WINDOWS 10'S OPTIONAL FEATURES AND HOW TO MANAGE THEM

Windows 10 comes with a number of "optional" features that you can turn on or off through the Windows Features dialog. Many of these features are intended for business networks and servers, while some are useful to everyone. Here's an explanation of what each feature is for, and how to turn them on or off.
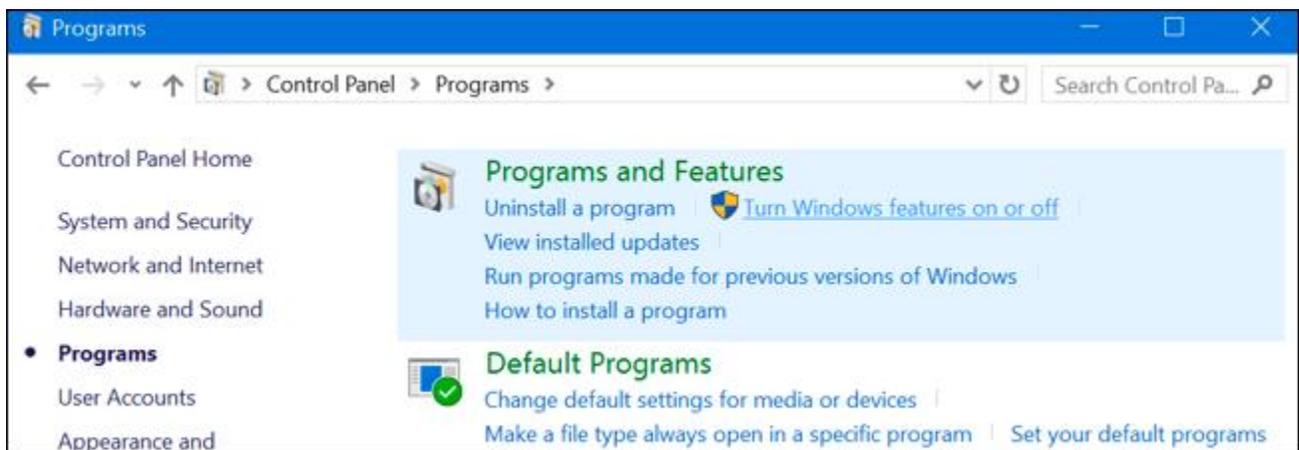
All these Windows 10 features take up space on your hard drive whether you have them enabled or not. But you shouldn't just enable every feature–that could result in security problems and slower system performance. Only enable the features you need and will actually use.

How to View Windows' Optional Features, and Turn Them On and Off

Windows 10 doesn't offer a way to manage these features from the Settings application. You'll have to use the old Windows Features dialog, available in the Control Panel (Windows + X, then P).

From this Windows Features dialog, you can remove access to some default features–for example, you could disable Internet Explorer to hide that legacy web browser from Windows 10. The exact features available to you here depend on the edition of Windows 10 you're using.
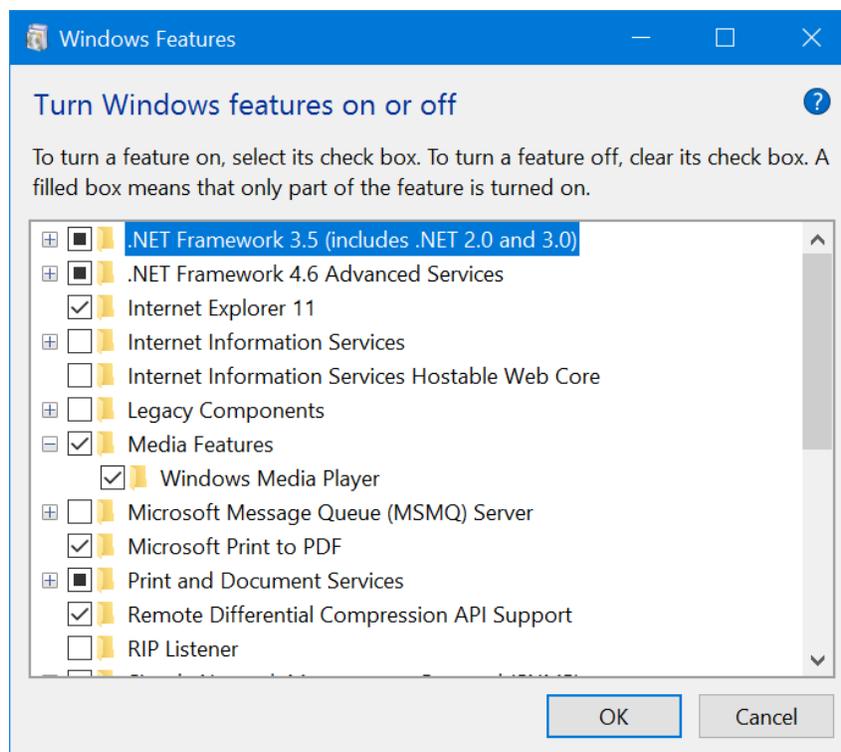
To launch the Control Panel, right-click the Start button or press Windows+X on your keyboard, then select "Control Panel" from the menu that pops up. While in Category view, click on Programs. Finally, select "Turn Windows features on or off" under Programs and Features.

