



# Configuring your Gnome desktop

Get your PC looking and working just the way you want it.



THE DEFAULT Ubuntu desktop is called Gnome, and while it's very easy to use and packed with features, it's designed to look quite dry and businesslike by default. If this is what you like, stop reading, because we're going to show you how to customise Gnome's style, colours and functionality to personalise your desktop.

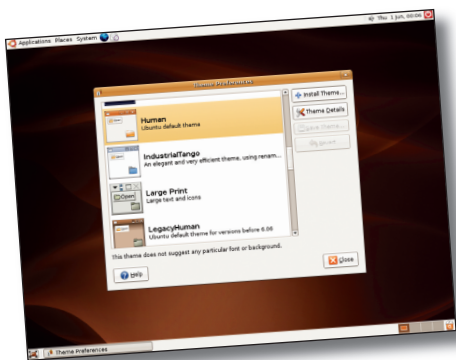


All the Gnome customisation preferences can be found under the System > Preferences menu.

There's a whole lot you can change here, such as the way your background looks or the style of widgets (the common name for buttons and other graphical interface objects), but you should be careful – if design isn't your forte you might find things start to look a bit uneasy on the eye!

## THEMES

Gnome themes encapsulate colours, icons, fonts and widget styles all in one. If you find one you like just as it is, great! If not, you can use a theme as a starting point for your own customisation – you can change the font, for example, but keep everything else (icons, window borders etc) as the default setting. To get started, go to the System menu, choose Preferences, then select Themes from the



You can choose from Gnome's existing list of themes, or customise your own.

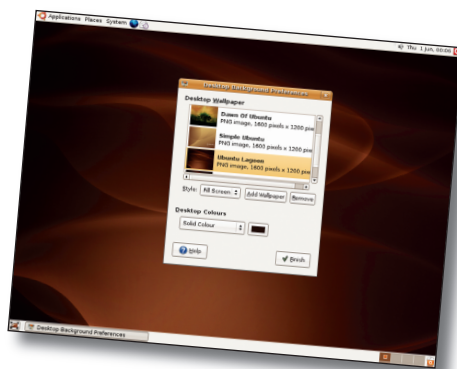
menu. You'll see a list of the themes available, with the default (Human) selected. If you click on a different theme, Gnome will update to show you how the new theme will look – you should see the window border (the bar at the top with the window title) change, plus the colours, the icons, the buttons and more.

But you're not stuck with the default options of a theme. Say you change to Ocean Dream, then decide you actually rather like the Clearlooks window border. Well, you can have both! First select the theme that you want to use as the base for your display. Then click on the Theme Details button, and a window will appear with three tabs at the top: Controls, Window Border and Icons. Select the Window Border tab, and if you chose the Ocean Dream theme you'll see the Sandwich window border selected. Scroll up that list and choose the Clearlooks window border, and you'll see the window borders change to the Clearlooks style with the rest of the interface staying as Ocean Dream.

It's possible to change any components of your new themes, and when you're done Gnome will refer to your modified version as Custom Theme. You can save your custom themes by clicking on the Save Theme button – you just need to give it a name and a short description.

## DESKTOP BACKGROUND

You can change the background image on your desktop using the Desktop Background tool under the System > Preferences menu. You'll see a list of



Gnome ships with lots of wallpapers by default. Drag your own here from Nautilus to change it.

the available background images, and clicking on them will immediately apply the change. Beneath the list is a small selection box that's set to Fill Screen by default. This will stretch the image to fit on the screen either horizontally or vertically, then, if

necessary, tile it where there are gaps. Most of the pictures supplied with Ubuntu are 1600x1200 pixels, and these will be scaled down to fit your screen if you use a lower resolution. Instead of Fill Screen you can choose Scaled, which stretches the image to fit either horizontally or vertically but doesn't tile it to fill any gaps; Centred, which doesn't scale it at all but places the image in the middle of the screen; and Tiled, which prints small images on to the screen multiple times.

At the very top of the list of desktop backgrounds you'll find the No Wallpaper option. This allows you to use colours and gradients rather than a picture by using the Desktop Colours box and picking your favourite colours.

