

How to customise... Windows 10

The 24 Changes You Must Make»

» Not happy with how Windows 10 looks and works? Don't worry – you can customise every aspect of it to your liking. Windows 10 expert Jonathan Parkyn explains how

Despite courting controversy – thanks, in part, to its somewhat carefree attitude to users' privacy (see our Cover Feature, Issue 469) – Windows 10 is gaining popularity at an astonishing rate. According to Netmarketshare (<http://netmarketshare.com>) and StatCounter (statcounter.com), which monitor the

worldwide usage of operating systems (OS), only Windows 7 is more popular than Windows 10 (see box below). Microsoft's latest OS reached another major milestone in February when it eclipsed Windows XP for the first time.

People the world over are embracing Windows 10 – partly because they can upgrade for free, but also because the OS looks great and is easy to use. However, even those who love it will admit that Windows 10 is far from perfect. Perhaps

you find the on-screen text too small or difficult to read, or perhaps you don't like the live tiles in the Start menu. Whatever your gripes and grievances, you'll be pleased to know there are easy ways to modify Microsoft's default settings and get Windows 10 looking and working exactly how you want. Over the next few pages we'll show you how to customise, tweak and hack your way through the OS until you've eliminated everything you don't like about it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Tweak the Start menu, taskbar and more to suit you better
- Make Windows 10 easier to see and more comfortable to work with
- Hack Windows 10 with free tools to customise almost anything

OPERATING SYSTEMS MARKET SHARE

- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| • Windows 7 – 52% | • Windows 8.1 – 10% | • Linux – 2% |
| • Windows 10 – 12% | • Windows 8 – 3% | • Windows Vista – 2% |
| • Windows XP – 11% | • Mac OS X 10.11 – 3% | • Others – 5% |

CUSTOMISE THE START MENU

1 Resize the Start menu

Unlike the relatively small panel that pops up when you click Start in Windows 7 or XP, the Windows 10 Start menu can take over a sizable portion of your Desktop. But there's an easy way to cut it down to size. Click Start, then move your mouse over the menu's top or right-hand edge and the cursor will turn into a double-headed arrow. Click and drag downwards from the top edge to adjust the menu's height, or drag left from the right edge to make it narrower.

On the other hand, if you find it too cramped, you can enlarge it by dragging upwards and outwards. And, for a Windows 8-style Start screen, click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Start, and turn on the 'Use Start full screen' option.

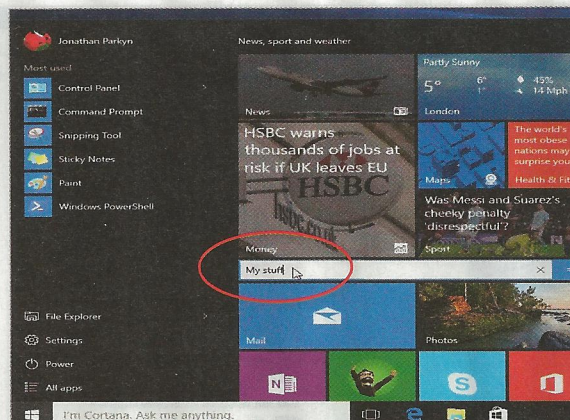
2 Move, resize, remove or add tiles

By default, the Windows 10 Start menu is divided into two halves, with colourful tiles on the right-hand side. But you don't have to stick with this default arrangement. Click a tile, hold your mouse button down, then drag the tile to where you want it. To resize a tile, right-click it then select Resize. In most cases you'll be shown a selection of sizes – Small, Medium, Wide or Large (see screenshot below) – though some tiles don't have all four options.

Right-clicking also lets you 'Unpin from Start', which whisks the tile away. You can add new tiles to the Start menu by right-clicking almost anything you like (programs listed in 'All apps', files, folders, shortcuts on your Desktop and more) then selecting 'Pin to Start'.

3 Turn live tiles on or off

If you'd rather avoid the flickering distraction of animated live tiles, it's easy to switch them off. Click Start, then right-click a live tile and select More,



Group your tiles into categories then name them

then 'Turn live tile off'.

If, on the other hand, you find live tiles a vibrant addition to your Desktop, you can enable additional ones by right-clicking a non-live tile, selecting More, then clicking 'Turn live tile on'. Be aware that not all tiles let you do this; it's usually only those that are associated with Windows Store apps and which deliver regularly updated information, such as, news, sports results and weather forecasts.

