

THINGS TO DO FIRST IN YOUR WINDOWS 11 COMPUTER

Lower the volume

Microsoft inexplicably configures Windows 11 to output sound at a very high volume. So, be sure to lower the system volume now using the Volume icon in the system tray or, if your PC supports it, via the PC's Volume keys or buttons on your keyboard.

Delete superfluous Microsoft Edge shortcuts

Microsoft really wants you to use its Microsoft Edge browser. And you can tell because it creates shortcuts to it on the Taskbar, in the Start menu, and on the Desktop. That's probably two too many shortcuts, even if you plan to use Microsoft Edge. At the very least, delete the Desktop shortcut. And, if you intend to use another web browser, the Taskbar shortcut as well.

Turn off Do not disturb (Optional)

It's not clear why Microsoft made this change, but you will not receive most notifications until you disable Do not disturb.

To do so, select the date/time display in the far right of the Taskbar to display the Notifications and Calendar panes.

Configure the Desktop theme (Optional)

In addition to supporting Dark and light modes like Windows 10, Windows 11 also sees the return of themes, where each theme is a combination of a background, an accent color, a sound scheme, and a mouse cursor. The default Windows 11 theme displays in Light mode and includes a pleasant "bloom"-inspired background, a medium blue accent color, mellow sounds, and the default mouse cursor. But you can change any or all of it as you like.

To change the theme, or any other aspect of the default Desktop display, open the Settings app and navigate to Personalization. In that view, you will find a set of theme thumbnails and options related to the background, colors, and themes.

Alternatively, you can right-click the Desktop and choose "Personalize" from the context menu that appears to navigate directly to this interface.

Configure File Explorer

While many will find that File Explorer works fine in its default configuration, others may wish to make a few changes based on their needs. Key among these changes are configuring which view File Explorer displays when first run and determining whether the app displays recently-accessed files and folders.

These and other File Explorer features are configured using the Folder Options dialog. To display this dialog, open File Explorer and then select See more (“...”) and then Options.

You can also open File Explorer by pressing WINKEY + E.

To configure the default view, select the drop-down next to “Open File Explorer to:”. There are three choices:

Home. This default view displays your Quick access folders (Desktop, Downloads, Documents, Pictures, Music, and Videos by default, though this can be configured), plus favorite and recently accessed files and folders.

The Quick access folders displayed here also appear under Home in File Explorer’s Navigation pane.

This PC. This more traditional view displays six key user account folders (Desktop, Downloads, Documents, Music, Pictures, and Videos) and any fixed or removable drives and devices.

OneDrive. New to Windows 11 version 22H2, this view displays the root of your OneDrive, which can be synced to your PC for offline use.

In the Privacy section of the General tab in Folder Options, you will also see three options, all enabled by default, that impact how the Home view works. They are:

Show recently used files. When this option is enabled, the documents and files that you accessed most recently on this PC will appear in the Recent section in the Home view.

Show frequently used folders. When this option is enabled, any folders that you use regularly will be added to the Quick access section in the Home view, and to the Home section in the navigation pane.

Show files from Office.com. When this option is selected, any documents and files that you access using Office.com on the web will appear in the Recent section in the Home view.

How you configure File Explorer will be determined by how you use File Explorer. If you like the default behavior, where recently used files and frequently used folders appear automatically in the Home view and, in the case of folders, under Home in the navigation pane, then you may simply want to leave it as-is.

Otherwise, you can change the default view and consider disabling one or more of the Privacy options. For example, you may prefer the This PC view, and disable all three of those latter options.

Check your date and time settings

In the old days, new Windows installs would often default to Pacific Time (where Microsoft's headquarters are) or to whatever time zone your PC maker may have configured. But now Windows 11 tries to automatically detect your location and then set the time and date accordingly. This usually works, but check the time/date display in the far right of the Taskbar just in case.

If either or both are not correct, right-click the date/ time and then select "Adjust date and time" from the context menu that appears. You can make the necessary changes in the Date & time settings window that appears.

Rename your PC

If you didn't create a name for your PC during the Out-of-Box Experience (OOBE), Windows Setup will create a nonsense name. You should rename it now because you will see your PC's name referenced by OneDrive and other Microsoft services on the web and elsewhere.

To do so, right-click on the Start button (or WinKey + X) to display the Quick Access menu, and then choose "System" from the list. In the System settings window that appears, select the "Rename this PC" button and then enter a name that makes sense to you—perhaps Bills-PC, Laptop, or whatever—and click Next. You'll be told you have to reboot the PC. Do so.

(You can't use spaces or most special characters in the PC name.)

Prevent Microsoft Teams from auto-starting

Microsoft has replaced Skype in Windows 11 with the much less desirable Microsoft Teams for consumers. It's highly unlikely you'll want to use this app, since virtually no one does. And yet Microsoft auto-starts Teams in the background every time Windows starts up. It does this so that the Chat icon that it also places in the Taskbar by default will work.

To prevent Teams from silently starting in the background and wasting system resources, right-click the Start button to display the Quick action menu and then select "Task Manager." Then, in Task Manager, navigate to the Startup apps tab.

Locate Microsoft Teams in the list, select it, and then choose "Disable" in Task Manager's toolbar.

Remove unnecessary Taskbar icons

Microsoft adds items like Widgets, Search, Taskbar, and Chat to the Windows 11 Taskbar by default, plus app shortcuts for File Explorer, Microsoft Edge, and Microsoft Store. And your PC maker can add their own app shortcuts as well. If you find these items to be unnecessary, you can remove them.

To remove Widgets, Search, Taskbar, and/or Chat, right-click an empty area of the Taskbar, select "Taskbar settings" from the context menu that appears (it's the only choice), and then deselect the items you don't need.

To remove any app shortcut, right-click the shortcut and choose "Unpin from taskbar" from the context menu that appears.

Use Windows Update to get Windows 11 up-to-date

After that reboot is complete, be sure to check Windows Update—found in Settings (WINKEY + I) > Windows Update—for any updates, rebooting as required and rechecking until there are no more updates to install.

Run your PC maker's support/driver update application

If you have just set up a new PC, check to see whether your PC maker provides a custom application—Dell Update, HP Support Assistant, Lenovo Vantage, or similar—for delivering software and driver updates. After Windows Update is completely up-to-date, use this application to install any updates your PC maker provides.

If your PC uses an Intel microprocessor, you may also want to install the Intel Driver & Support Assistant, which provides regular updates for Intel microprocessors and other chipsets.

Create a recovery drive (Optional)

While Windows comes with various recovery tools, it's possible that the disk on which you installed the operating system could experience a problem, making the built-in tools unavailable. So you may want to create a USB-based recovery drive, which can be used to boot your PC and fix problems, including getting Windows 10 reinstalled if needed.

The easiest way to find this tool is with Start search: Open the Start menu and type *recovery drive*.

In the wizard that appears, be sure to leave the option “Back up system files to the recovery drive” selected.

Should you make a recovery drive?

Not necessarily: your PC has the recovery tools built in, and if you have Windows 11 installation media, that can be used like a recovery drive. And you can always make installation media if you have another PC.

But if you only have one PC and/or just want to be sure you can recover a problematic Windows 11 PC, a recovery drive is your best bet.