If you want to use a specific picture that you can't find in the list, fret not: just drag your picture from Nautilus into the Desktop Background Preferences window and it will be loaded into the list and selected for you. After playing around with the options, you'll soon find that the best pictures to use for backgrounds are invariably low in contrast (so your icons are easy to see), but you can use *Gimp* to lower image contrast to your satisfaction.

## FONTS

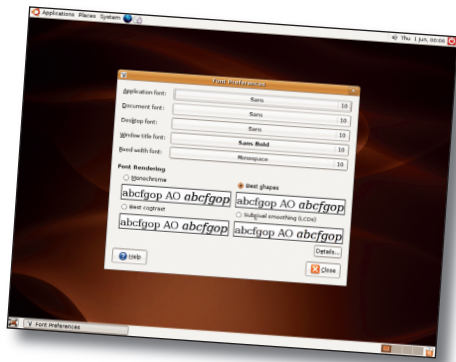
Choosing the desktop fonts should not be taken lightly: they need to be easy to read but also configured correctly for your display. To customise

## WHAT WINDOWS DO

In the spirit of choice, you can control how Gnome works with windows. For example, do you want windows to be selected when you move your mouse over them? Options like these that customise how your windows work can be found under the Window Preference dialog (from the System menu, then Preferences, then Windows).

There are three options in this window: Window Selection (should windows be selected when you move your mouse over them?); Titlebar Action (what happens when you double-click on the title bar?); and Movement Key (which key should be held down to move the window with the mouse?).

You have two options when it comes to Titlebar action: Maximize, which causes the window to fill the whole screen; and Roll Up, which hides the window's contents, showing only the title bar. A movement key is unnecessary unless you have problems dragging the window around by its title bar. If you set one, you'll be able to hold that key down (Alt, or Ctrl for example), and click and drag anywhere on the window to move it.



**You can set font sizes for all Gnome programs through this one screen.**

your fonts, go to the System menu, then choose Preferences and Font. The default window that appears allows you to change the font names and sizes for applications, the desktop, window titles and terminals, but also lets you configure how fonts should be rendered. You can click on any of the font names and sizes to change them, but you should be careful: setting these fonts too large will make your system unusable!

Under Font Rendering you'll see four different possibilities of how your fonts could look. The lowest-quality version is Monochrome, which gives you very basic (but very sharp) fonts. The best default for non-flat-screen monitors is usually Best Contrast, but if you do have an LCD monitor you should try the Subpixel Smoothing option as it may look a bit better. Even more options lie waiting for you under the Details button, but most people should be able to ignore these.

## IDENTIFYING FOLDERS

As you start to use your Linux computer more and more, you'll find it becomes increasingly hard to distinguish your folders in *Nautilus* quickly. A great solution for this is emblems (briefly introduced on page 16). These are virtual stickers that you can apply to folders in *Nautilus* to mark a folder as containing music, as being something you like, or just being special in some way.

First, use *Nautilus* to browse to where you can see the folder you want to customise. Now select the Edit menu and choose Backgrounds And Emblems. On the left you'll see options to set patterns, colours and emblems, so go ahead and choose the Emblems option. The list on the right will show all



**Drag and drop emblems, patterns and colours on to folders that you want to customise.**

the emblems you can assign to folders, such as Certified, Special, Urgent and the perennially popular "Oh no!". You can click on any of these and drag them on to the folders you want to customise, and you can even drop multiple emblems on to a folder if you don't mind the clutter. To remove emblems, right-click on the folder, select Properties, then choose the Emblems tab and un-tick all the emblems you don't want.

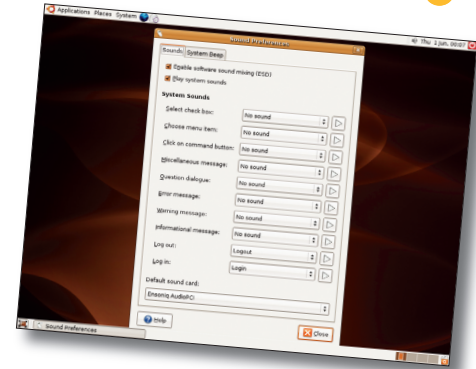
Also in this screen are the pattern and colour options. These can be dragged and dropped in the same way as emblems, except that they need to be dropped on to a blank space in the *Nautilus* window because they customise the look of the background. Although this is fun for a few minutes, it almost invariably ends up being ugly – so there's a Reset button at the top of the list for patterns and colours that you can use to give the folder a plain look again!