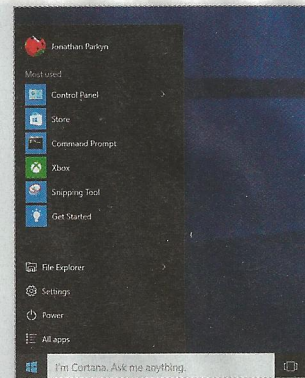
4 Group tiles using your own categories

Windows 10 arranges Start menu tiles into pre-assigned groups: 'Explore Windows', 'Life at a glance' and so on. To rename an existing group, click the heading, select the current text, then type your own group name (ours is the deeply unimaginative 'My stuff' – see screenshot above left). To create a new group, click and drag a tile to the very bottom of the Start menu until a blank, coloured bar appears above it. Release the tile and move your mouse to the blank area above the tile and you'll see 'Name group' appear – click and type a category name.

Drag tiles under your category heading to add them to the group. You can move groups of tiles by clicking the heading and dragging. Dragging all tiles out of a group will automatically remove the heading.

5 Remove live tiles completely

If you *really* dislike Windows 10's tiles, then you can remove them all and shrink the Start menu down to a simple,



Simple and neat – this is what the Start menu looks like without any live tiles

TWEAK THE START MENU WITH FREE TOOLS

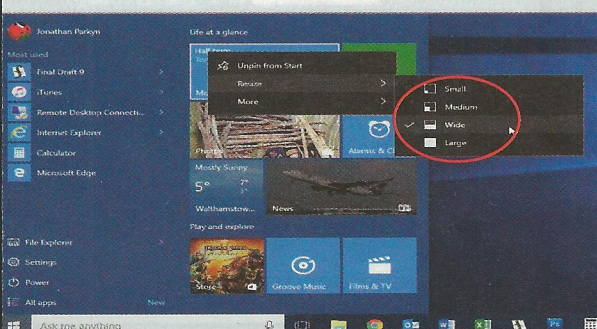
If none of the tweaks we've suggested go far enough and you'd like even more control over your Start menu, you could consider installing a third-party tool. Anyone who has used Windows 8 will probably be familiar with Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net). It effectively banishes Windows 8's Start screen and allows you to restore a classic Windows-style Start menu. But Classic Shell is also compatible with Windows 10, where it lets you configure almost any aspect of your Start menu, including menu styles, jump lists, shutdown button behaviour and more. Follow our Workshop on page 35 to learn more about installing and using it.

There are other, Windows 10-specific alternative tools available, though these tend to cost money – Stardock's Start10 (www.snipca.com/19651), for example, costs about £3.

neat, single-column panel (see screenshot above right). Annoyingly, you'll need to right-click each tile individually and select 'Unpin from Start'. When you've done this, click the right edge of the menu and drag it left.

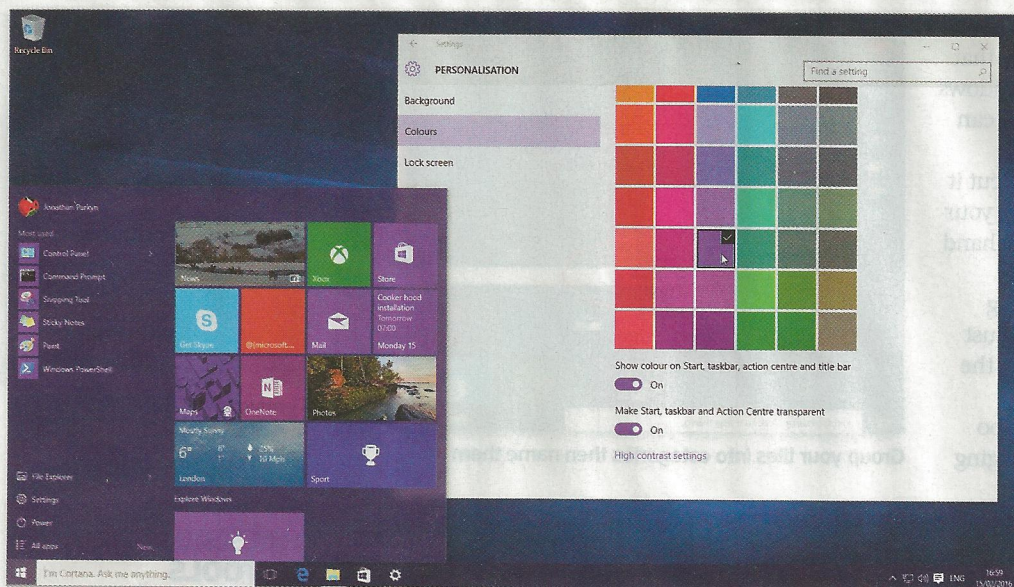
6 Banish adverts from the Start menu

By default, Microsoft advertises 'suggested' apps in the Start menu. To turn these off, click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Start. Click the switch under 'Occasionally show suggestions in Start' to Off. Next, open the Windows Store app, click your account icon, then Settings and click 'Show products on tile' to Off.



