transparency effects**. I'm fairly sure you'll want

this switched on – it makes items such as the taskbar, Start menu and Widgets panel look more attractive – but feel free to switch it off and have a look at those items to see what you prefer.

5. Slightly lower down in the Settings window we reach the 'Accent colour'. This is a highlight colour you'll see to at least some extent throughout Windows – notably on the little dots and bars that appear below icons for open windows on your taskbar, but perhaps in many other places too as we'll discover.

Choose your favourite accent colour

6. Click on **Accent colour**. A collection of colour swatches appear which we'll explore in a moment. First, to the right of those words, you have a choice of two options:

   • **Manual:** this allows you to choose your favourite accent colour, as I'll explain in a moment.

   • **Automatic:** this leaves Windows to pick an accent colour that tones with your chosen wallpaper. And if you've set up a slideshow, as explained on page 4, the accent colour changes with your wallpaper.

7. If you've chosen 'Manual' use the swatches below to click a colour you like.

8. Now we'll turn our attention to a couple of handy switches below those colours and experiment a little:

Try out these extra options

   • If you've opted for Dark mode for Windows, you can switch on **Show accent colour on Start and taskbar**. Try that and see if you prefer having a coloured taskbar and Start menu (and, if you like, experiment with different accent colours).

   • You can also enable **Show accent colour on title bars and window borders**. A good way to test this is by opening the Notepad accessory, which is representative of the result this produces: with this option switched off, Notepad has a white title

bar and a grey border. Switching this option on, the title bar and border match your chosen accent colour.

Choose Your Favourite Sounds and Pointers

Now we'll turn to a couple of items that are worth a quick mention – sounds and mouse pointers. For personalisation purposes, there's not a great deal you can change about them, but it's worth knowing where they are.

Sounds

Windows sound effects

Windows plays particular sound effects when certain 'actions' occur, such as minimizing a window, displaying a message box or emptying the Recycle Bin. There's a list of these actions and the sound that accompanies each.

1. If the Settings app is still open, click **System** at the left. If it isn't, press **Win+I** to open it.

2. On the 'System' page, click on **Sound**. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on **More sound settings**.

3. In the 'Sound' dialog that opens, switch to the **Sounds** tab.

4. Here you'll probably see that your current sound scheme is 'Windows Default'. You can open that drop-down list to see if you have any other sound schemes available, but all you'll probably see is 'No Sounds' which turns off all your sound effects. However, the day may come when you install another sound scheme (or you install a 'theme' which comes with its own sound scheme) giving you more schemes to choose from. You can also create your own sound schemes on this page by picking different

sounds (or no sound) for particular actions, but that's a job that really requires an article of its own!

Pointers

Windows 11 has a variety of mouse pointer schemes – collections of pointers – and you can choose between them. There's nothing very exciting on offer, but you can find collections of pointers online, and you might one day install a 'theme' that gives you a new set of pointers – not necessarily one you're happy with!

Mouse pointer schemes

1. If the Settings app is still open, click **Bluetooth & devices** at the left. If it isn't, press **Win+I** to open it and then choose **Bluetooth & devices**.

2. Click on **Mouse**, then **Additional mouse settings**.

3. In the 'Mouse Properties' dialog that opens, switch to the **Pointers** tab.

4. Below 'Scheme' at the top, open the drop-down list and you'll see all the different pointer schemes you have available. When you choose a scheme, the larger box below shows a list of the various pointer types and which shape is used for each.

5. Besides the default scheme ('Windows Default') you have Black, Inverted, Standard and Magnified, the first three of which are available at several different sizes. Choose any scheme you want to use and then click **Apply** to put it into effect. When you're happy with your choice, click **OK**.

Give Windows a New Look with a Theme

What you've done so far is to choose wallpapers and colours (with associated options) along with a sound scheme and a mouse pointer scheme. Although you

weren't aware of it, what you've actually done is to create a 'theme'.

A wise next step is to save that theme and give it a recognisable name. What you can do after that is to explore other themes (and there are plenty to choose from!), safe in the knowledge that you can get back to your own theme with just a couple of clicks, rather than having to set it all up from scratch again.

First, are you sure you're happy with everything you've chosen so far? If you want to tweak something we dealt with earlier, now is the time to do it!
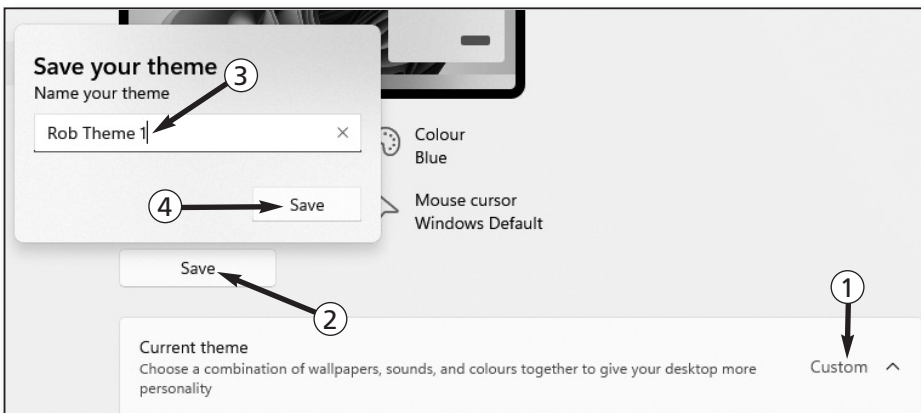
When you're ready, follow these steps to save your theme and then investigate what else is available:

