Introduction to the Xfce Menu

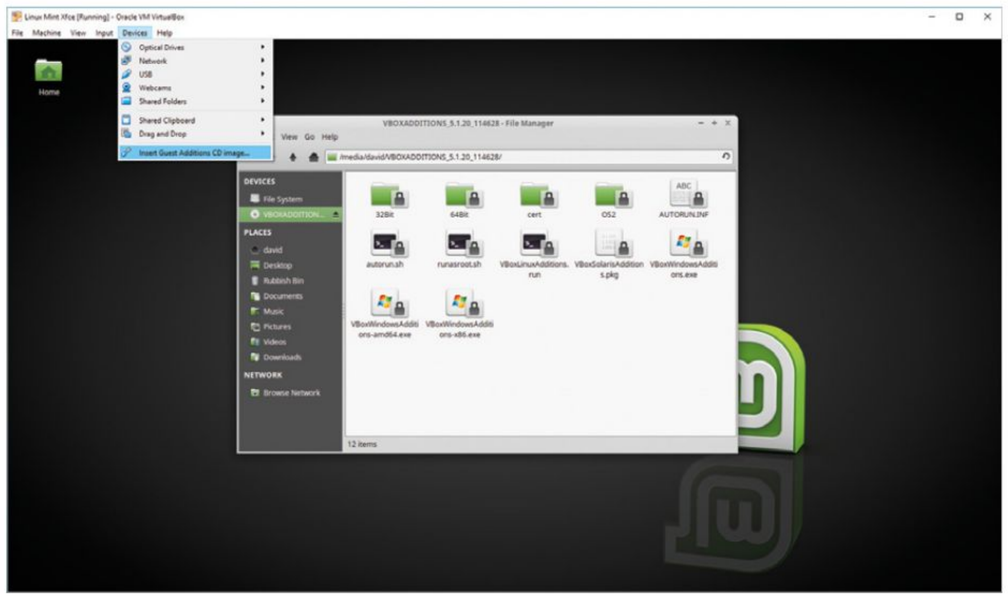
Xfce is a lightweight desktop environment that's blisteringly quick on modern computers, and runs magnificently on older specification systems too. If you've opted for Xfce over MATE and Cinnamon you certainly won't be disappointed.

VIRTUALBOX XFCE SETUP

Virtualbox Guest Additions setup is always recommended to help make the system a little more stable and perform better within a virtual environment. Here's how to set it up in Xfce.

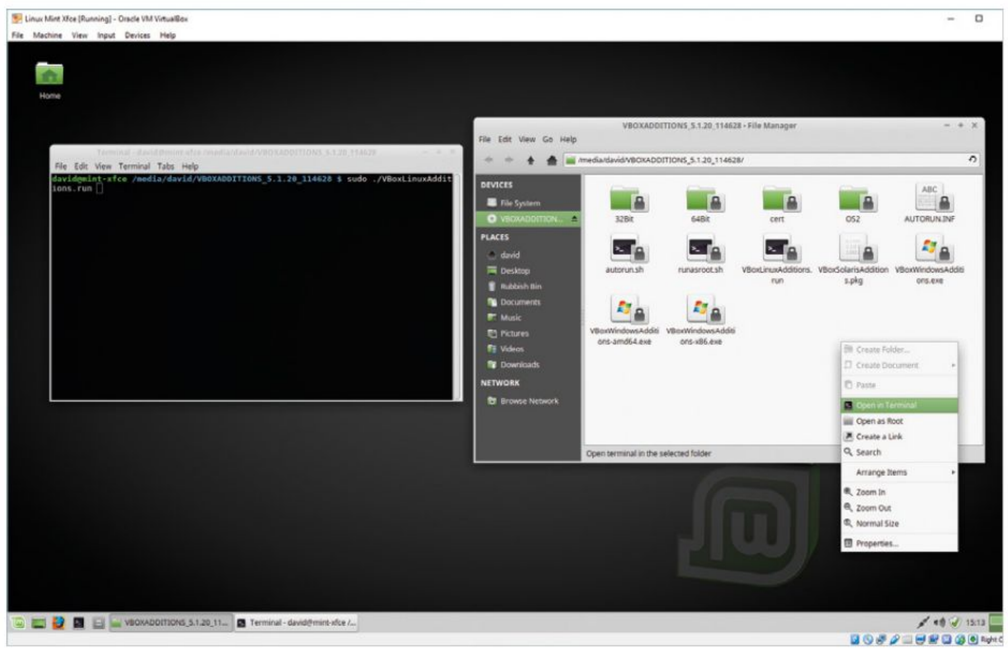
STEP 1

If you've installed Linux Mint 18.1 Xfce in Virtualbox, you can see that it doesn't auto-execute the same was as with MATE or Cinnamon. This is really just due to the differences in desktop environment. Start by mounting the Virtualbox Guest Addition CD as normal, via the Virtualbox Device menu option and selecting it.