Resize a tile by right-clicking it then choosing Small, Medium, Wide or Large

CHANGE THE WAY WINDOWS 10 LOOKS



Pick a colour for your interface that looks nice with your desktop

7 Change your colour scheme

Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Colours. Under 'Choose your accent colour' you can change the colour of the interface's highlights, such as the Start menu tiles. Or you can allow Windows to pick a colour that complements your chosen desktop wallpaper by switching on 'Automatically pick an accent colour from my background'. You can make the interface even more colourful by scrolling to 'Show colour on Start, taskbar, action centre and title bar', and

switching it on. The setting below lets you choose between transparent effects or solid colours for the Start menu, taskbar and Action Centre.

8 Personalise your desktop and lock screen

Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Background. From the Background dropdown menu choose Picture, 'Solid colour' or Slideshow. For Picture and Slideshow, click Browse to locate a file or folder of pictures you want to use, then select your preference from the 'Choose a fit' menu. For Slideshows, choose how frequently the images update from the 'Change picture every' dropdown menu. Enabling Shuffle

randomises the selection. Now click 'Lock screen' on the left. Again, under Background, you can select Picture or Slideshow and browse for images (see screenshot below). But you can also choose 'Windows spotlight' here, which will display random images from Microsoft whenever you lock your PC.

9 Download free themes

Windows 7-style themes – combinations of backdrops, colours and system sounds – are still available in Windows 10, but they're somewhat buried. Click

Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Themes. Click 'Theme settings' to launch the familiar Windows 7 Personalisation Control Panel. A small selection of pre-defined default themes is offered here – click one to apply it. To download additional themes, click the 'Get more themes online' link (see screenshot above right). This will open a web page in your browser, from which you can view and download any themes that take your fancy. They're all free.

