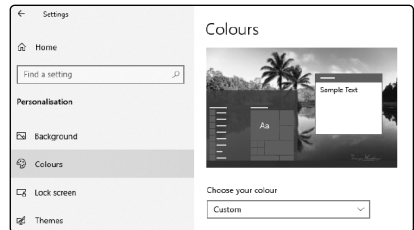


Brighten Up the Appearance of Windows 10 and Customise It to Your Own Taste

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Choose a colour scheme and style for Windows
- ✓ Select a picture or create a slideshow for your desktop
- ✓ Give yourself a change of style with free ‘themes’

When it’s fresh out of the box, Windows 10 looks surprisingly dark and gloomy. The desktop background picture, although various shades of blue, looks rather shadowy and brooding. Meanwhile, the taskbar and Start menu are black. It’s not the most attractive environment to be working in, but you don’t have to leave it that way: why not brighten it up and put your own personal stamp on it? Just work through this article to find out what you can change and how to do it.



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Choose a 'Colour Mode' and 'Accent Colour'

Choose between
Light and Dark...

...for Windows
itself and for
your apps

You're probably wondering what on earth a 'colour mode' could be. In fact, it's a fairly straightforward choice between two colour schemes – Light or Dark.

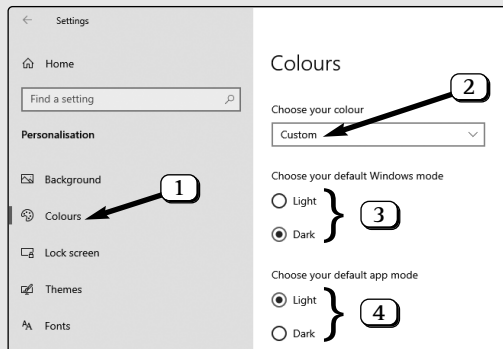
You choose one of these modes for Windows 10 itself, and that determines the style and colour of your taskbar, Start menu and Action Centre panel. And separately you can choose a mode for the apps you use, which determines whether their windows look mostly-light or mostly-dark.

Let's go and adjust those colour schemes:



Choose Custom

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise**. This opens the Settings app to its 'Personalisation' page.
2. At the left of the window, click on **Colours** (1).
3. On the right, below the words 'Choose your colour', open the drop-down list and choose **Custom** (2) if that option isn't already selected.



4. Now, just below that drop-down list, you'll see the options that let you choose a colour mode for Windows

③ and one for your apps ④, as I mentioned earlier.

5. We'll start with the mode for apps, which is simplest. Below the words 'Choose your default app mode' ④, click whichever option isn't currently selected, and wait a few seconds for Windows to make its adjustments. The Settings app you're currently using will change to reflect your choice, and you can try opening other apps from your Start menu or taskbar to see how they look:

- If you've chosen **Dark**, the colours of windows will be predominantly black with white text.
- If you've chosen **Light**, windows will be the more-familiar white with black text.

Choose a colour mode for apps

Not all apps take notice of this setting, and some-what oddly it's Microsoft apps that are most likely to ignore it. For instance, the Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox web browsers both turn dark in Dark mode whereas Microsoft Edge doesn't. (Of course, web pages themselves will remain whatever colour they were designed to be.)

If you've plumped for Dark mode (and want to stick with it), it's worth looking at the options for other apps to see if they offer a similar mode. As an example, if you start any Microsoft Office program and choose **File > Options**, you'll see that you can open the drop-down list beside **Office Theme** and choose something like 'Black' or 'Dark Grey'.



6. If you're not keen on the 'app mode' option you've just chosen, just click the other option to put things back the way they were.

Choose a colour mode for Windows

Try out these options



Set your accent colour

7. Now let's turn our attention to the Windows mode (**3** in the previous screenshot). Once again, click whichever option isn't currently selected, and give Windows a few seconds to adjust itself accordingly.
8. Just below the two sets of Light/Dark options, you'll see a **Transparency effects** switch. Set this to **On** (which I think you'll probably prefer). Feel free to toggle this on and off as you make other adjustments to see which you like best.
9. Now scroll down a little further, to below the colour swatches, and do the following:
 - Tick the box beside **Title bars and window borders**.
 - If you've just switched to Dark mode, tick the box beside **Start, taskbar and action centre**. (If you've chosen Light mode, this box is disabled.)

