

Discover All the Most Useful Changes in the Latest Version of Windows 11

This article shows you how to:

- Put all your most-used files within easy reach
- Use new options to customise your Start menu
- See a new wallpaper image on your desktop daily

It's hard to believe, but Windows 11 has been with us a year. It's now about to receive its first 'feature update' which goes by the exotic name '22H2'. As you might expect after a year, this update contains a whole host of changes, but some of them will matter more to you than others.



In this article, I'll run through all the most notable changes in version 22H2 and explain how to make the most of them.

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What is Windows 11 Version 22H2?

Windows as a Service When Windows 10 was released, just over seven years ago, Microsoft introduced the concept of 'Windows as a Service' (or WaaS for short). The idea was that once you'd bought a copy of Windows, perhaps on a new PC, it would be kept updated automatically, at no extra charge. The days of having to pay for a new version every three years were gone.

Regular feature updates Those of us who were using Windows 10 saw WaaS in action right from the start, with large feature updates arriving like clockwork every six months. Initially these had imaginative names like the Anniversary Update and the Creators Update, but the naming soon became more prosaic – the April 2018 Update and so on.

Finally, a year ago, we got the ultimate update (if our PCs were modern enough to meet the onerous conditions to install it): a free upgrade to Windows 11.

In Windows 11 the updates are now yearly Although we're using a new version of Windows, the WaaS concept continues much as it always did, but with one difference: Microsoft realised they'd bitten off more than they could chew with six-monthly updates, and they'll now arrive yearly instead.

This year's is named 22H2 They also have dull, slightly technical-looking names. The original release of Windows 11 was version 21H2 (so named because it was released in the second half – H2 – of 2021). And now we have its first feature update named 22H2.



If you ever want to check what version of Windows you're currently using, there's an easy way. Click the **Start** button, or the **Search** button beside it, type the word **winver** (short for 'Windows version') and press **Enter**. An About Windows dialog will appear showing the name and version number of your version of Windows.

How to get your hands on version 22H2

Perhaps after reading to the end of this article you'll be itching to get your hands on this feature update as soon as you can. My usual advice is that it pays not to be in a hurry with these things. New versions of Windows (which is what this really is) often have a few bugs and oddities, and it's a good idea to leave others to grapple with those and give Microsoft some time to fix them.

It usually pays to wait!

The update will roll out gradually to Windows 11 users, starting anytime now, and my advice is simply to let nature take its course and wait until something pops up on your screen to tell you that updates are ready to install or that Windows Update needs to restart.

If you wish, you can try to hurry things along by checking for updates manually. Press **Win+I** to open the Settings app, click on **Windows Update** at the left, and then click the **Check for updates** button. You may need to do this a few times if other updates were waiting to be installed, but you may find that this produces an offer to install the feature update.

Try checking for updates...

However, despite my note of caution above, I've been using version 22H2 since it was finalised in May, and it's been refreshingly reliable. So, if you really are keen to upgrade as soon as possible, I'm less inclined than usual to advise against it. The trouble is, I can't be precise about how to do it, but my suggestion is to visit this page on Microsoft's website:

... or visit this web page

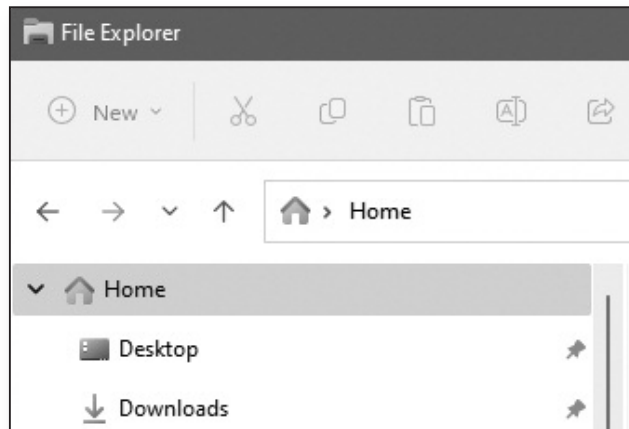
www.microsoft.com/en-gb/software-download/windows11

In years gone by, the Windows 10 equivalent of this page would sport an **Update now** button as soon as a feature update had been released, and it seems reasonable to expect that the same will happen with Windows 11. Assuming it does, just click that button and follow the instructions to upgrade.

File Explorer: Quickly Open Your Favourite Files

'Home' in File Explorer

Press **Win+E** to open File Explorer and you might notice a change at the top of the left-hand panel and in the address box: the location you've arrived at, which used to be named 'Quick access', is now named 'Home'.