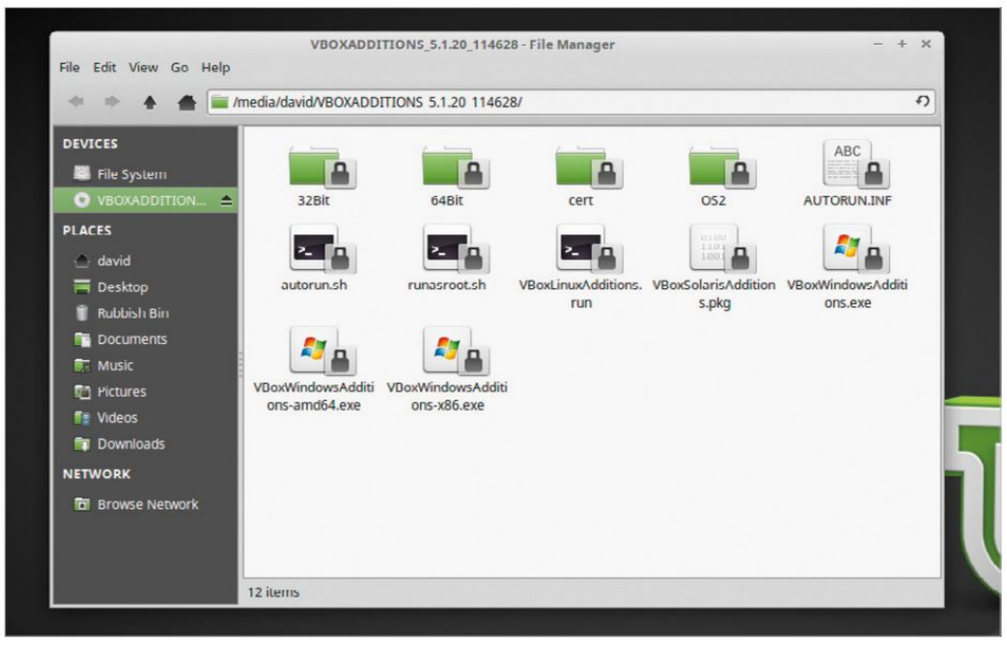
STEP 2

This will open the Xfce file manager displaying the contents of the Guest Additions image. Right-click on a blank area in the folder and from the menu choose Open in Terminal. With the Terminal launched, enter the following command: `sudo ./VBoxLinuxAdditions.run`, press Enter and enter your password.



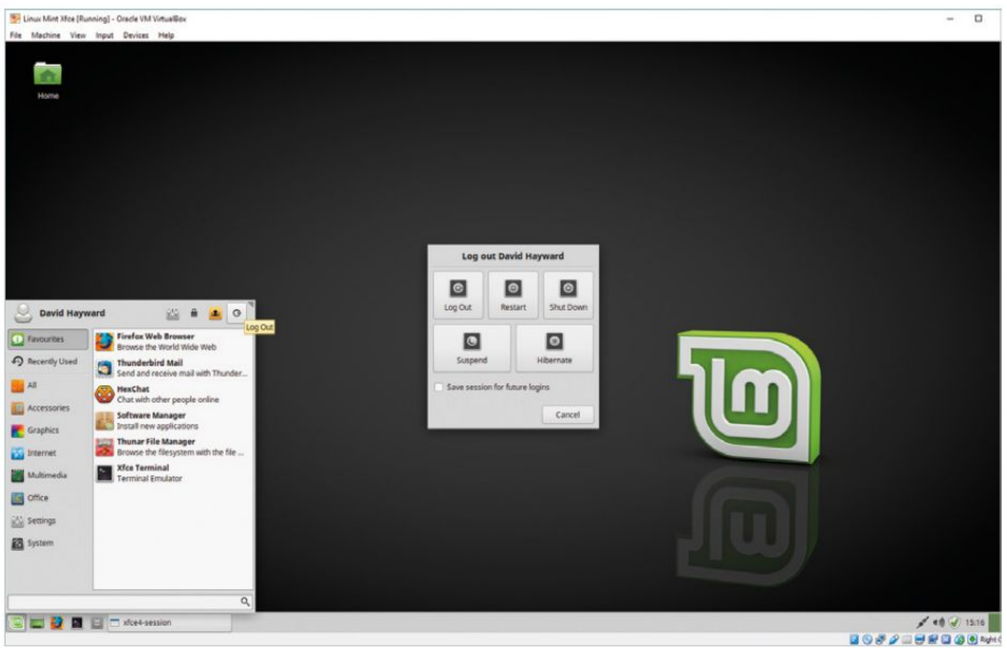
STEP 3

The Guest Additions setup will run as normal now. When asked enter yes to accept the installation of the new drivers. When the installation is complete, type in exit into the Terminal to close it. With the file manager still open, click on the up arrow next to VBOXADDITIONS in the Devices section.



STEP 4

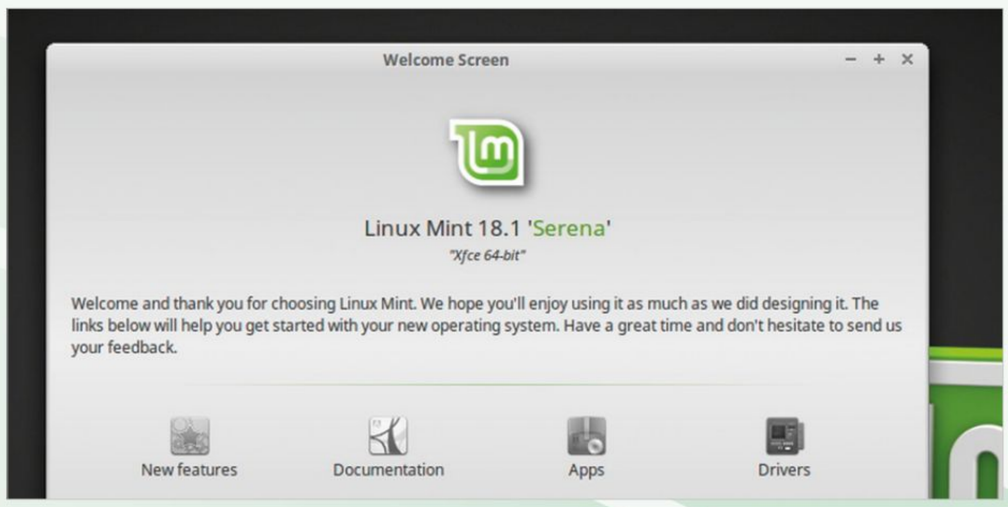
Click the X in the corner of the file manager to close it, then click the Xfce Menu located in the bottom left of the desktop, represented as the Linux Mint logo. In the top right of the Menu there's a power icon, click it and in the following window click Restart.



