1. GNOME: Oldest and most widely used, based on the GTK framework. Relies heavily on "Activities" overview which is essentially a centralized hub for everything
KDE Plasma: Widget-based graphical shell developed by the KDE community. Known to be very lightweight. Has a similar set up to proprietary os's making the transition easy.
Mate: Very stable and lightweight compare to the others. Strictly traditional.
Cinnamon: Graphical shell that is very beginner friendly and gives the ability to add several features. Focuses on balance between functionality and similarity. While not as customizable as KDE Plasma, it is still pretty customizable.

2. GNOME is the most widely installed while KDE Plasma is generally known as the most liked.

3. Run a system update, install the DE, Reboot, Select the desired DE, enter password and you are in.