A new 'Favourites' section

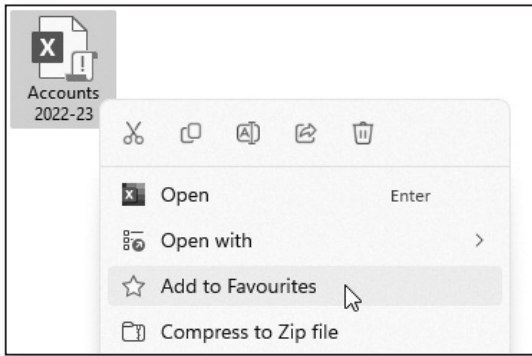
It's a tiny change for sure, but it hints that Microsoft really does intend this to be a useful place to start when you're working with files. Look to the right and you'll see that this Home page now contains a new section: **Favourites**. This is intended to do for files what its namesake in Microsoft Edge does for web pages.

In total, then, this Home page now contains three sections:

- **Quick access**, for shortcuts to all your favourite folders.
- **Favourites**, for shortcuts to all your most-used files.
- **Recent**, containing shortcuts to the files you've worked on most recently.

At the moment, the Favourites section is empty, just showing a note that after you've pinned some files they'll be shown here. And that's the way to start: dig into your folders and go in search of files you open and/or edit regularly (or simply files you want to be able to find easily when you need them, such as favourite photos). When you find one, just right-click it and choose **Add to Favourites**:

Add favourite files to this section



Nothing interesting happens, but if you were to return to that Home page now you'd see that this file is now listed in that Favourites section. Carry on adding files to Favourites in the same way – you can add as many as you like and they'll be listed in alphabetical order. In future, of course, whenever you want to open one of these files, you just double-click it.

Double-click one to open it

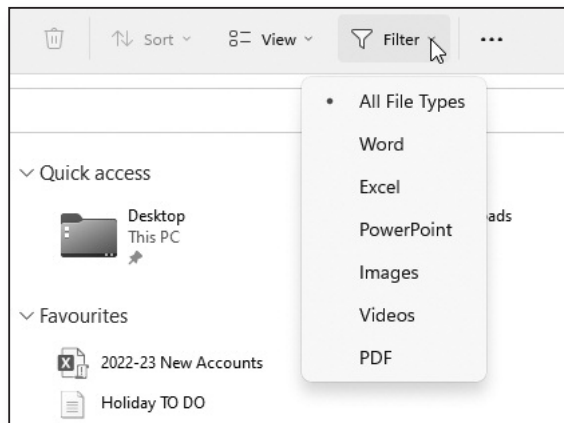
As you might guess, if you ever delete one of the files you've added to Favourites, it will disappear from that section too. But if you ever want to remove a particular file from Favourites (because you don't use it enough to feel it deserves a place there), just right-click it and choose **Remove from Favourites**.



Microsoft clearly feels you might add dozens of files to this Favourites section, so they've included a feature

Filter the list

that makes those files easier to trawl through. Whenever you're on the Home page of File Explorer you'll see a **Filter** button on the toolbar. Click that and you'll see a menu which allows you to see only particular types of favourite files in the list: only Word documents, or only images, or only PDFs, for example:



Although not new, I'll briefly point out the **Quick access** section on this Home page too. Just as the Favourites section is for your favourite files, the Quick access section is for your favourite folders. Have a trawl through your PC, and when you come across a folder you'd like to reach more easily, just right-click it and choose **Pin to Quick access**.

Start Menu: Arrange Your Apps for Fast Access

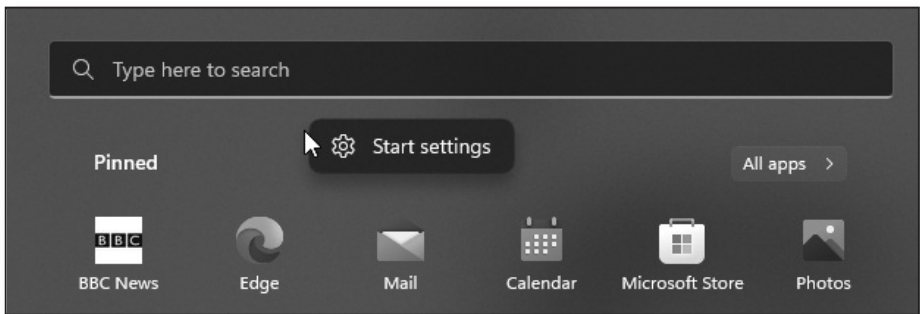
The Start menu in Windows 11 hasn't proved terribly popular with users. When you open it, you see two sections: 'Pinned' and 'Recommended', and the complaint is that the mostly-useless Recommended section

takes up half the available space, at the expense of the far-more-useful Pinned section.