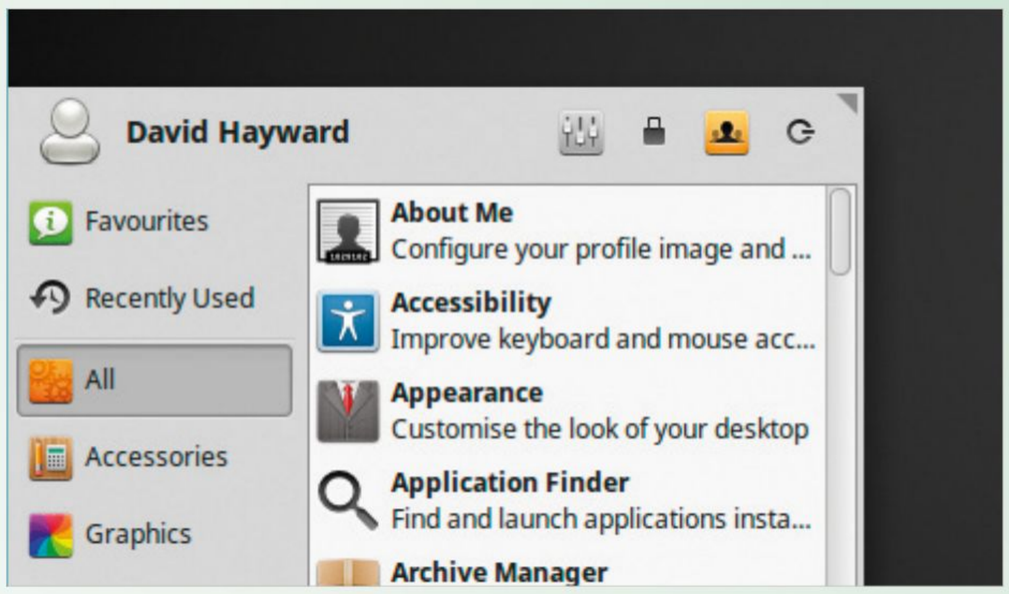
SUPER-QUICK XFCE

Xfce is a little different to what we've seen from Cinnamon and MATE. While its core is still Linux Mint 18.1, there are some subtle differences that make it an equally excellent desktop environment.

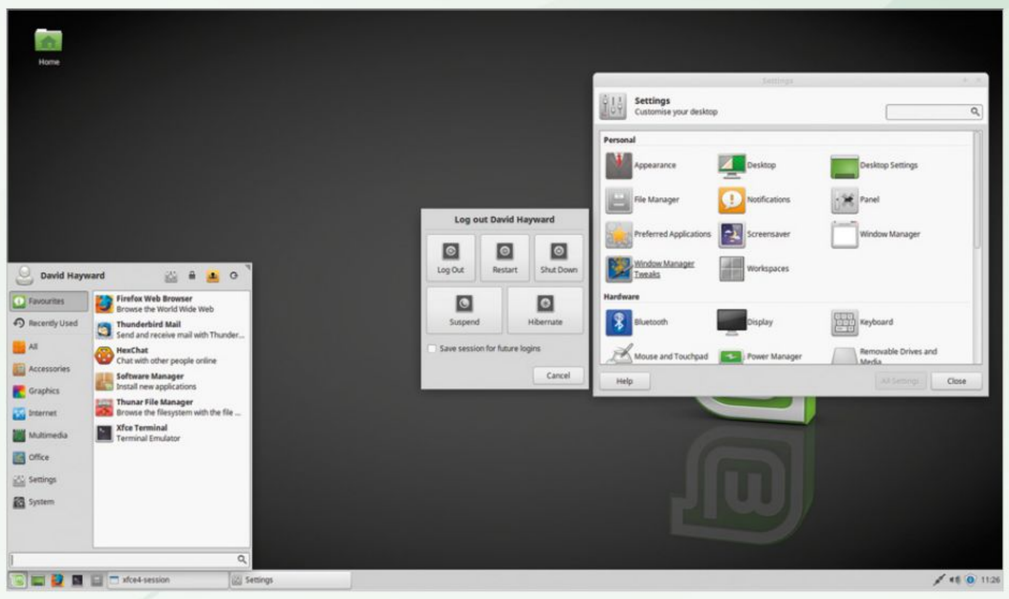
STEP 1 With the Virtualbox Additions driver now installed you can have a look round the Xfce environment. The Welcome Screen is, as previously mentioned, a good place to start. Check out the New Features and Documentation, along with the other options.



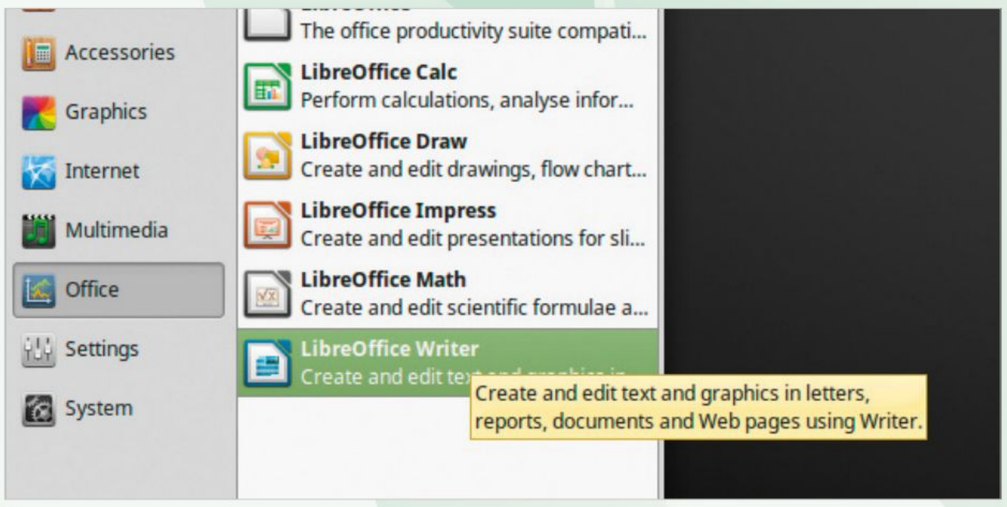
STEP 2 We've already had a brief look at the Linux Mint 18.1 Xfce Menu, when we restarted the system for the Virtualbox setup. You can see it's a more simple layout than that of MATE or Cinnamon. Your username is displayed along the top together with a Settings option and Session options.



