

THE DESKTOP IN WINDOWS 11

The Windows 11 Desktop works much as it did in Windows 10, but it has been updated with new iconography—as evidenced by the Recycle Bin—and a new Themes feature that combines desktop wallpapers, sounds, and colors to provide a more personalized experience.

What’s changed with the Desktop context menus?

When you right-click the Desktop or any of the icons on the Desktop, Windows 11 displays a context menu that provides options related to that specific object.

For example, when you right-click the Recycle Bin, you see one option, “Empty the Recycle Bin” that only applies to that item.

When you right-click an icon for a folder, shortcut, app, or another file, you will see several items that apply to whatever type of object you’ve selected.

This behavior should be familiar to most Windows 10 users. But aside from the obvious new visual style, there are other changes to these context menus in Windows 11. And they are related to Microsoft’s simplification efforts in this release: these menus tend to be much shorter than the similar context menus you saw in Windows 10 because Microsoft has replaced some options with icons, and because there are now fewer options than before.

Make sense of the icons in the new context menus

In Windows 10, the Desktop context menus display text-based options for commands like Cut, Copy, Paste, Rename, Delete, and Share alongside the other items. But in Windows 11, these commands have been changed to icons that all appear in a single row at the top (or bottom) of the context menu.

This can be confusing, and these icons will be as indecipherable as Egyptian hieroglyphics to many.

Fortunately, you can mouse-over each icon to display a tooltip that explains what each does and provides its keyboard shortcut.

Also confusing, the row of icons can appear at the bottom of the context menu instead of the top. But this is purposeful: Windows 11 will always display these icons as close as possible to the mouse cursor, and if the item you’re right-clicking is too close to

the bottom of the Desktop, the context menu that appears will have to display above the mouse cursor. And so the icons will be on the bottom.

Microsoft has also removed some options that were available in the similar Windows 10 context menus. And that can be problematic if you are used to using one of those options.

Fortunately, Windows 11 allows you to display the old Windows 10-style context menus when you right-click the Desktop or an item on the Desktop. You can't switch to these context menus permanently, but you can at least access them on the fly.

To access the Windows 10-style context menu, right-click the Desktop or an item on the Desktop and choose "Show more options." The old context menu, with its text-based commands and missing commands, appears.

Alternatively, you can open this older context menu style directly by holding down the SHIFT key while you right-click.