Both of the above items are optional of course, but I suspect you'll like them switched on: feel free to experiment with them!

10. You'll see that the colour of your taskbar has changed, and you'll see the same change of colour if you open the Start menu or the Action Centre panel. In Light mode, these areas are all light blue, but you'll see little dashes of colour in the title bars and borders of windows, and on the Start button when you move your mouse over it: this is your 'accent colour'. In Dark mode, these areas are all one colour, but that colour varies: again, it's your 'accent colour'.
11. The final job is to experiment with that accent colour. Scroll back up the page to the heading 'Choose your accent colour' and you have two options:

- If you tick the box beside **Automatically pick an accent colour from my background**, Windows will examine your desktop background picture (which we'll come to below) and choose an accent colour that tones nicely with it. This way too, whenever you change your background picture (or if you set up a desktop slideshow, which I'll also explain), you'll automatically get a change of accent colour to go with it. As I hinted above, that accent colour is much more noticeable if you've chosen Dark mode than Light.
- With that box unticked, you can pick your preferred colour from the swatches by clicking it (and, as usual, giving Windows a few seconds to adjust things). Try out different colours until you land on one you like.

You can play around with the options on this 'Colours' page to your heart's content until you find a combination you like. When you're done, either close the Settings window or keep it open as we move on to the next area of personalisation.

Let Windows choose your colour...

...or click a colour swatch

Select a Background Picture – Or a Slideshow!

At least as important as your colour scheme is what's filling your desktop. At the moment it's probably a picture, but you might prefer a different picture, or a single solid colour, or perhaps you'd like a so-called slideshow where Windows changes your background picture at regular intervals.

Here's how to change your desktop background:

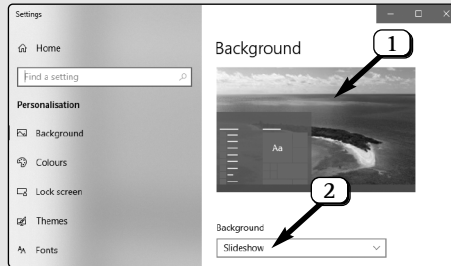
1. If you didn't leave the Settings window open after adjusting your colours, right-click a blank space on

Liven up your desktop



Choose how to fill your desktop

- your desktop and choose **Personalise** and you'll arrive at the 'Background' page of the Settings window. If you did keep the Settings window open, click **Background** at the left.
- At the top you'll see a preview of how your desktop currently looks (1). Below that preview, you can open the drop-down list (2) and choose between a 'Picture', a 'Solid colour' and a 'Slideshow'.

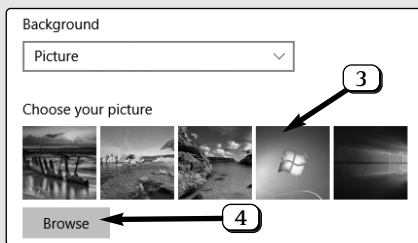


- The next step depends on what you've just chosen from that drop-down list:
 - Solid colour:** as the name suggests, this fills your desktop with a single colour. You'll see a collection of colour swatches below the drop-down list, and you can click your way through them until you find one you like.
 - Picture:** this is the option to choose if you'd like to use a single picture as your desktop background – one that doesn't change until you come back here and choose something different. Just below the drop-down list you'll see small versions of pictures supplied with Windows, or pictures you've used previously (3). To use one of these, just click it and it immediately appears on your desktop. Not keen? Just click a different one.