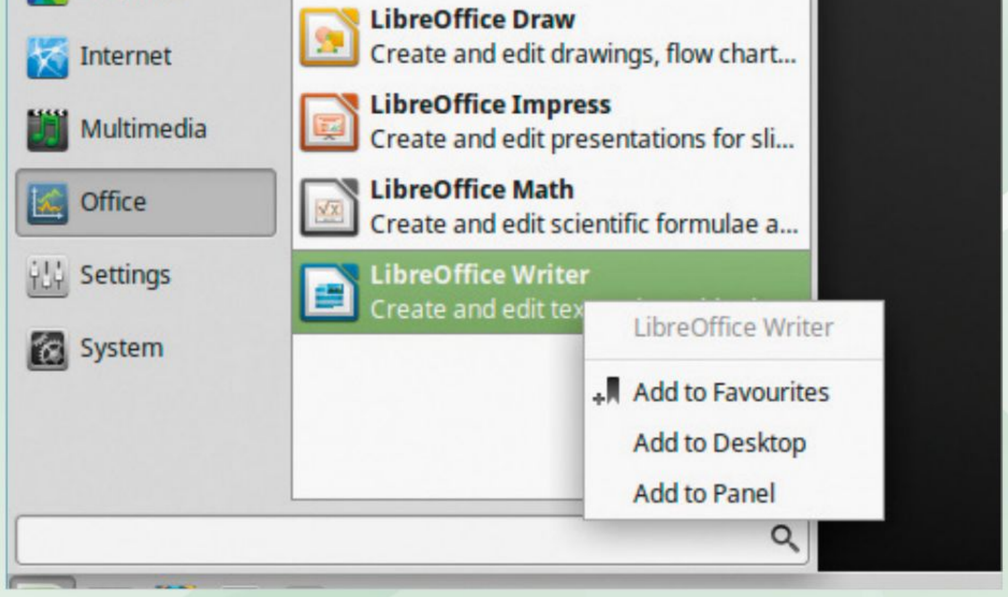
STEP 3 The Settings option, the icon resembling three vertical sliders, opens up the console used to configure and customise the desktop. The Session options include Lock Screen, Switch Users and the Power option for logging out, Shut Down, Restart, Suspend and so on.



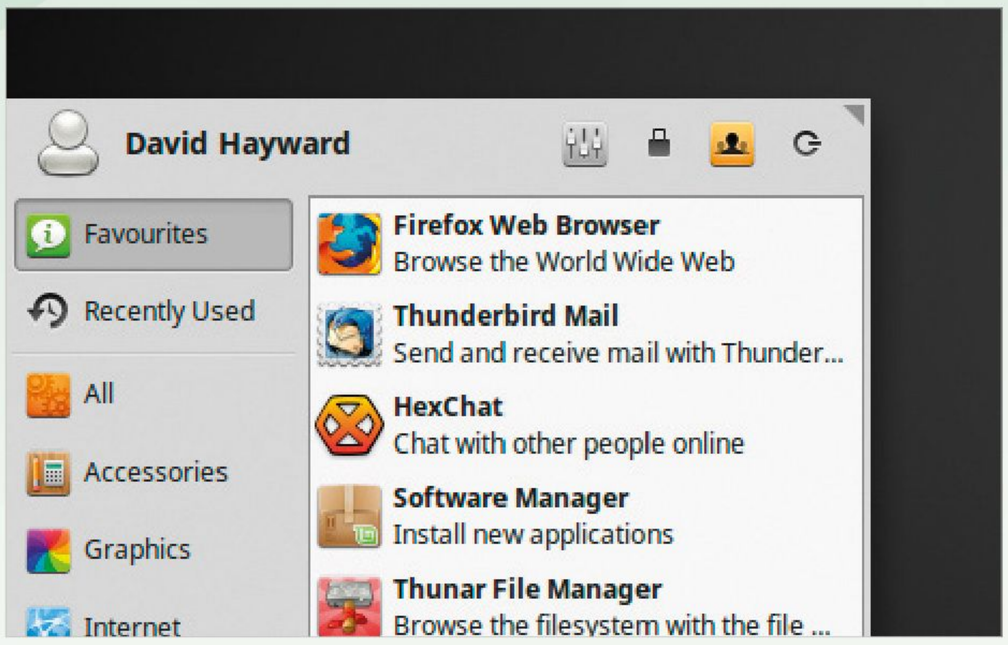
STEP 4 The rest of the Xfce Menu is arranged with the app categories to the left, and their contents to the right. There's an active search bar at the bottom that works in the same way as the other search bars in MATE and Cinnamon. You only need to mouse-over the app categories to bring up the contents of each.



STEP 5 You can right-click any of the apps within the Xfce Menu to add them to the Panel, Desktop or Favourites category, which is located at the top of the Menu.



STEP 6 The Favourites category already contains some default apps: Firefox, Thunderbird Email, HexChat Internet chat client, Software Manager (to install new apps), the Thunar file manager and the Xfce Terminal.



Navigating the Xfce Desktop

Xfce is often thought of as lacking in terms of style and functionality, due to its slimmed down and lightweight setup. However, that couldn't be further from the truth. Xfce is effective, easily customised and feature-rich.