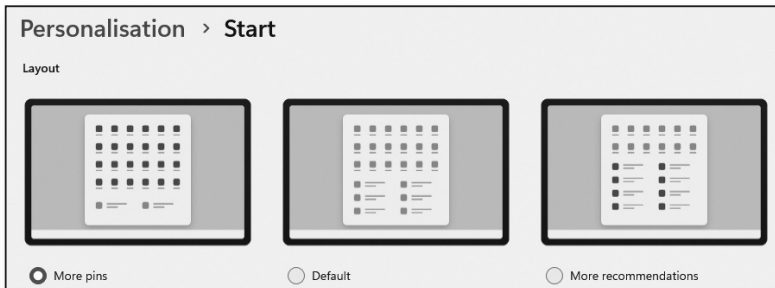
Microsoft seems to have acknowledged this complaint and provided a fix of sorts: you can now make the Pinned section taller by one row (and the Recommended section shorter).

Enlarge the 'Pinned' area

To do that, right-click any blank space on the Start menu (not on an icon) and choose **Start settings**:



The Settings app opens at the Personalisation > Start page and you'll see three new options right at the top: **More pins** (answering the complaint above), **Default** (which is the layout you've already got), or **More recommendations** (on the off-chance you actually find the Recommended section useful). Just click the option you want to use and close the Settings window.



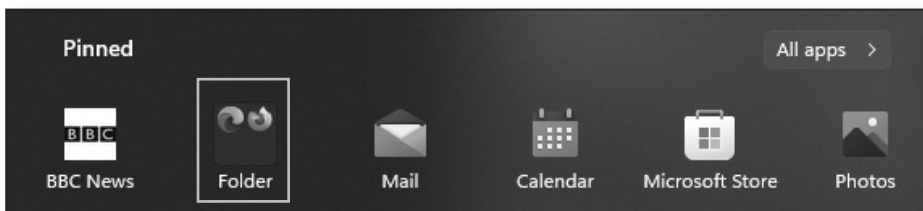
Group apps into folders The obvious reason for the complaint above is that some people would like to see more of their apps in that Pinned section without having to scroll up and down, and Microsoft has added another feature that offers something of a solution. You can now group apps into folders in that section.

Of course, that puts those apps one click further away because you have to open the folder to click the app you want to use, but it's something you may like to try.

First you'll need all the necessary apps to be in that Pinned section. If they're not, click on **More apps** to see all your apps, then right-click an app and choose **Pin to Start**.

Drag one icon onto another Now you're ready to group some apps into a folder. Perhaps, as an example, you'd like to group all your web browsers into a folder. In that Pinned section, find the icon for one of your web browsers, then drag-and-drop it directly onto another of your web browser icons.

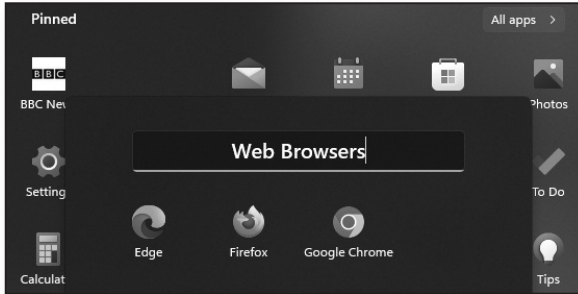
They both land in a new folder The two icons disappear and are replaced by a single icon labelled 'Folder' showing tiny copies of the (currently two) icons it contains:



Now find another of your web browsers and drop its icon onto that Folder icon to move it there, and continue in the same way for any other apps you want to put in this folder.

Name the folder Lastly, click that folder to open it, and you'll see the icons you placed in it. At the top you'll see the words

Edit name: click those words, type a better name for this folder (such as 'Web Browsers') and press **Enter**:



You can create as many folders as you like in this way, so if there are a lot of apps you use regularly, it's a good way to put them fairly close at hand and to organise them at the same time.

Windows Spotlight: Stylish New Wallpaper Every Day

If you've explored the Personalisation options in the Settings app, you'll have discovered you can choose something called 'Windows spotlight' for your Lock screen. This gives you a different background image on your Lock screen each day. Nice, you might think, but I only see my Lock screen once a day, briefly, when I sign into Windows. Why can't I do the same on my desktop?

Well, now you can. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise**, click on **Background** and alongside the words 'Personalise your background', open the drop-down list and choose **Windows spotlight**.