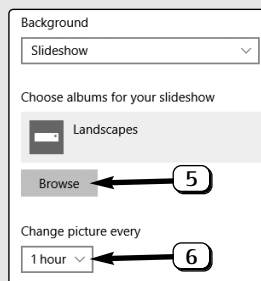
A solid colour for the desktop

Choose a single, unchanging picture

If none of those pictures fit the bill, you can choose a picture from your own collection – one you've taken yourself or one you've downloaded from a website. Click the **Browse** button (4), and in the dialog that opens you can locate and click the picture you'd like to use and click the **Choose picture** button. As soon as you've done this, the dialog closes and the picture you've chosen is set as your desktop background. (Again, if you're not happy with the result, you can click **Browse** again to choose something different.)



- **Slideshow:** with this option, you select a folder of pictures and Windows automatically switches between the pictures in that folder on a schedule you choose – every hour, perhaps, or daily. After choosing this option from the drop-down list, you'll see the name of the folder Windows proposes to look in for pictures to use. Quite likely this is your 'Pictures' folder, but this only works if you have pictures placed directly in that folder: if you've sorted your pictures into subfolders, as you quite likely have, they won't be included.



A desktop picture that changes regularly

Select a folder
of pictures

Choose how
often to change
pictures

Fit the picture
to your screen

Instead, click the **Browse** button (5) and use the dialog that opens to navigate to the folder whose pictures you want to use as a slideshow, then click the **Choose this folder** button. One of the pictures in that folder will then immediately appear in the preview at the top of the page and on your desktop. After choosing the folder of pictures, open the **Change picture every box** (6) to choose how often the picture should change. The choice is yours, but I'd suggest that having the picture change more frequently than every 30 minutes could be a bit of a distraction!

4. If you've chosen either **Picture** or **Slideshow**, there's one extra option a little lower down: **Choose a fit**. This specifies how your background picture should be placed on your desktop, and my suggestion is always to choose **Fill**. Feel free to try out the other options, but the 'Fill' setting ensures your picture entirely fills your desktop without leaving ugly borders around its edges.
5. That's got your desktop background set up (although, of course, you can repeat these steps as often as you like to make changes in the future). Now, as before, you can either close the Settings window or keep it open as we move on to the next stage of our customisations.





Did you choose the **Slideshow** option? If so, here are two quick tips to accompany it:

- First, you might like to create a folder containing your favourite pictures (copying them into it from your other folders, or saving attractive pictures into it that you find online) and specify that as your slideshow folder. As you add more pictures to it over time, Windows will automatically include

those in the slideshow. You can read more about doing this, and find your way to sources of attractive background pictures, in article W030 – **Wallpaper Slideshow: Liven Up Your Desktop** in update 11/20.

- Second, if Windows ever displays a picture you're not keen on, you don't have to put up with it until the next change of picture. Instead, right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Next desktop background** and Windows will immediately switch to one of your other pictures.

Tweak the Look of Your Lock Screen

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  +  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. If you still have the Settings window open at its 'Personalisation' section, click **Lock screen** at the left. (If you closed it, right-click a blank space on your desktop and choose **Personalise** then **Lock screen**.)
2. Below the preview of how your lock screen currently looks, open the drop-down list and choose between three options:

You only see the lock screen briefly



Choose between three picture 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** button and selecting a picture from your own collection.
- **Slideshow:** in this case, rather like the desktop slideshow on page 7, you click **Add a folder** to select a folder containing pictures, and you'll see a different picture from that folder each time your lock screen appears.

Switch on this option

One other nice option on this page is **Show 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. Yet again, keep this Settings window open if you want to continue working through the customisation options, or close it if you've finished.

You might like to set up a screensaver

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.

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 in 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 as 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 a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise** then **Lock screen**.)
2. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the words **Screen saver 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.

Preview screensavers and adjust settings



When should it start?



Choose when your screen goes to sleep

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 settings**.
7. At the top of the page, below the large word 'Screen' 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.

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

Each time you sign into Windows 10, you'll see your 'account picture' above 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 far-left (the topmost of that little column of icons). On the menu that opens, choose **Change account settings**.
2. This opens the Settings app at a page titled 'Your info'. Scroll down the page a little way and you'll see a 'Create your picture' heading. Below this, click on **Browse for one**.
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 for one** again and try something different.)