10 Add useful icons to your desktop

By default, Windows 10 only shows the Recycle Bin icon on the desktop, but it's

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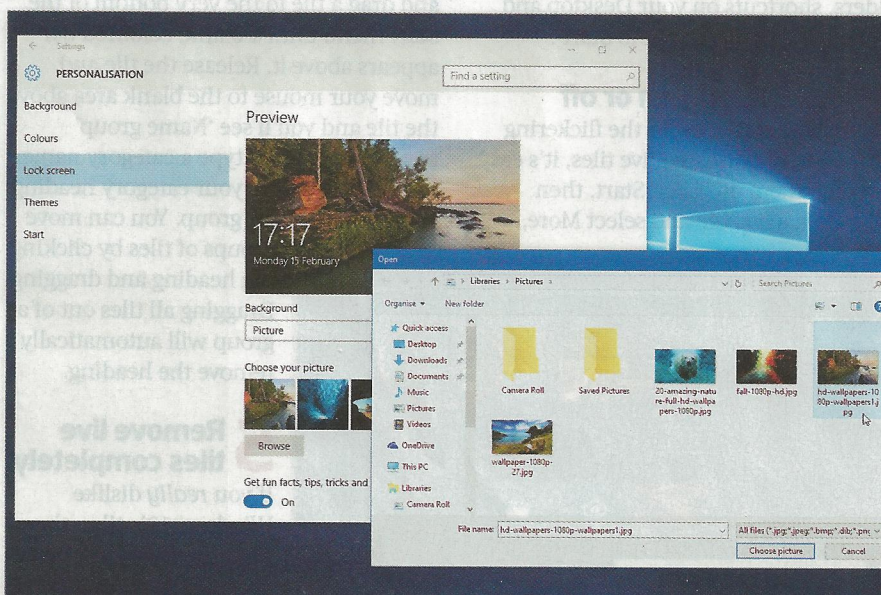
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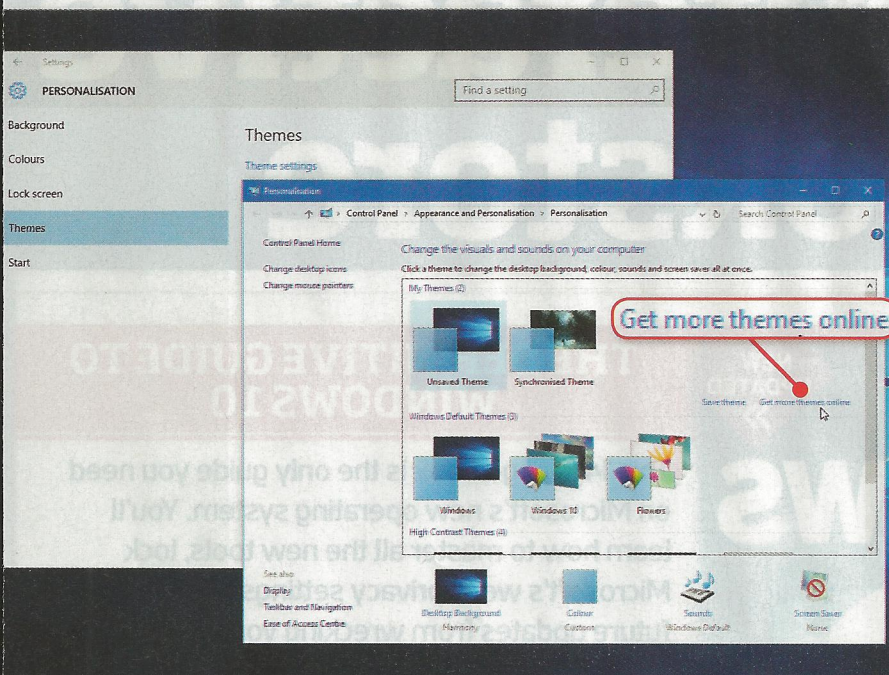
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You can choose your own photos to appear on Windows 10's lock screen



Click 'Get more themes online' to download themes from the web

possible to add more, including a handy link to the Control Panel. Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Themes. Click 'Desktop icon settings' and, in the box that opens, put a tick next to any of the icons you'd like to add (you can also choose User's Files, Network and Computer), then click Apply (see screenshot above right). You can also change the look of the icons themselves – click one of the icons displayed, then click the Change Icon button to select a new one.

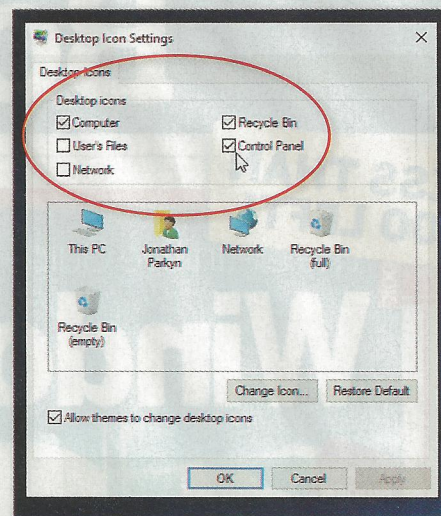
11 Change your mouse cursors

Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, Themes, then click 'Mouse pointer

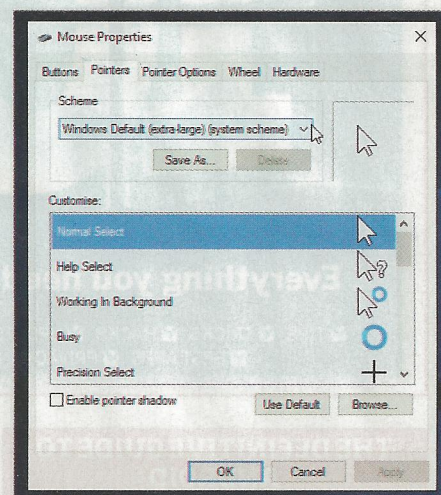
settings'. From the Scheme dropdown menu you can select a variety of alternative cursor styles, including larger variations on the default scheme. This can help if you're having trouble seeing the cursor on your screen. Click Apply when you've made your selection.

Alternatively, in the Customise section, you can click on each individual cursor in your scheme then click Browse to select another one. Adding a drop-shadow to the mouse by ticking the option at the bottom of the box can help make the cursor easier to see.

You can also change how quickly your mouse wheel works – just click the Wheel tab at the top.