EXPLORE XFCE

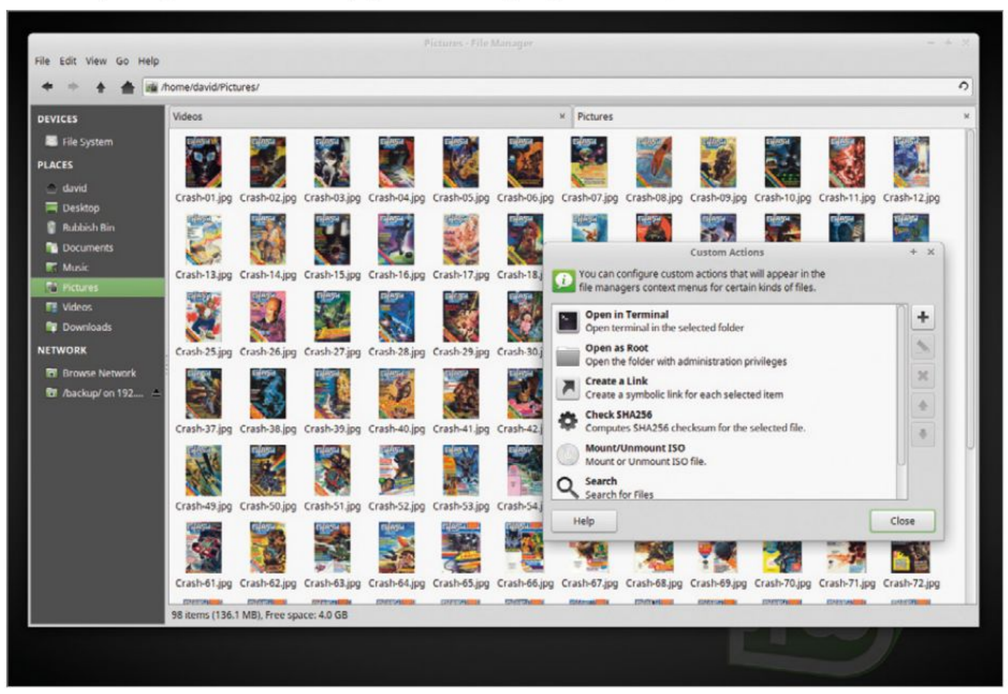
Xfce is a polished and remarkably good desktop environment. Not only is it quick, responsive and an excellent performer on older hardware, it also has plenty to offer the user.

STEP 1

The Xfce desktop has just a single icon by default, a link to the Home folder. Clicking it will bring up Thunar, the Xfce file manager. The interface is a lot simpler looking than that of MATE or Cinnamon, as you can see, but still quite effective.

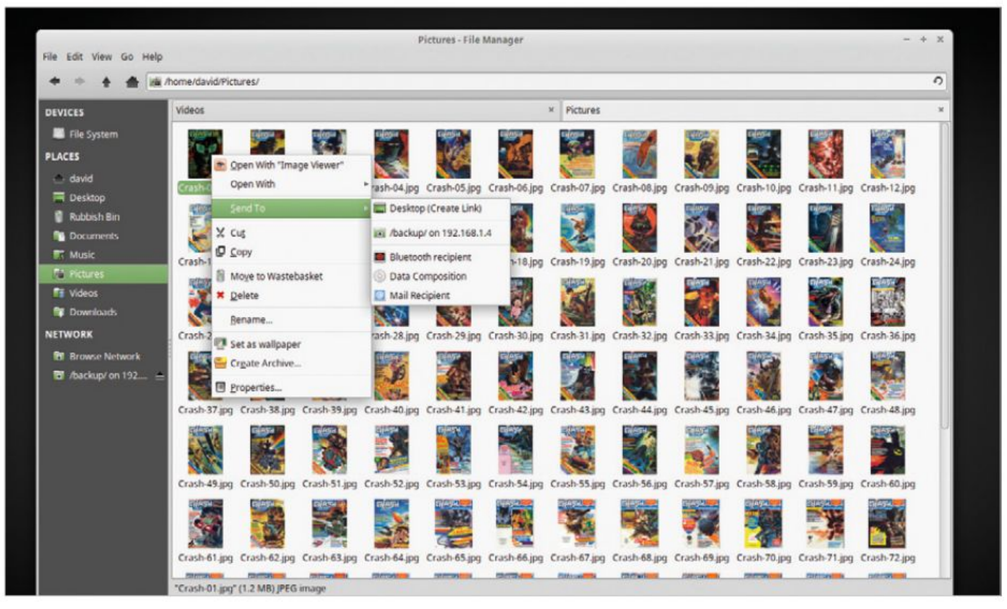
STEP 2

Don't be fooled into thinking Thunar lacks features. You can have multiple locations tabs open, view thumbnails in varying sizes, connect to remote or network shares and services and even specify actions to appear in any right-click, context menus.



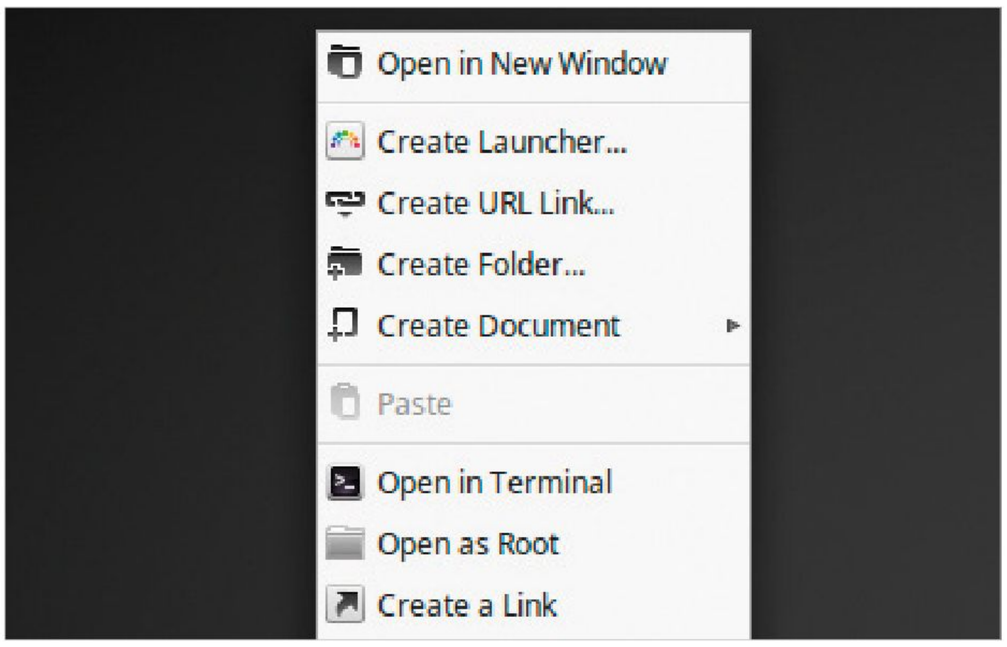
STEP 3

Context menus within Xfce offer numerous options, depending on the file type, folder and where you've open them. Right-clicking on an image file, allows you the usual cut, copy, open and so on, as well as Set as Wallpaper. You can also Send To different sources, such as the desktop as link, Bluetooth device, optical media or email attachment.



