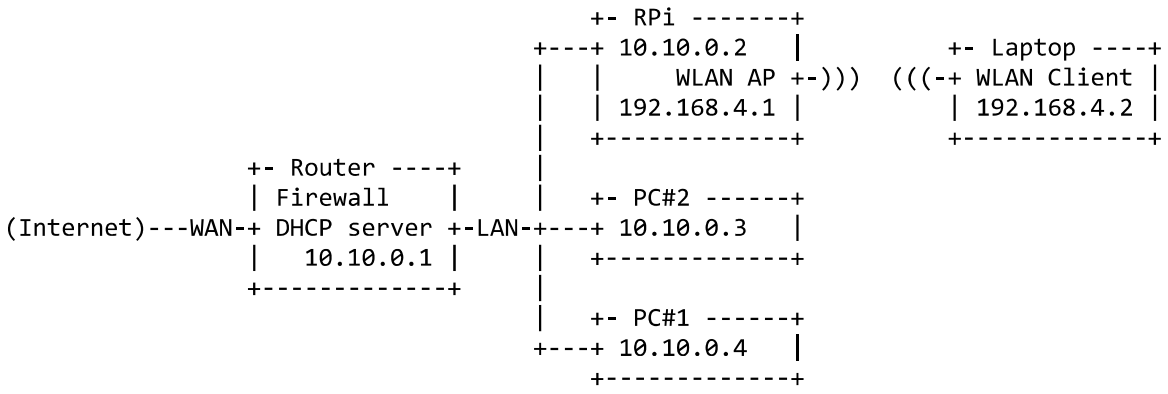
Setting up a Raspberry Pi as a routed wireless access point

A Raspberry Pi within an Ethernet network can be used as a wireless access point, creating a secondary network. The resulting new wireless network is entirely managed by the Raspberry Pi.

If you wish to extend an existing Ethernet network to wireless clients, consider instead setting up a bridged access point.



A routed wireless access point can be created using the inbuilt wireless features of the Raspberry Pi 4, Raspberry Pi 3 or Raspberry Pi Zero W, or by using a suitable USB wireless dongle that supports access point mode. It is possible that some USB dongles may need slight changes to their settings. If you are having trouble with a USB wireless dongle, please check the forums.

This documentation was tested on a Raspberry Pi 3B running a fresh installation of Raspberry Pi OS Buster.

Before you start

- Ensure you have administrative access to your Raspberry Pi. The network setup will be modified as part of the installation: local access, with screen and keyboard connected to your Raspberry Pi, is recommended.
- Connect your Raspberry Pi to the Ethernet network and boot the Raspberry Pi OS.
- Ensure the Raspberry Pi OS on your Raspberry Pi is up-to-date and reboot if packages were installed in the process.
- Take note of the IP configuration of the Ethernet network the Raspberry Pi is connected to:
  - In this document, we assume IP network `10.10.0.0/24` is configured on the Ethernet LAN, and the Raspberry Pi is going to manage IP network `192.168.4.0/24` for wireless clients.
  - Please select another IP network for wireless, e.g. `192.168.10.0/24`, if IP network `192.168.4.0/24` is already in use by your Ethernet LAN.
- Have a wireless client (laptop, smartphone, ...) ready to test your new access point.

Install the access point and network management software

In order to work as an access point, the Raspberry Pi needs to have the `hostapd` access point software package installed:

```
sudo apt install hostapd
```

Enable the wireless access point service and set it to start when your Raspberry Pi boots:

```
sudo systemctl unmask hostapd
sudo systemctl enable hostapd
```

In order to provide network management services (DNS, DHCP) to wireless clients, the Raspberry Pi needs to have the `dnsmasq` software package installed:

```
sudo apt install dnsmasq
```

Finally, install `netfilter-persistent` and its plugin `iptables-persistent`. This utilty helps by saving firewall rules and restoring them when the Raspberry Pi boots:

```
sudo DEBIAN_FRONTEND=noninteractive apt install -y netfilter-persistent iptables-persistent
```

Software installation is complete. We will configure the software packages later on.

Set up the network router

The Raspberry Pi will run and manage a standalone wireless network. It will also route between the wireless and Ethernet networks, providing internet access to wireless clients. If you prefer, you can choose to skip the routing by skipping the section "Enable routing and IP masquerading" below, and run the wireless network in complete isolation.

Define the wireless interface IP configuration

The Raspberry Pi runs a DHCP server for the wireless network; this requires static IP configuration for the wireless interface (`wlan0`) in the Raspberry Pi. The Raspberry Pi also acts as the router on the wireless network, and as is customary, we will give it the first IP address in the network: `192.168.4.1`.

To configure the static IP address, edit the configuration file for `dhcpcd` with:

```
sudo nano /etc/dhcpcd.conf
```

Go to the end of the file and add the following:

```
interface wlan0
    static ip_address=192.168.4.1/24
    nohook wpa_supplicant
```

Enable routing and IP masquerading

This section configures the Raspberry Pi to let wireless clients access computers on the main (Ethernet) network, and from there the internet. **NOTE:** If you wish to block wireless clients from accessing the Ethernet network and the internet, skip this section.