You can add several icons to your desktop, including a link to your Control Panel



Windows 10 gives you lots of way to change the mouse cursor (or 'pointer')

MAKE WINDOWS 10 EASIER TO SEE

1 MAKE ICONS AND TEXT BIGGER

Right-click the desktop, select 'Display settings', then use the slider to increase the size of all on-screen elements.

2 MAKE EVERYTHING BIGGER

Right-click the desktop, select 'Display settings', click 'Advanced display settings', then 'Advanced sizing of text and other items'. Under 'Change size of items', click 'set a custom scaling level'. Use the dropdown menu in the ruler window that opens to select your scaling percentage, then click OK, Apply. You'll be prompted to sign out, then sign in again for the setting to take effect.

3 MAKE ONLY TEXT LARGER

Navigate to 'Advanced sizing of text and other items' as described above, then choose the text elements you want to enlarge from the dropdown menu under 'Change the text size only'. Select the font size from the dropdown menu next to it. Click Apply for each element that you decide to change.

4 MAGNIFY TEXT

Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', Magnifier and switch Magnifier on – this will magnify the section of your desktop immediately surrounding your mouse cursor. You can customise the magnification amount

and the tool's behaviour by clicking the magnifying glass icon on your desktop.

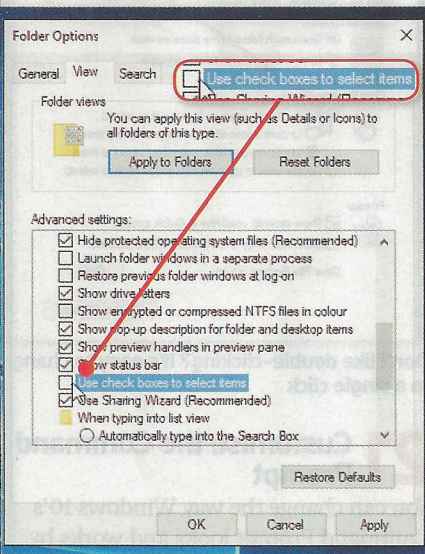
5 USE A HIGH-CONTRAST THEME

Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', then 'High contrast' to select a high-contrast theme from the dropdown menu. Click Apply.

6 CHANGE THE CURSOR'S THICKNESS

As well as making the mouse cursor bigger (see tip 11), you can increase its thickness when it's blinking. Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', then 'Other options' and use the slider.

CHANGE THE WAY WINDOWS 10 WORKS



Untick this option to remove check boxes from icons

12 Get rid of check boxes on icons

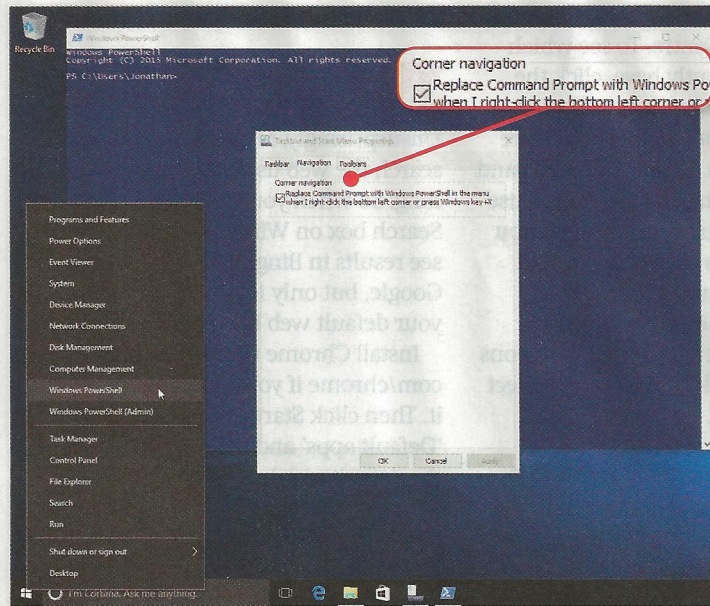
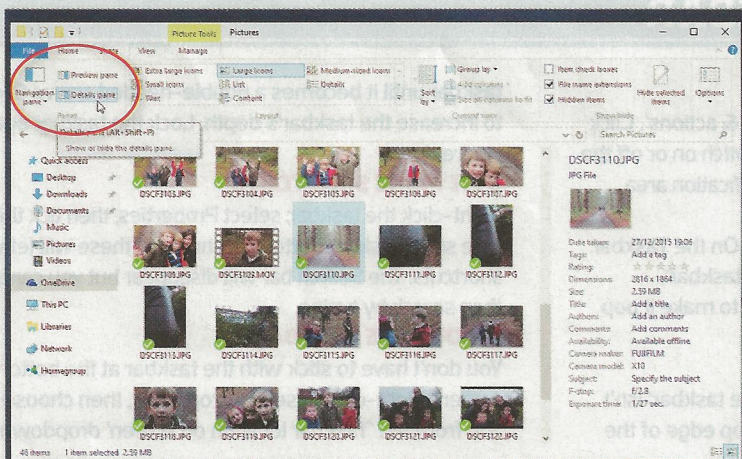
Windows 10's icons display check boxes when you select them, which can be distracting. To remove them click Start, File Explorer. Then click View, Options and, in the box that appears, click the View tab. In the 'Advanced settings' section, scroll down to 'Use check boxes to select items' – untick this, then click OK (see screenshot above).