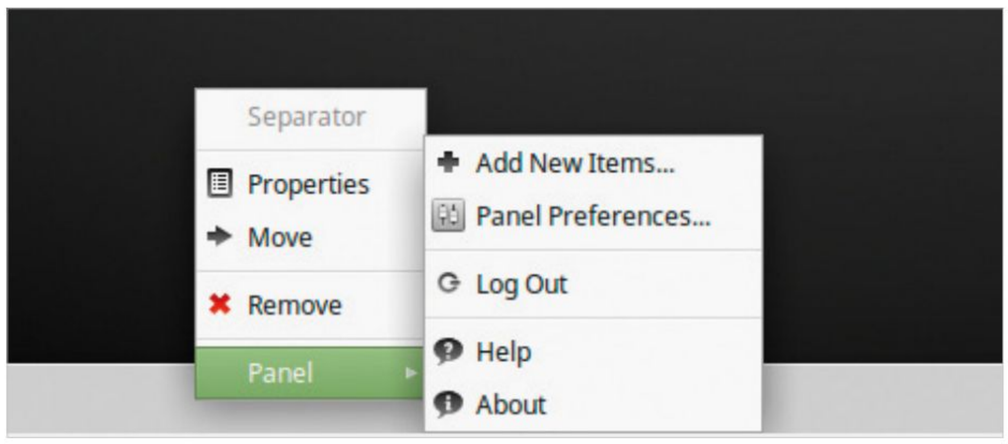
STEP 4

The context menu on the desktop also features a number of options, where you can create, copy, open in a Terminal, open as the administrator Root account and arrange icons on the desktop. You can also access the Desktop Settings and create URL links to web pages and resources.



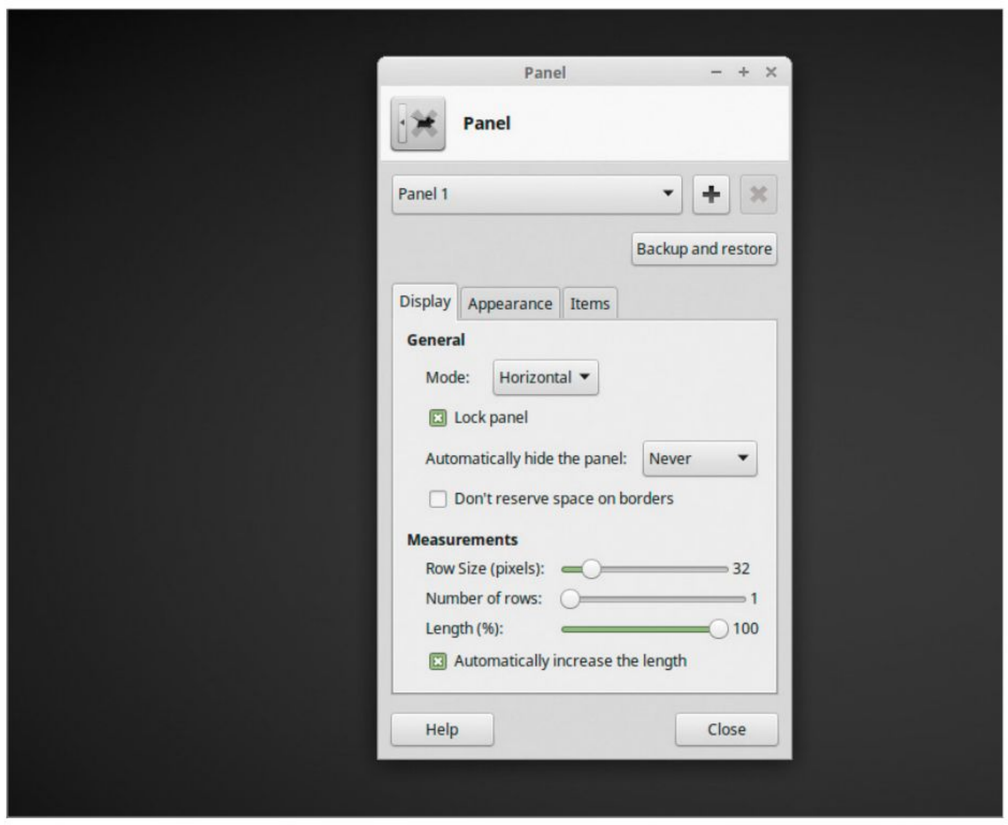
STEP 5

At the bottom of the desktop is the Xfce Panel. You've already looked at the Xfce Menu, and next to that there's an icon to minimise all windows and display the desktop, a quick launch icon for Firefox, the Terminal and Thunar file manager. Right-clicking the Panel displays some options, where you can configure and add new Panel features.