You can also quickly launch this window with a single command. To do so, open the Start menu, type "optionalfeatures", and press Enter. You can also press Windows Key + R to open the Run dialog, type "optionalfeatures", and press Enter.

The list of available Windows features appears. If a feature has a checkmark next to it, it is enabled. If a feature doesn't have a checkmark, it's disabled.

If you see a square in a box, the feature contains multiple sub-features and only some of them are enabled. You can expand the feature to see which of its subfeatures are or aren't enabled.

Click "OK" and Windows will apply whatever changes you made. Depending on the features you enabled or disabled, Windows may require you reboot your computer for the changes to take effect.

You can do this entirely offline and without any Internet connection. The features are stored on your computer and aren't downloaded when you enable them.

What Are Some of the Optional Features on Windows 10 (Home edition)?

So what should you turn on or off? Since most of us are using Windows 10 Home, we only have some features.

- **Hyper-V**: This is Microsoft's virtualization tool. It includes the underlying platform and services and a graphical Hyper-V Manager tool for creating, managing, and using virtual machines.

- **Internet Explorer 11**: If you don't need Microsoft's legacy web browser, you can disable access to Internet Explorer entirely.

- **Isolated User Mode**: A new feature in Windows 10, this allows applications to run in a secure, isolated space if they're programmed to do so. You only need this if the program you need to use requests or requires it.

- **Legacy Components (DIrectPlay)**:DirectPlay was part of DirectX, and was used for networking and multiplayer gaming by some games. Windows 10 should automatically install it when you install an old game that requires DIrectPlay.

- **Media Features (Windows Media Player)**: You can disable access to Windows Media Player from here, if you have no use for it.

- **Microsoft Print to PDF**: Windows 10's included PDF printer can be disabled from here, if you like (but it's so useful, there is little reason why you would).

- **MultiPoint Connector**: This allows your computer to be monitored and managed by the MultiPoint Manager and Dashboard applications. It's only useful on corporate networks, and only if those networks use these management tools.

- **Print and Document Services**: The Internet Printing Client and Windows Fax and Scan features are enabled by default. These enable printing over the network, faxing, and scanning. You can also add support for the LPD and LPR network printing protocols, although these are older and not as common–you'll only need them if you have to connect to a network printer requiring them. The Scan Management feature here is for managing and monitoring scanners connected to a network.

- **Windows PowerShell 2.0**: PowerShell is a more advanced scripting and command-line environment than the old Command Prompt. It's enabled by default, but you can disable PowerShell, if you like.

- **Windows Subsystem for Linux**: In Windows 10's Anniversary Update, this service enables you to use the Ubuntu Bash shell and run Linux applications on Windows 10.

- **Windows TIFF iFilter**: This feature enables the Windows indexing service to analyze .TIFF files and perform optical character recognition (OCR). It's disabled by default as this is a CPU-intensive process. But, if you use a lot of TIFF files–for example, if you regularly scan paper documents to TIFF–this could potentially be a useful feature that allows you to search those scanned documents more easily.

- **XPS Services**: This enables printing to XPS documents. Microsoft created this document format with Windows Vista and it never took off, so you're better off printing to PDF instead. Turn off this feature and the XPS printer will vanish from your list of installed printers (though you can also just right-click the XPS Printer in the Devices & Printers window and select "Remove Device").

- **XPS Viewer**: This application allows you to view XPS documents.

Most Windows users will never need to visit this window and actively manage these features. Windows 10 will automatically install the features programs require, when necessary, though for certain features, it's handy to know where you can turn them on or off. If ever you don't have a feature you think you should, it's a good place to check.