13 Change the way File Explorer works

The new version of File Explorer is highly customisable. Click Start, File Explorer, then click the View tab for some options. Use the top-left Panes section to add or remove the Navigation, Preview or Details panes (see screenshot below).

The Details pane is particularly useful – it sits on the right and provides lots of information about any file you click

Add or remove Navigation, Preview or Details from the Panes section in File Explorer



Tick this option to replace Command Prompt with PowerShell

without you having to open it. In the Layout section, you can choose how items are displayed in the main part of the window. You could switch to extra-large icons, for example, or choose Details, which lets you sort items by name, date, type, size and more. You can use the options in the 'Current view' section to sort or group items the way you want.

14 Add a handy shortcut to Windows PowerShell

The Windows PowerShell is a very useful command-line console that lets you do everything the Command Prompt can, and more besides. And you can customise Windows 10's shortcuts to go to PowerShell instead of the Command Prompt, if you prefer. Right-click the taskbar then select Properties. In the box that opens, click the Navigation tab, tick the 'Replace Command Prompt with PowerShell...' option (see screenshot

above), then click OK. Now, when you right-click the Start button, you'll find a useful shortcut to the PowerShell. You can also open the PowerShell by using the Windows key+X keyboard shortcut.

15 Switch File Explorer back to My Computer

Windows 10's new Quick Access view is how File Explorer appears when you open it. It displays a selection of frequently used folders and recently used files. Quick Access can be useful, but it's very different from the old My Computer-style view used in Windows XP and 7, which displayed your PC's drives and devices. To revert to using this instead, click Start, File Explorer, View, then click Options. On the General tab, select This PC from the 'Open File Explorer to' dropdown menu and click OK.

16 Switch to single-clicking

Double-clicking has long been the default way to launch programs and open files in Windows. But there's no reason to stick with this if you don't like it – it's easy to change to single-clicking. Click Start, File Explorer, View, then click Options. On the General tab, click 'Single-click to open an item (point to select)' (see top-right screenshot on page 56) to select it, then select 'Underline icon titles only when I point at them' and click OK. This will give you a more web browser-like experience, where items you point to on the desktop or in File Explorer will display a line underneath them to show you've selected them. Clicking items once will open them.

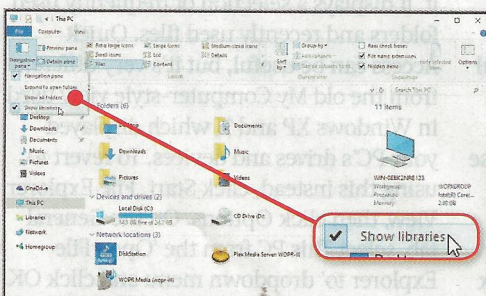
17 Customise Quick Actions

Windows 10's Quick Actions menu – not to be confused with Quick Access – is a selection of shortcuts that appears in Action Centre. To see which shortcuts you currently have, click the speech-bubble icon in the notification area. The four buttons at the bottom are your Quick Actions. You can click Expand to see more, but you can also re-organise them so that the four Quick Actions you use most are always available, without having to click Expand. Click Start, Settings, System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Here, click each of the four icons shown under 'Quick actions', then select the items you want.

18 Create another desktop

Thankfully, the desktop is at the heart of how you use Windows 10 – a relief following Windows 8's disorientating Start screen interface. Proving that you can never get too much of a good thing, Windows 10 lets you create multiple desktops that you can switch between using the Task View button on the taskbar or via the Windows key+Tab keyboard shortcut.

