How to Hide Files and View Hidden Files on Mac OS X

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Macs offer a way to hide files and folders, just like other operating systems. But Mac OS X hides these options and doesn't make it as easy as it is on Windows and Linux.

To hide a file or folder, you'll need to set the "hidden" attribute for it. The Finder and other Mac apps will then ignore and not display this file or folder by default.
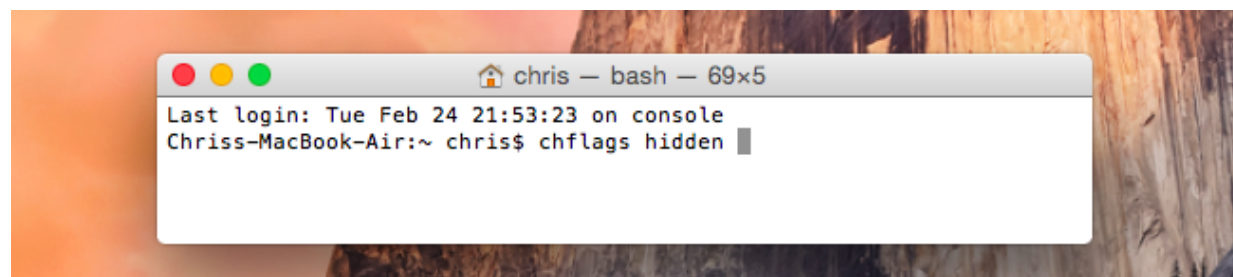
Hide a File or Folder on a Mac

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Rather than hiding an individual file — although you can do that — you may want to create a hidden folder. We'll do that for this
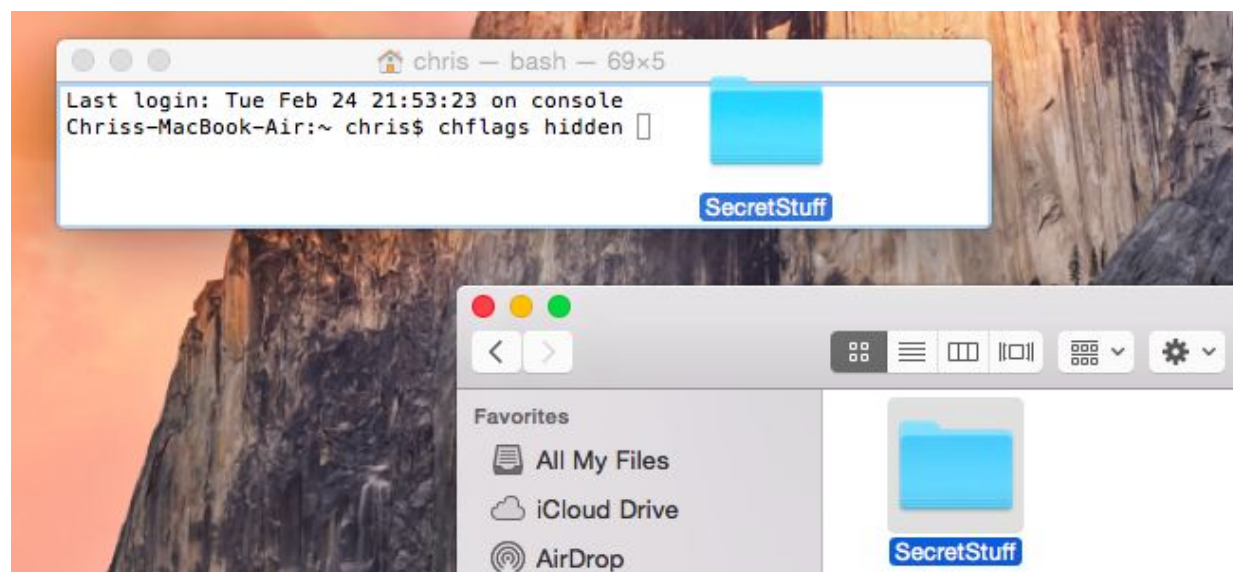
example, although this trick will also work to hide individual files.