To enable routing, i.e. to allow traffic to flow from one network to the other in the Raspberry Pi, create a file using the following command, with the contents below:

```
sudo nano /etc/sysctl.d/routed-ap.conf
```

File contents:

```
# https://www.raspberrypi.org/documentation/configuration/wireless/access-point-routed.md
# Enable IPv4 routing
```

```
net.ipv4.ip_forward=1
```

Enabling routing will allow hosts from network `192.168.4.0/24` to reach the LAN and the main router towards the internet. In order to allow traffic between clients on this foreign wireless network and the internet without changing the configuration of the main router, the Raspberry Pi can substitute the IP address of wireless clients with its own IP address on the LAN using a "masquerade" firewall rule.

- The main router will see all outgoing traffic from wireless clients as coming from the Raspberry Pi, allowing communication with the internet.
- The Raspberry Pi will receive all incoming traffic, substitute the IP addresses back, and forward traffic to the original wireless client.

This process is configured by adding a single firewall rule in the Raspberry Pi:

```
sudo iptables -t nat -A POSTROUTING -o eth0 -j MASQUERADE
```

Now save the current firewall rules for IPv4 (including the rule above) and IPv6 to be loaded at boot by the `netfilter-persistent` service:

```
sudo netfilter-persistent save
```

Filtering rules are saved to the directory `/etc/iptables/`. If in the future you change the configuration of your firewall, make sure to save the configuration before rebooting.

Configure the DHCP and DNS services for the wireless network

The DHCP and DNS services are provided by `dnsmasq`. The default configuration file serves as a template for all possible configuration options, whereas we only need a few. It is easier to start from an empty file.

Rename the default configuration file and edit a new one:

```
sudo mv /etc/dnsmasq.conf /etc/dnsmasq.conf.orig
sudo nano /etc/dnsmasq.conf
```

Add the following to the file and save it:

```
interface=wlan0 # Listening interface
dhcp-range=192.168.4.2,192.168.4.20,255.255.255.0,24h
                # Pool of IP addresses served via DHCP
domain=wlan     # Local wireless DNS domain
address=/gw.wlan/192.168.4.1
                # Alias for this router
```

The Raspberry Pi will deliver IP addresses between `192.168.4.2` and `192.168.4.20`, with a lease time of 24 hours, to wireless DHCP clients. You should be able to reach the Raspberry Pi under the name `gw.wlan` from wireless clients.

There are many more options for `dnsmasq`; see the default configuration file (`/etc/dnsmasq.conf`) or the online documentation for details.

Ensure wireless operation

Countries around the world regulate the use of telecommunication radio frequency bands to ensure interference-free operation. The Linux OS helps users comply with these rules by allowing applications to be configured with a two-letter "WiFi country code", e.g. `US` for a computer used in the United States.

In the Raspberry Pi OS, 5 GHz wireless networking is disabled until a WiFi country code has been configured by the user, usually as part of the initial installation process (see wireless configuration pages in this section for details.)

To ensure WiFi radio is not blocked on your Raspberry Pi, execute the following command:

```
sudo rfkill unblock wlan
```

This setting will be automatically restored at boot time. We will define an appropriate country code in the access point software configuration, next.

Configure the access point software

Create the `hostapd` configuration file, located at `/etc/hostapd/hostapd.conf`, to add the various parameters for your new wireless network.

```
sudo nano /etc/hostapd/hostapd.conf
```

Add the information below to the configuration file. This configuration assumes we are using channel 7, with a network name of `NameOfNetwork`, and a password `AardvarkBadgerHedgehog`. Note that the name and password should **not** have quotes around them. The passphrase should be between 8 and 64 characters in length.

```
country_code=GB
interface=wlan0
ssid=NameOfNetwork
hw_mode=g
channel=7
macaddr_acl=0
auth_algs=1
ignore_broadcast_ssid=0
wpa=2
wpa_passphrase=AardvarkBadgerHedgehog
wpa_key_mgmt=WPA-PSK
wpa_pairwise=TKIP
rsn_pairwise=CCMP
```

Note the line `country_code=GB`: it configures the computer to use the correct wireless frequencies in the United Kingdom. **Adapt this line** and specify the two-letter ISO code of your country. See Wikipedia for a list of two-letter ISO 3166-1 country codes.

To use the 5 GHz band, you can change the operations mode from `hw_mode=g` to `hw_mode=a`. Possible values for `hw_mode` are:

- a = IEEE 802.11a (5 GHz) (Raspberry Pi 3B+ onwards)
- b = IEEE 802.11b (2.4 GHz)
- g = IEEE 802.11g (2.4 GHz)

Note that when changing the `hw_mode`, you may need to also change the `channel` - see Wikipedia for a list of allowed combinations.

Run your new wireless access point

Now restart your Raspberry Pi and verify that the wireless access point becomes automatically available.

```
sudo systemctl reboot
```

Once your Raspberry Pi has restarted, search for wireless networks with your wireless client. The network SSID you specified in file `/etc/hostapd/hostapd.conf` should now be present, and it should be accessible with the specified password.

If SSH is enabled on the Raspberry Pi, it should be possible to connect to it from your wireless client as follows, assuming the `pi` account is present: `ssh pi@192.168.4.1` or `ssh pi@gw.wlan`

If your wireless client has access to your Raspberry Pi (and the internet, if you set up routing), congratulations on setting up your new access point!

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