1. Right-click the desktop and choose **Personalise**.

2. On the 'Personalisation' page of the Settings app, click on **Themes**.

Save this theme
3. Alongside the words 'Current theme' you'll see it says 'Custom' ①: in other words, your current theme hasn't been saved. Click on **Save** ②, type a name for this theme ③ and click the **Save** button ④.

Save your theme ③

Name your theme

| Rob Theme 1| ✕ |

Colour
Blue

④ → Save

Mouse cursor
Windows Default

Save

②

①

Current theme
Choose a combination of wallpapers, sounds, and colours together to give your desktop more personality

Custom ⌃

A tip worth considering is to start any of your own themes with your own name, as I have in the screenshot above, so that you can always recognise your own themes in the list below.

4. Now look a little lower on the page and you'll see a small collection of extra themes. One of these will be the theme you've just saved, as you can tell either from its wallpaper picture or by hovering the mouse pointer over it to see its name. Try clicking one of the others to put it into effect and see what you think of it. Any time you fancy a change, you can come back here and click one of these themes.

Click a theme to use it

5. You don't have a great deal to choose from just yet, but we can go in search of more. Just below those themes, click the **Browse themes** button.

Find more themes online

6. This opens the Microsoft Store app at its 'Themes' page, where you'll find the hundreds of available themes, most of which are free. Each has a name and a tile showing an example picture from the theme. When you find one that looks interesting, click it for more details: this takes you to a page containing a description of the theme and examples of the wallpaper pictures it contains.

Click a theme for details and pictures

7. If you're not keen on this theme after all, you can click the arrow near the top-left corner of the window to go back to the list and continue looking. If you do like this theme and want to install it, click the large **Get** button near the top of the page. After a few seconds of activity, you'll see a note that 'This product is installed', and you can either click the large **Apply** button beside it to put it into action straight away, or click the arrow I mentioned a moment ago to go back and look for others to install in the same way.

*Click **Get** to install the theme*

8. When you've finished installing themes, close the Microsoft Store window and you'll be back at the Settings window we were using earlier where you'll

Switch between themes (or delete them

now find your new theme(s) in the list among those you already had. To use one, just click it (and you can return to this Settings page whenever you like to switch to a different one). To delete one you decide you don't like, right-click it and choose **Delete**.

Tweak the Look of Your Lock Screen

You only see the lock screen briefly

We won't linger too long on this one as you don't see the lock screen very often: it appears straight after Windows starts, but a quick tap of any key on your keyboard skips past it to the point where you sign into Windows and get to work. From this point, you'll only see the lock screen again if you press **Win+L** to 'lock' your PC when you leave it unattended for a while.

Nevertheless, you probably do see this lock screen at least daily, so you might as well make it attractive! Here's how to personalise it:

1. Right-click the desktop and choose **Personalise**.

2. On the 'Personalisation' page of the Settings app, click on **Lock screen**.

Choose between three picture options

3. Below the preview of how your lock screen currently looks, open the drop-down list and choose between three options:

   • **Windows spotlight:** with this option, you'll see a different picture on your lock screen every few days, downloaded automatically by Windows.

   • **Picture:** this gives you a single, unchanging picture on your lock screen, which you can choose from the row of thumbnail pictures below or by clicking the **Browse photos** button and selecting a picture from your own collection.

   • **Slideshow:** in this case, rather like the desktop slideshow on page 4, you click **Browse** to select a

folder containing pictures, and you'll see a different picture from that folder each time your lock screen appears.

One other nice option on this page is **Show the lock screen background picture on the sign-in screen**. It's a small detail, but by having this switched on, your sign-in screen looks more attractive as you're typing your Windows password.

Switch on this option

Keep this Settings window open if you want to continue working through the personalisation options, or close it if you've finished.

Set Up Your Screensaver

If you wander away from your PC for – let's say – half an hour, what happens? Quite likely the screen goes to sleep to save energy. But, if you choose, what could happen instead is that a screensaver starts: a colourful moving animation of some sort.

You might like to set up a screensaver

In the old days, a screensaver was a necessity to prevent so-called 'burn in': the ghostly shapes of items on the screen could burn themselves into your screen's pixels. Nowadays, with our better-quality screens, that's far less likely to happen, but you might still like to set up a screensaver on the basis that it looks much more attractive than a blank screen.