First, open a terminal window — press Command+Space, type Terminal, and press Enter. In the terminal, type the following command, including a space at the end of it:
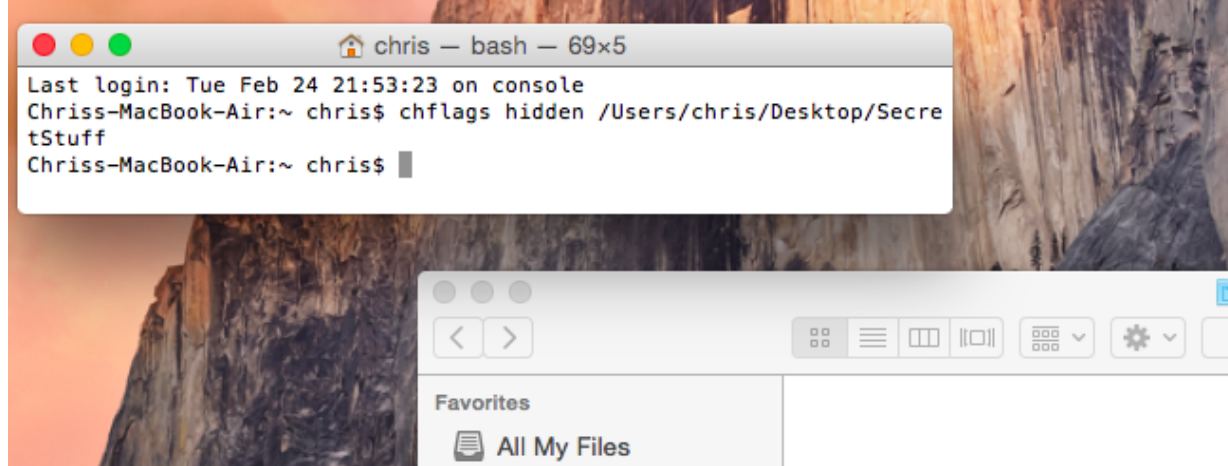
chflags hidden

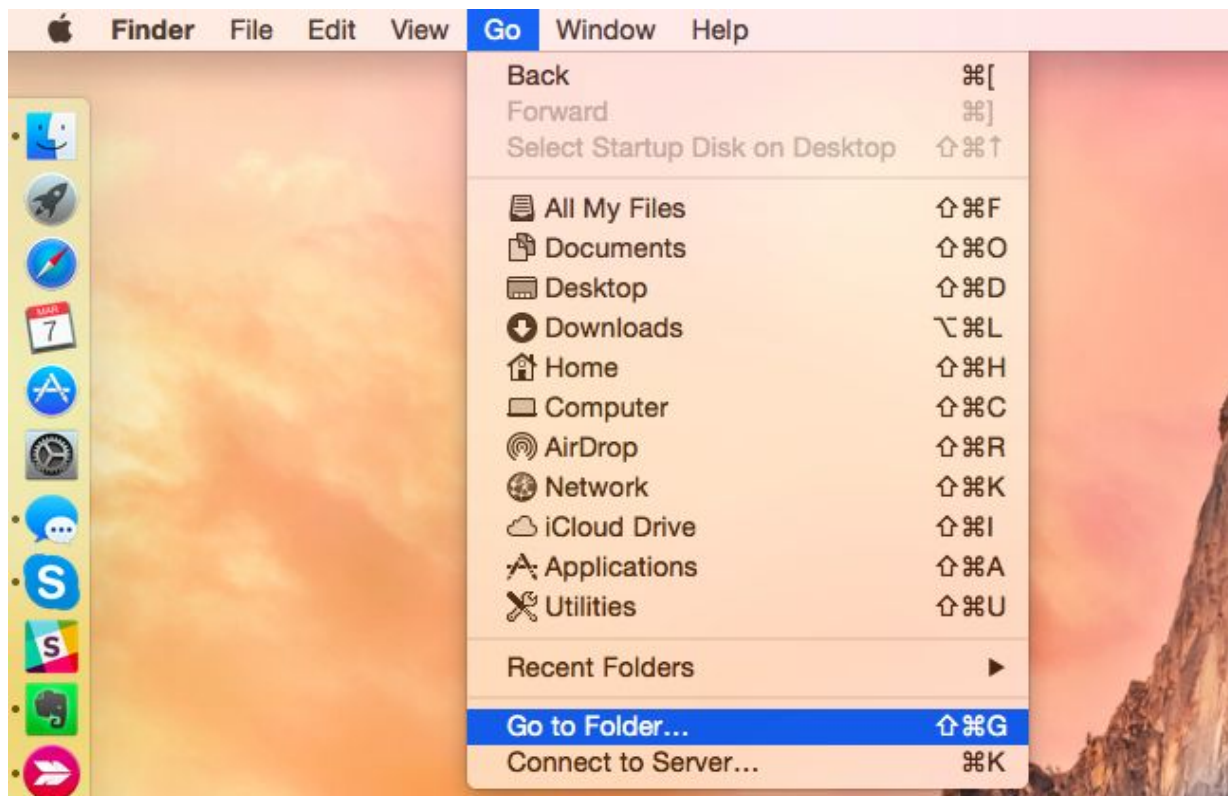Drag-and-drop a folder or file from the Finder into the terminal window.