Initially you'll see the default Windows 11 background picture on your desktop – a blue swirly shape. But give it a few seconds and that should be replaced by today's

The Lock screen offers 'Windows spotlight'

Now it's available for the desktop too

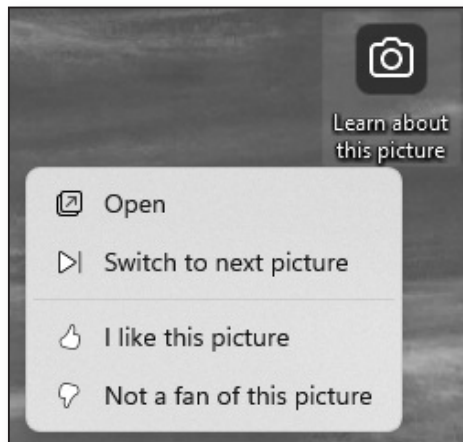
daily background picture. And each day you'll see something different.

A new icon appears on your desktop

You'll also gain a new icon in the top-right corner of your desktop named 'Learn about this picture'. That's a bit of a misnomer: double-clicking this icon actually just opens the Microsoft Edge web browser and takes you to the results of a Bing search for the current picture's title, so you probably won't learn anything about the picture itself.

Switch between background pictures

More usefully, if you don't like the current picture, you can right-click that icon and choose **Switch to next picture** to see a different one. There are a limited number of pictures available each day, but you can use this option to cycle through them until you land on one you like.



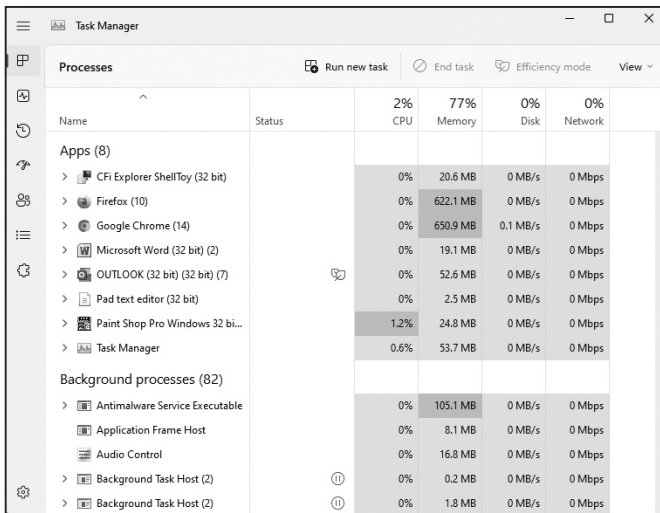
Like or dislike a picture

There are also options to specify whether or not you like the current picture. I can't tell you what – if anything – these do. Perhaps you'll see more of the sort of pictures you've 'liked' and fewer of those you've 'disliked', but I wouldn't be surprised if these have no practical effect at all.

Small Stuff: Other Little Changes in Windows 11

We've covered the headlines of what's new in version 22H2, but there are an awful lot of more-minor changes, so let's finish by running through some of those:

- Pressing **Alt+Tab** to switch between windows now opens in a panel in the centre of the screen – as it did in versions of Windows gone by – rather than filling the entire screen. *Alt+Tab*
- Folder icons in Windows 10 showed previews of their contents, giving you a (rather vague) idea of what sort of files were inside each folder. These previews disappeared in the original release of Windows 11, but they're now back again. *Previews on folder icons*
- Open Task Manager (perhaps by pressing **Ctrl+Shift+Esc**) and you'll find it's had a modern redesign. The tabs across the top are gone, replaced by icons down the left-hand side. *A redesigned Task Manager*



- Sticking with Task Manager, you can now choose which 'tab' you reach when it starts. Click the **Settings** (cog) icon in its bottom-left corner and choose your preferred tab under **Default start page**.
- New 'Accessibility' folder*
- The folder on your Start menu that used to be named 'Windows Ease of Access' is now named 'Accessibility' (so you'll find it near the top in the 'A' section rather than down the bottom under 'W').
- Easily set your default web browser*
- After many complaints and adverse publicity, Windows 11 now makes it easy to change your default web browser to something other than Microsoft Edge. Open the Settings app (by pressing **Win+I**) and go to **Apps > Default apps**. Click the name of your favourite browser, and at the top of the next page you'll see a **Set default** button. (Note that despite doing this, certain things will continue to open in Edge, such as items you click in the Widgets panel.)
- More gestures for touch screens*
- If you use a tablet (or you're lucky enough to have a touch-sensitive PC monitor), Windows 11 introduces more touch 'gestures' – finger swipes to get things done. Swipe up from the bottom-centre of the screen to open the Start menu, or the bottom-right to open Quick Settings. Swipe in from the left to open Widgets, or from the right to open the Notifications panel. A three-finger swipe down the middle of the screen will minimise your open windows.
- Clipchamp video editor*
- There's a brand-new video editing app named Clipchamp which you'll find on your Start menu. From my brief look around this it seems rather complicated (although I don't have much experience with video editing to start with), but it's something to experiment with on a rainy afternoon!