

ONEDRIVE IN WINDOWS 11

OneDrive is Microsoft's cloud storage service, and it can be accessed from the web, and other mobile devices, Macs, and PCs running Windows 10 or 11. That latter bit is of particular interest to us here: OneDrive is deeply integrated with Windows 11, allowing users to automatically back up and sync content between the cloud and their PCs.

What about storage?

Anyone with a Microsoft account gets 5 GB of free OneDrive storage space. But you can pay more to get more storage: those with a Microsoft 365 Basic (\$19.99 per year) subscription get an additional 100 GB of storage, while those with Microsoft 365 Personal (\$69.99 per year) or Family (\$99.99 per year) subscriptions get an additional 1 TB of OneDrive storage per user. You can compare these offerings on the Microsoft website.

And once you have a Microsoft 365 subscription, you can add additional storage in 200 GB (\$1.99 per month), 400 GB (\$3.99 per month), 600 GB (\$5.99 per month), 800 GB (\$7.99 per month), or 1 TB (\$9.99 per month) allotments. So a Microsoft 365 subscription is the best choice for those who need a lot of storage.

Because Microsoft requires most users to sign in to Windows 11 with a Microsoft account, OneDrive is a key part of the experience.

During Setup, for example, you are told that some key user folders—Desktop, Documents, and Pictures—are being backed up automatically to OneDrive.

And when you open File Explorer, you will see that the files in your OneDrive storage are accessible alongside the local files on your PC.

Best of all, you can configure some or all of it to be available offline, because Windows 11 can sync your OneDrive content using a feature called Files On-Demand.

Configure OneDrive

Because of its deep integration with Windows 11, OneDrive offers a wide range of configuration options. These are available in OneDrive Settings, which requires a multi-step process to find and open.

To do so, locate the OneDrive icon (it resembles a cloud) in the system tray. This might be visible on the Taskbar, but it could also be hidden in the Taskbar overflow area.

Select this icon to open the OneDrive pane. Then, select the Help & Settings icon (it resembles a gear) in the upper right to display a menu. Select the “Settings” item to display OneDrive Settings.

Here, you can access numerous OneDrive options across three main pages—Sync and backup, Account, and About—each of which is accessible from the navigation pane on the left alongside a quick peek at your cloud storage usage and a button so you can manage OneDrive on the web.

Configure OneDrive folder backup

By default, Windows 11 is configured to back up three key user folders—Desktop, Documents, and Pictures—to OneDrive. It does this by redirecting these file system locations to similar locations inside of OneDrive. That is, instead of using C:\Users[user name]\Desktop as the location for your Desktop folder, it will use C:\Users[user name]\OneDrive\Desktop.

Obviously, there are benefits to this feature. For example, anything you store in one of these folders will be backed up to the cloud and will be accessible from any device that supports OneDrive.

Additionally, if you sign into Windows 10 or 11 on another PC, the contents of those folders will be synced to that PC so that those contents will be accessible there as well. You can edit, move, or delete files in those folders and the changes will be reflected everywhere.

That said, some people may not want to back up these folders to OneDrive because they don’t want to use up too much of their OneDrive storage allotment, don’t use those folders anyway, or use other cloud storage services.

However you feel about this feature, you should at least examine how OneDrive backup is configured when you upgrade to Windows 11 (or a new version of Windows 11) or set up Windows 11 on a new PC. And, if desired, disable the automatic backup of one or more of those folders.

To do so, open OneDrive Settings, which displays the Sync and backup page by default. Then, select the “Manage backup” button to display the Sync and protect your folders in OneDrive window. Here, you will see toggle switches for the three folder locations that OneDrive automatically backs up—Documents, Pictures, and Desktop—plus two other important folders in your user account, Music and Videos. You can toggle each folder as you wish and then click “Save changes” if required.

Choose which OneDrive folders appear in Windows 11

By default, File Explorer will display the entire contents of your OneDrive storage in Windows 11. But you can choose to hide one or more folders from File Explorer and display only those folders you will need to access from your PC.

One side effect of this change is that any files in a folder that was syncing to the PC will be deleted from the PC. These files will remain in OneDrive, of course, but doing this will free up storage space on your PC.

To make this change, open OneDrive Settings and navigate to the Account page. Then, select the “Choose folders” button to display the Choose folders window.

Here, you can expand and contract your OneDrive folder hierarchy and deselect those folders you don’t want to see on your PC. Press “OK” when you’re done. Then, open File Explorer and navigate to OneDrive to see the change.

Manage OneDrive notifications

By default, OneDrive can be a bit chatty, in that it displays notification banners for several different reasons, including informational alerts when the service has created an “On this day” slideshow. Some may find these notifications annoying and be tempted to disable them entirely (which you can do from the notification banner’s “Settings” [“...”] link or in the Settings app at System > Notifications). But you can also configure which types of notifications that OneDrive displays instead.

To do so, open OneDrive Settings and navigate to the Notifications page. Toggle the notifications you don’t wish to see to “Off.”

Disable OneDrive

If you don’t use OneDrive, you may as well disable it. This way, the app doesn’t auto-start when Windows boots, and you won’t see a OneDrive entry in File Explorer.

To do so, open OneDrive Settings, navigate to the Account page, and select the “Unlink this PC” link. Click “Unlink account” when prompted. Then, close the Set up OneDrive window that appears.

Next, open Task Manager (quickest way: press CTRL + SHIFT + ESC) and navigate to the Startup view. Locate the Microsoft OneDrive entry in the list, right-click it, and choose “Disable.” Then, restart your PC.

Configure how OneDrive works in File Explorer

Because most of your interactions with your OneDrive content occurs in File Explorer, that application also offers a few OneDrive-related options you can configure.

Make OneDrive the default home page in File Explorer

If you use OneDrive extensively, you may wish to make OneDrive the default home page in File Explorer. When you make this change, File Explorer will navigate to the root of OneDrive every time it’s launched, rather than the default Home view.

To make this change, open File Explorer, select the See more (“...”) command bar item, and then select “Options” from the menu that appears. The Folder Options window will appear. Here, select “[user name] - Personal” from the “Open File Explorer to:” drop-down and then select “OK.”

Change where OneDrive is located on your PC

By default, Windows 11 places your OneDrive folder inside of your user account folder structure, at C:\Users[user name]\OneDrive. This isn’t something you need to think about all that often, since File Explorer provides a link to OneDrive in its navigation bar. But you can move OneDrive to a new location if you’d like. For example, those with desktop PCs sometimes have two drives, with a solidstate drive as the system disk (C:) and a large, traditional hard drive (D:) that’s used for data. And you may wish to move OneDrive from C:\ to that larger D:\ drive.

To do so, open OneDrive settings and navigate to the Account tab. Then, select the “Unlink this PC” link. Windows will prompt you to explain what will happen if you proceed.

Select “Unlink account.” A Set up OneDrive window will appear.

Enter the email address for your Microsoft account as prompted and handle any two-step authentication requirements. Then, step through a series of mostly promotional windows until you arrive at one titled “Your OneDrive folder.”

Here, you will find a link, “Change location,” that lets you choose a new location for the OneDrive folder. Simply use the Choose your OneDrive location window—a renamed Open file dialog window— to choose a new location. Note that a OneDrive folder will be created for you in whatever location you choose.

After this, you will need to step through several other windows in which you can configure OneDrive folder backup and then learn more about OneDrive. When you’re done, File Explorer will open to OneDrive, which is now in its new location on your PC.

The original OneDrive folder remains on your PC after this change, and it will include any files you downloaded or synced to this PC. You can leave it there, of course, but if you delete it, it will free up whatever storage space it is taking up.