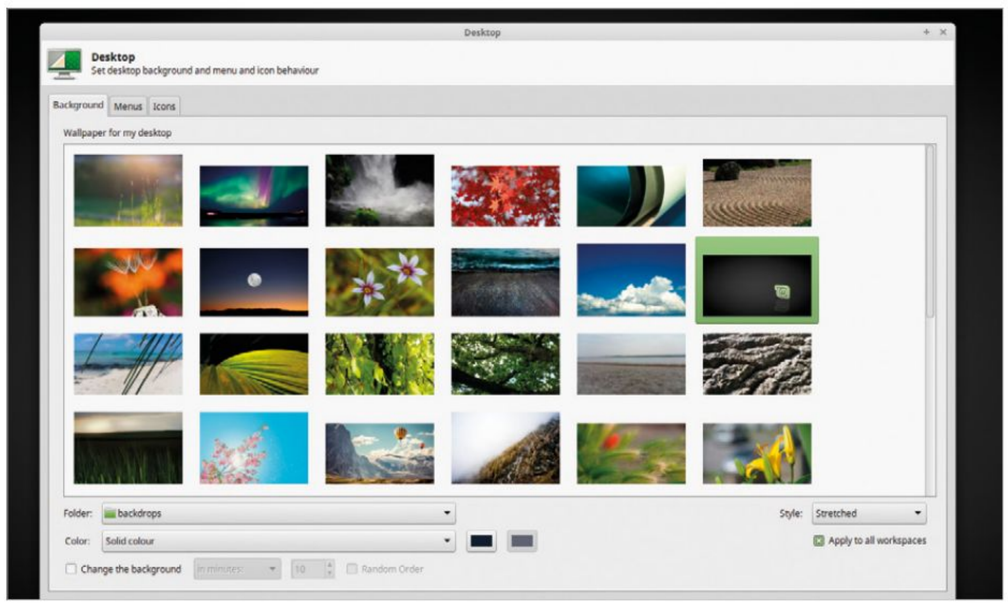
STEP 6

Within the Panel context menu, branching out from the Panel option, there's Panel Preferences. This option allows you to move the Panel, lock it in place, alter the sizing of the Panel and add new Panels. There are also options to alter its appearance and the items on it.



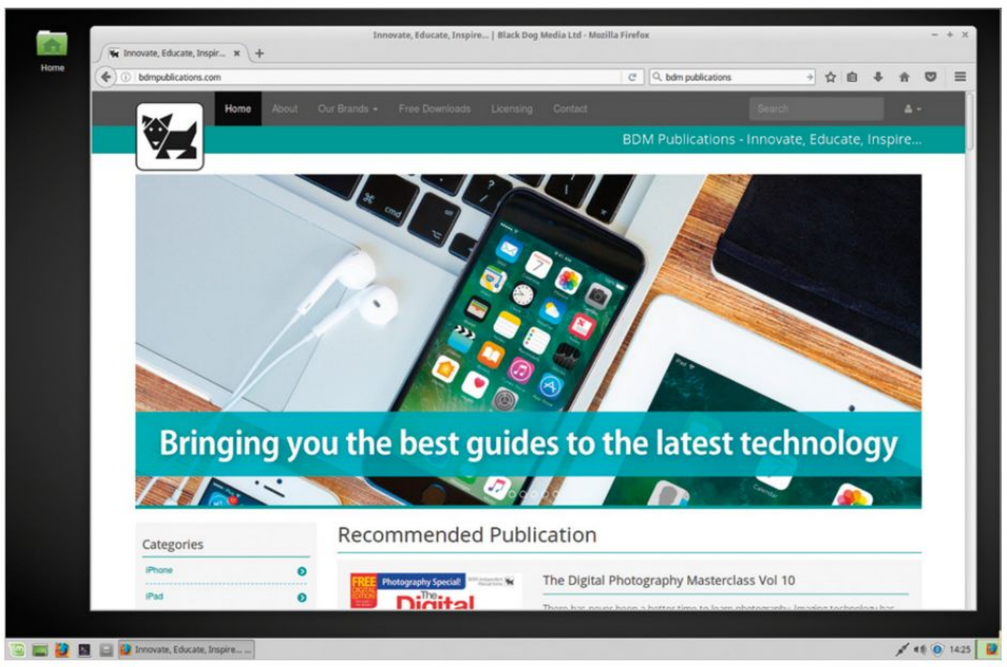
STEP 7

The Desktop Settings option, found in the context menu for the desktop, features the array of Linux Mint 18.1 wallpapers and background colours. There's also a Menus tab to allow you to customise the mouse-click menus in Xfce and an Icons tab to add, remove or edit desktop icons.



STEP 8

Workspaces are available in most, if not all, Linux desktop environments. With Xfce you have four Workspaces by default and you can add more with Alt + Insert keys. Workspaces are virtual desktops that help you better manage your open apps. You can have Firefox in one Workspace, LibreOffice Writer in another, a video player in another and so on.

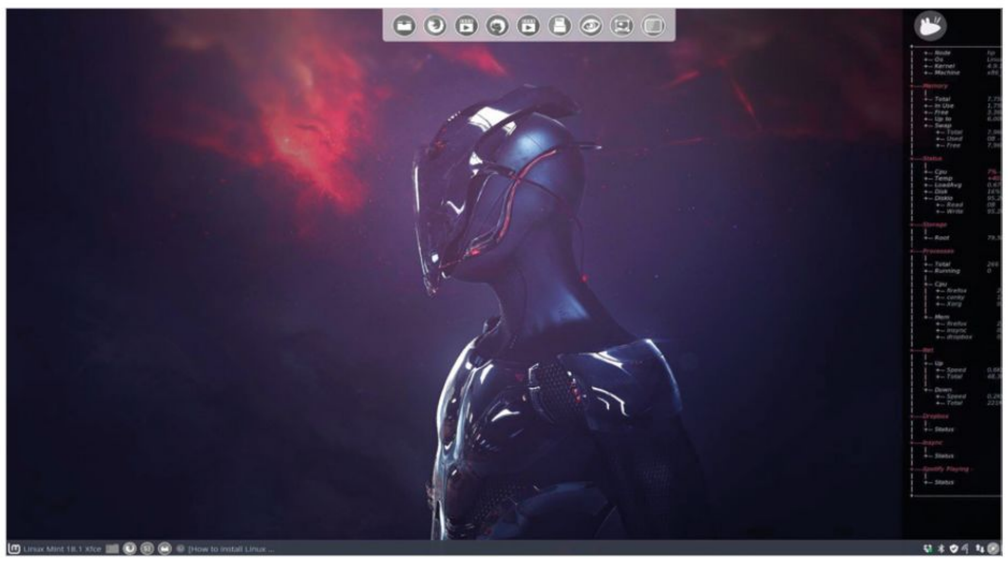


STEP 9

You can view the Workspaces in the Panel by right-clicking on the Panel, then choosing Panel Preferences. Click on the Items tab, then the Plus sign. Scroll down the list until you reach Workspace Switcher and click the Add button. The Workspace Switcher will appear in the bottom right of the Panel.

