

What is the Windows.old Folder and How Do You Delete It?

When you upgraded an old version of Windows to a new version of Windows, you have a Windows.old folder on your computer, and it's wasting a huge amount of space. You can delete it — but not like you'd delete a normal folder.

The Windows.old folder isn't something new with Windows 10. But, before Windows 10, you'd only see it if you purchased a new version of Windows and performed an “upgrade install” on a PC that came with a previous version of Windows.

This folder is created when you upgrade from one version of Windows to another, starting with Windows Vista. The Windows.old folder actually contains all the files and data from your previous Windows installation. It can be used to restore your system to the old version of Windows if you don't like the new version. If you're looking for a specific file that wasn't properly copied to your new Windows 10 installation, you may be able to dig into the Windows.old folder and find it.

Essentially, the Windows.old folder just contains the old Windows system. From the Windows system files to your installed programs and each user account's settings and files, it's all here. The new version of Windows just keeps it around in case you'd like to go back to that older version of Windows or in case you need to dig in and find a file.

But, don't wait too long — Windows will automatically delete the Windows.old folder to free up space after a month. That's the reason why Microsoft gives you only 30 days to change your mind after you have installed Windows 10.

It's easy to downgrade from Windows 10 to Windows 7 or 8.1. After installing Windows 10, you can open Settings (Windows +I), click Update & security, and click Recovery. You'll see a “Get Started” button under “Go back to Windows 7” or “Go back to Windows 8.1”, depending on which version of Windows you had installed before you upgraded.

Click this button and Windows will restore your old Windows operating system, using the Windows.old folder as the source.

Again, as the interface notes, this option is only available for a month after you upgrade. Windows will automatically remove the Windows.old folder to free up

space after a month, so that's how long you have to decide whether you want to stick with your new version of Windows.

How to Recover Individual Files from the Windows.old Folder

If you need to recover individual files from your old Windows installation, you can recover them from the Windows.old folder. This should just be a matter of opening the File Explorer window (Windows +E), accessing the Windows.old folder at C:\Windows.old, and browsing your file system. Your personal files will be located under C:\Windows.old\Users\yourname. From there, you can *copy and paste!*

How to Delete the Windows.old Folder to Free Up Space

The Windows.old folder can take up quite a bit of space. In a best case scenario, it might be 12 GB or so of hard disk space. But it could easily consume 20 GB, or a lot more — it depends on your previous Windows installation and how large it was.

If you try to delete the Windows.old folder from File Explorer like you would any other folder, you will receive an error message. You could potentially bypass this error message by modifying with the Windows.old folder's permissions. However, you shouldn't bother with that — that's not the correct way to remove this folder.

To delete this folder, use the Windows Disk Cleanup tool. On Windows 10, click the Start button, search for "Disk cleanup" in the Start menu, and launch the Disk cleanup application. You can also right-click the C:\ drive in File Explorer, select Properties, and click the "Disk Clean-up" button under the General tab.

Click the "Clean up system files" button. You'll see "Previous Windows installation(s)" appear in the list, and Disk Cleanup will tell you how much space those files are taking up. Check that option and use Disk Cleanup to wipe the previous Windows system files away. You can also use this tool to wipe other unnecessary files taking up space on your system drive.

There's no downside to removing the Windows.old directory. As long as you're happy with your current Windows system and don't want to downgrade — and as long as you're sure you have all your important files and don't need to grab a straggler from the Windows.old folder — you can go ahead and remove it.

Windows will automatically remove the Windows.old folder a month after you upgrade, anyway. All those PCs that upgrade to Windows 10 will eventually have the space used by the Windows.old folder freed up, even if their users never noticed the Windows.old folder and don't know to use the Disk Cleanup tool.