The path of the file or folder will appear in the terminal. Press Enter to run the command and the file or folder will vanish. It's still there — it's just hidden, so the Finder won't show it by default.

Access a Hidden Files or Folder

Want to quickly access a hidden folder from the Finder? The easiest way is to click the Go menu in the Finder and select Go to Folder.

Plug the path of the folder into the dialog box and click Go or press Enter. The ~ stands for your user folder, so if you had a folder named SecretStuff on your desktop, you'd enter ~/Desktop/SecretStuff. If it was in Documents, you'd enter ~/Documents/SecretStuff.

Although the folder is hidden and won't appear normally in the Finder or save dialogs, you can quickly access it this way. Any files you store in this folder are effectively hidden, too — no one

can accidentally click their way to the folder, but they'll appear in the Finder if you go there directly.

View Hidden Files and Folders in the Open/Dialog

While the Finder doesn't offer a graphical option to let you find those hidden files and folders, the Open and Save dialog on Mac OS X does.

To view hidden files and folders in the Open/Save dialog, just press Command+Shift+Period (that's the . key).

You'll have to click a different folder in the Open/Save dialog after pressing this shortcut. So, if the hidden folder is on the desktop, it won't appear immediately when you press Command+Shift+Period. You have to press this keyboard shortcut, click over to another folder, and then click the Desktop folder again. Hidden folders and files will appear so you can easily access them from here.

View Hidden Files in the Finder

The Finder does offer an option to view hidden files. However, this isn't a graphical option — you have to enable it with a terminal command and restart the Finder for your changes to take effect.

To view hidden files in the Finder, open a Terminal window and run the following commands in it, pressing Enter after each one:

```
defaults write com.apple.finder AppleShowAllFiles TRUE

killall Finder
```

This command tells Finder to show hidden files and then restarts it. It'll show all those hidden files and folders once you're done. They appear partially transparent to distinguish hidden files and folders from normally unhidden ones.

Want to stop Finder from showing hidden files and folders? Run the following command to disable this option and restart the Finder:

```
defaults write com.apple.finder AppleShowAllFiles FALSE

killall Finder
```

If you'd like to view and hide hidden files and folders with a key press, you could create an Automator script that automatically runs these commands when you press a certain key or click a menu option.

Unhide a File or Folder

Want to unhide a file or folder? Run the same command you ran before, but change "hidden" to "nohidden." In other words, type the following command into the terminal, typing a space after it:

```
chflags nohidden
```

If you remember the exact path of the folder or file, you can type

it into the terminal. If you don't, you can use the above trick to display hidden files and folder in the Finder and drag and drop that hidden file or folder into the Terminal, as you did earlier.

(You can also press the up arrow key at the terminal to cycle through previous commands, locating the command that made the file or folder hidden. Use the left arrow key to go to the "hidden" part of the command and change it to "nohidden," and then press Enter.)

Type Enter afterward and the file or folder will become unhidden, so you can access it normally.

You can also hide files or folders by renaming them to begin with a ".", or period, character. However, Mac OS X won't let you rename files or folders to this from the Finder window, so you'll have to do so from the Terminal. You can also run various Terminal commands that will display these files.

This can be useful if you share a computer with someone, but someone who goes looking for these hidden files and folders can easily find them. It's not a foolproof way to protect your files and folders from others, but encryption is.

Image Credit: Quentin Meulepas on Flickr

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Chris Hoffman is Editor in Chief of How-To Geek. He's written about technology for nearly a decade and was a PCWorld columnist for two years. Chris has written for The New York Times, been interviewed as a technology expert on TV stations like Miami's NBC 6, and had his work covered by news outlets like the BBC. Since 2011, Chris has written over 2,000 articles that have been read more than 500 million times---and that's just here at How-To Geek. READ FULL BIO »

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