Personalise
Windows with
your own photo



Choose a picture
from your
collection

Pin Your Most-Used Programs to the Taskbar

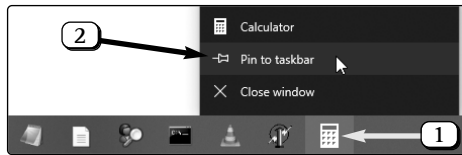
Make your taskbar as helpful as possible

As well as making your PC look more attractive, you can personalise it in other ways, and an important one is to make sure your taskbar is serving you as well as it can. The way you do that is to 'pin' all your most-used programs to it so that they're always just one click away when you need them.

There are two ways to 'pin' programs to your taskbar, and you can use (and combine) them as you like:

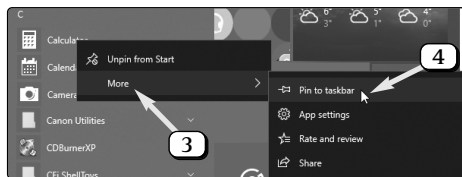
Open a program and then pin it

- **Method 1:** wait until you next start a favourite program. As it starts, its icon will appear at the end of the taskbar's row of icons to indicate it's running. Right-click it (1) and choose **Pin to taskbar** (2), and that icon will stay on the taskbar permanently, even after you close the program.



Find programs on the Start menu and pin them

- **Method 2:** open the Start menu and go in search of programs you use regularly. When you find one, right-click it, move the mouse to **More** (3) and choose **Pin to taskbar** (4). An icon for this program will be added to the end of the taskbar's row of icons.



Remove an unneeded program

You can change the order of these icons just by dragging them right or left along the taskbar. If you ever decide that one of these icons no longer needs to appear on your taskbar, you can remove it easily: just right-click it and choose

Unpin from taskbar. If the program isn't currently running, the icon disappears instantly; if it is, the icon disappears when you close it.

Give Windows a New Look with Themes

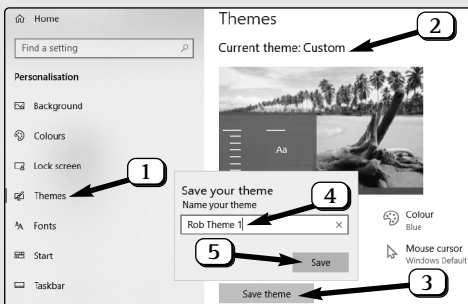
Earlier, we spent some time setting up your desktop background and colour scheme just as you like it, but after a while you might tire of seeing it every day. If so, here's a neat solution: switch to a different 'Theme'.

A 'Theme' consists of a collection of wallpaper pictures, so you'll see a different picture daily (or perhaps every few hours), along with sound effects, a colour scheme and mouse pointers. There are hundreds to choose from, and almost all of them are free to install from the Microsoft Store. Tempted? Here's what to do:

Wallpapers,
sounds, colours
and pointers



1. Right-click a blank space on your desktop and choose **Personalise**, which opens the Settings app at its 'Personalisation' section. At the left of the window, click on **Themes** (1).



2. At the top of the page, does it say **Current theme: Custom** (2)? If it does, it means your current theme hasn't been saved. You might want to return to it at some point, so let's start by saving it. Click on **Save**

Save your
current theme

Visit the Store to find new themes

Click a theme for details and pictures

Click **Get** to install the theme

Switch between themes (or delete them)

- theme (3), and in the little box that appears, type a name for your current theme (4) and click Save (5).
3. Further down this page, you'll see tiles and names of any themes already installed on your PC (including the one you're currently using). To switch to one of these, just click it. But there won't be much here to choose from yet, so let's go in search of more themes: just below that 'Save theme' button, click the words **Get more themes in Microsoft Store**.
 4. This opens the Store app at its 'Windows Themes' page, where you'll find the hundreds of available themes. 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, a little way down, examples of the wallpaper pictures it contains.
 5. 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.
 6. 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 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**.