This can be a very handy way to keep organised while you work. For example, it can prevent your main desktop from getting cluttered with web browsers or media players by letting you position



Click 'Show libraries' to get Windows 7's libraries in Windows 10

them on a different screen – even if you have just one monitor. To create another desktop, click the Task View button, then click 'New desktop' on the right.

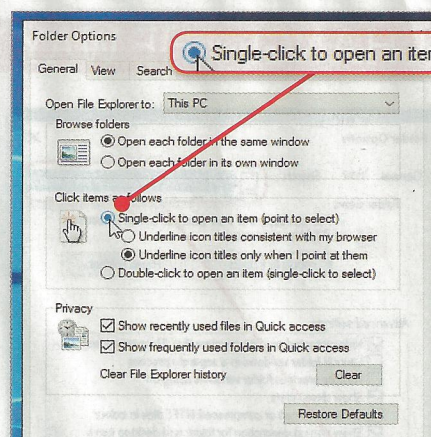
19 Change Windows 10's default search engine

Unsurprisingly, Microsoft wants you to search the web using its search engine Bing. So when you type anything into the Search box on Windows 10's taskbar, you see results in Bing. You can change this to Google, but only if you set Chrome as your default web browser instead of Edge.

Install Chrome from www.google.com/chrome if you don't already have it. Then click Start, Settings, System, 'Default apps' and make sure Chrome is the default web browser. Open Chrome and go to www.snipca.com/19662 – this will take you to the page for Chrometana, a Chrome extension that redirects Bing searches to the search engine of your choice. Click 'Add to Chrome', then 'Add extension', then select Google (or your preferred search engine) from those listed. Close Chrome and try a web search from Windows' taskbar Search box – you should now see a page of Google results.

20 Show Libraries in File Explorer

Windows 7 trained us to use Libraries – centralised locations for files of specific types, such as Documents, Pictures, Music and Videos. But just as we were all getting used to them, Windows 10 came along and relegated them in File Explorer, leaving them out of the left-hand Navigation pane altogether. To get them back, click Start, File Explorer, then View. Click the 'Navigation pane' button then tick the 'Show libraries' option (see screenshot left).



Don't like double-clicking? It's easy to change to a single click

21 Customise the Command Prompt

You can change the way Windows 10's Command Prompt looks and works by clicking Start, typing `cmd` and pressing Enter (see screenshot below). Right-click the Command Prompt window's title bar then select Properties. In the box that opens, select the 'Enable Ctrl key shortcuts' option. This lets you copy and paste text using the Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V keyboard shortcuts – handy if you're copying command lines from a web page. Click the Font tab to change the size of the text and the style of font used. You can make the text larger if you're having trouble reading it.

Also useful is the Colours tab, which lets you customise the colour of the background and text. The Opacity slider at the bottom lets you make the entire window semi-transparent. Click OK.



Open Command Prompt by clicking Start, typing `cmd` and pressing Enter

CUSTOMISE THE TASKBAR

1 DITCH UNNECESSARY ICONS

Click Start, Settings, System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Click 'Select which icons appear on the taskbar' to switch on or off the icons that are permanently displayed in the notification area.

2 SET THE TASKBAR TO AUTO-HIDE

Right-click the taskbar, then select Properties. On the Taskbar tab, put a tick in the box next to 'Auto-hide the taskbar'.

Move your mouse to the bottom of the screen to make it pop up again.

3 MAKE THE TASKBAR BIGGER

Right-click the taskbar and make sure 'Lock the taskbar' isn't ticked. Then move your mouse pointer to the top edge of the

taskbar until it becomes a double-headed arrow. Click and drag to increase the taskbar's depth. Lock the taskbar again when you're done.

4 FIT MORE SHORTCUTS

Right-click the taskbar, select Properties, then tick the box next to 'Use small taskbar buttons' – shrinking these will let you fit more shortcuts. The Search bar will disappear but you can still click Start, then search by typing.