## SOUNDS

Why let your eyes have all the fun? Gnome lets you customise the various sounds it produces when things happen on your computer – when new mail arrives, when you log in, or when you get the Game Over screen in the *Gnibbles* game. These options all live under the System menu, under Preferences then Sound.

The Sound Preferences dialog is split across three tabs: General, which enables or disables sounds globally; Sound Events, which lets you customise the sounds that are made when things happen; and System Bell, which lets you set what happens when the computer needs to issue a generic warning.

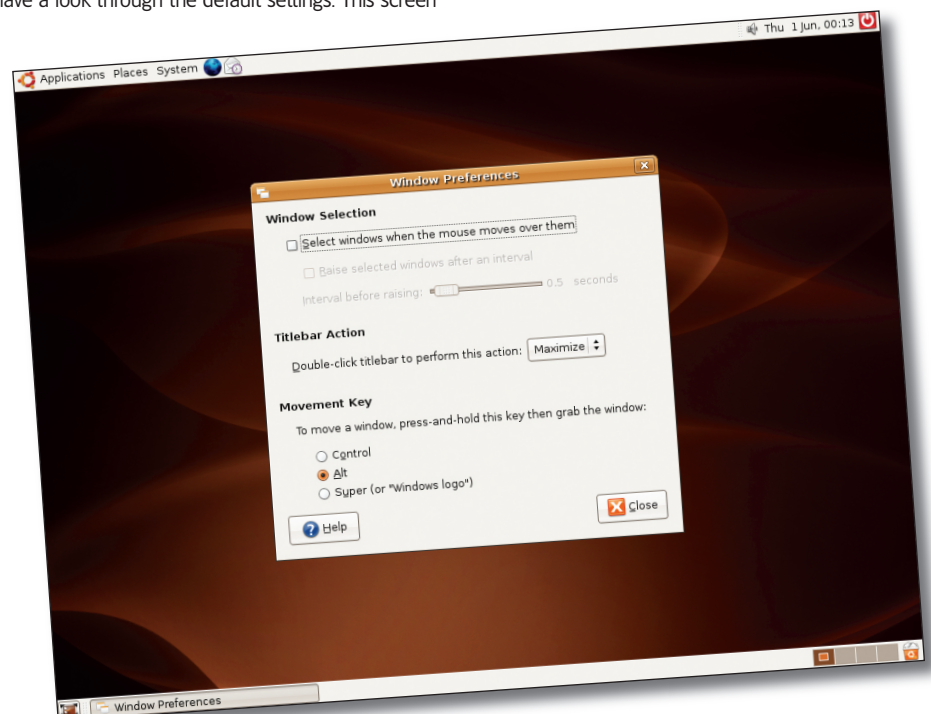
Starting from the General tab, make sure both Enable Sound Server Startup and Sounds For Events are enabled so that Gnome knows it can use your soundcard. Then go to the Sound Events tab, and have a look through the default settings. This screen



**Sound effects can be added to a variety of important Gnome events.**

shows a list of all the applications that have registered sound events with Gnome; so you may have lots of entries if you installed everything! To change a sound, first select the application you want (*Robots* for example). Click on the arrow next to it to open it out (it might be open already), then browse through the list of sound events that are available and pick one. Now look beneath the list for the Sound File selection box, and click on the Browse button to choose a new sound to play. To make sure you selected correctly, use the Play button to hear how it will sound.

The System Bell tab is important if you plan to use the terminal view, as it will sound when you make a mistake. The default option is to put a beep through your speakers, but this is quite irritating. A much better option is to disable the beep (deselect Sound An Audible Bell) and select Visual Feedback. Using this, Gnome will flash either the title bar or the entire screen depending on what you choose. The flash lasts for only a fraction of a second, but it's enough to let you know you made a mistake without a loud beep frightening the life out of you! ●



**Do you want your window to roll up rather than maximise when you double-click on the title bar? Your wish is granted!**