If you'd like to use a screensaver, we do it in two steps. First we set up the screensaver itself; second we choose when your screen is put to sleep to ensure that doesn't happen before your screensaver has had time to show itself. Here are the steps to follow:

A two-step process

1. If you kept the Settings window open, you're still on the 'Lock screen' page we were just using. (If you didn't, right-click the desktop and choose **Personalise** then **Lock screen**.)

2. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the words **Screen saver**.

Preview screensavers and adjust settings

3. In the dialog that appears, open the drop-down list and choose a screen saver to try. You'll see it previewed in the little screen at the top, but to try it out for real, click the **Preview** button and it will fill your screen. To stop it, just jiggle your mouse or tap a key on the keyboard. Not keen? Try a different one. If the **Settings** button is enabled for the screensaver you've chosen, click that to see what options you can change about it, then try previewing it again. A nice choice is the screensaver named Photos which allows you to choose a folder of pictures (such as your 'Pictures' folder) to display as an endless slideshow.
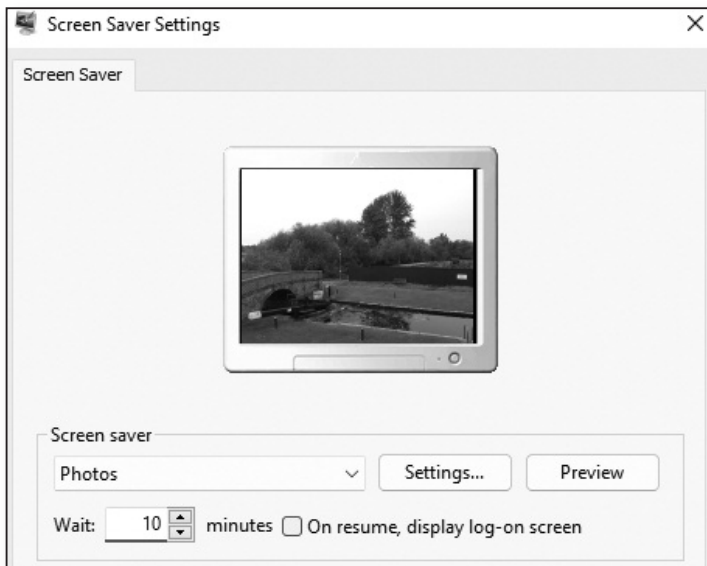
When should it start?

4. Assuming you find a screensaver you want to use, adjust the figure beside **Wait** according to how long your PC should be left idle and unattended before the screensaver starts: 10 minutes is a good choice.

> If you decide you don't want to use a screensaver after all, just open the drop-down list and choose **(None)** then click **OK** and ignore the remaining steps.

5. Click **OK** and that's got your screensaver itself set up (although you can return here whenever you like to pick a different one, adjust options or change the time-delay).

6. That takes you back to the Settings window and we'll do the second of the two jobs I mentioned. Click the words **Screen timeout**.

7. Click on **Screen and sleep** and you'll see a drop-down list that specifies when the screen should be turned off. (On a laptop or tablet, you'll see two drop-down lists that let you choose different intervals according to whether the PC is running on battery or mains power). Here, choose an interval that's longer than the one you chose for your screensaver. For instance, if you set your screensaver to kick in after 10 minutes, you won't want the screen to switch off for at least 15 minutes, otherwise you'll never see your screensaver! You might even choose **Never** so that the screen never switches itself off. On a portable PC, however, you might choose a long interval when the PC is plugged in, but something very short when it's on battery power (even though you won't see your screensaver) so that you conserve as much battery power as possible.

Choose when your screen goes to sleep

🖵 Screen and sleep	⌃
When plugged in, turn off my screen after	Never ⌄

8. While you're here, have a look a little lower down at when your PC is set to go to sleep. Again, if that happens before your screensaver was timed to appear, you'll never see the screensaver.

Change Your Account Picture

Personalise Windows with your own photo

Each time you sign into Windows 11, you'll see your 'account picture' accompanying your name. You'll also see a small copy of it near the bottom-left corner of the Start menu, and it pops up in one or two other places as well.

Right now, it's probably just an anonymous-looking head-and-shoulders drawing, but what better way to personalise your PC than to swap this for a picture of yourself? Here's how to do that:

1. Open the Start menu and click the little 'person' icon at the bottom-left. On the menu that opens, choose **Change account settings**.

2. This opens the Settings app at a page titled Accounts > Your info. Alongside the words 'Choose a file', click on **Browse files**.

Choose a picture from your collection

3. In the dialog that opens, find and select the picture you want to use and click the **Choose picture** button. You'll see your chosen picture at the top of this 'Your info' page, and assuming you're happy with it, you can close the Settings window and you've finished. (If you're not keen on your choice, of course, you can click **Browse files** again and try something different.)