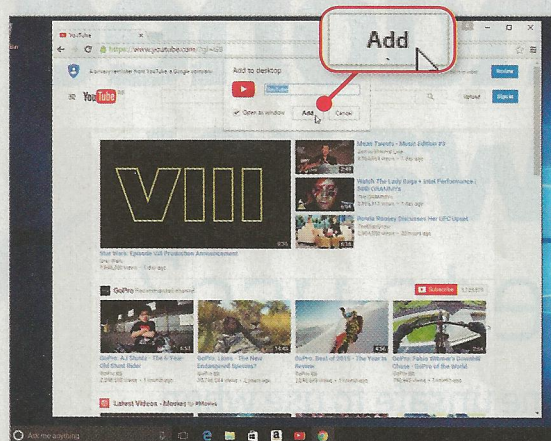
5 MOVE THE TASKBAR

You don't have to stick with the taskbar at the bottom of the screen. Right-click it, select Properties, then choose Left, Right or Top from the 'Taskbar location on screen' dropdown menu.

HACK WINDOWS 10 TO MAKE IT BETTER

22 Turn any website into a Windows 10 app

This hack makes use of a feature in Chrome that lets you convert websites into app-like shortcuts that you can add to your taskbar or Start menu. Install Chrome from www.google.com/chrome if you don't already have it, then open the browser and navigate to the site you want to convert. Click the top-right menu button (three horizontal lines), then select 'More tools', 'Add to desktop' (this may appear as 'Add to taskbar'). In the small window that opens, give your app a name, make sure the 'Open as window' option is ticked, then click Add (see screenshot right). Now right-click on the new desktop icon that appears, then select 'Pin to taskbar'. Whenever you click your new taskbar icon, your website will open in its own window, just like an app.



If you use Chrome, it's easy to turn a website into a Windows 10 app



You can create a toolbar of shortcuts to appear when you right-click the taskbar

23 Unlock Windows 10's secret 'dark' mode

Windows 10 has a hidden 'dark' theme that you may like (some people think it adds a touch of class to the operating system - see screenshot below). To activate it, you need to hack the Registry, so don't try this unless you're comfortable with that, and make sure you back up first. If you're happy to proceed, click Start, type **regedit** and press Enter. When the Registry

Editor opens, navigate to **HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Themes\Personalize**. Right-click a blank space on the right of the window and select New, then 'DWORD (32-bit) Value'. A new value will appear with its name highlighted in blue. Type **AppsUseLightTheme** to rename it. Now close the Registry Editor, log out of your user account, then log back into Windows.

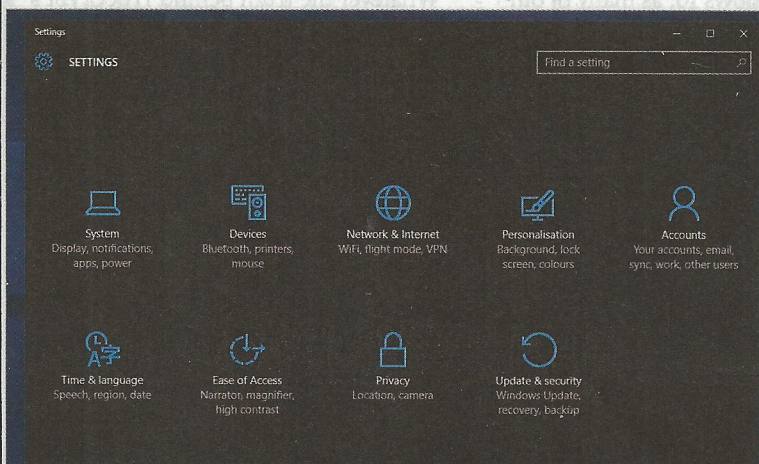
Not all apps will work with the dark theme, but many will, including the Settings app. To switch back, navigate to the **AppsUseLightTheme** Value in the Registry Editor, right-click it and select

Modify. Change the 'Value data' to 1, then click OK. Log out and in again.

24 Create a toolbar of shortcuts

Open File Explorer, navigate to your Documents folder, then create a new folder. Name it 'Shortcuts'. Now open a second File Explorer window and navigate to **C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs**. Work your way through the folders to select any programs and tools that you want to add to your toolbar. In each case, right-click the icon, select Copy, then right-click in your empty Shortcuts folder and select Paste - don't drag and drop anything. You can add shortcuts for anything to your folder - programs, web pages, files and more.

When you're done, right-click the taskbar and select Toolbars, then 'New toolbar'. In the window that opens, navigate to your Shortcuts folder, then click 'Select folder'. You should see the word Shortcuts towards the right of your taskbar - click the double arrow next to it to see all your shortcuts in a menu. **ca**



Like this 'dark' mode? Hack the Registry to activate it

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