STEP 10

The Xfce desktop environment is highly configurable, these few examples we've looked at can be used to create a stunning desktop. By adding a few more extra packages and tweaking the desktop further, you can end up with something really superb. This setup from Erik Dubois using Linux Mint 18.1 Xfce is a prime example.



10 Things to Do after Installing Linux Mint Xfce

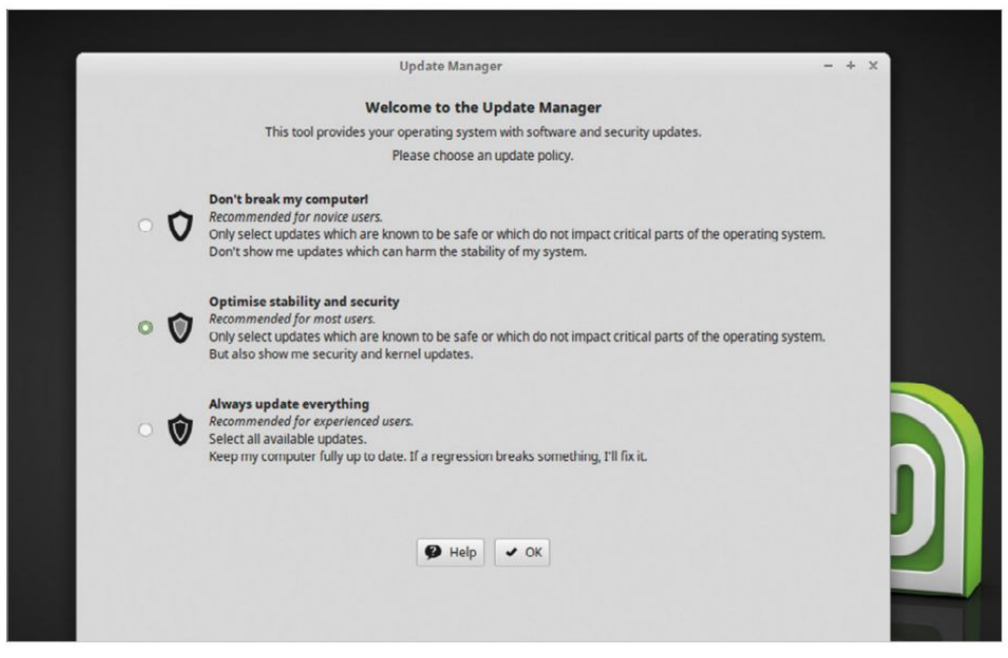
If Xfce is your chosen desktop environment then you've made an excellent decision. We've mentioned its lightweight, streamlined code and blistering performance many times already but it's also the high degree of customisations and ease of use that set it aside from other DEs.

GETTING MORE FROM XFCE

As before, although Xfce is a fantastic setup out of the box, there are still some modifications and fixes we can apply post-installation. If this is your DE of choice, here are ten helpful tweaks.

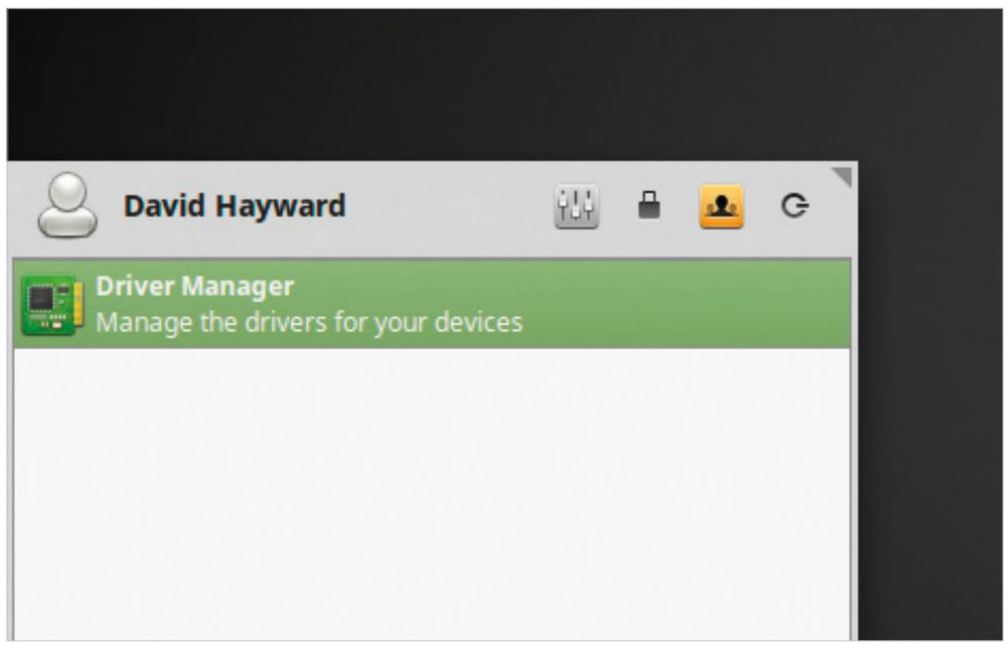
STEP 1

As always, check your updates. The process is the same for Xfce as it is for the other desktop environments. Use Mint Update, the shield in the Panel, choose an update policy, find a local Software Source server and apply all but the level-5 updates.



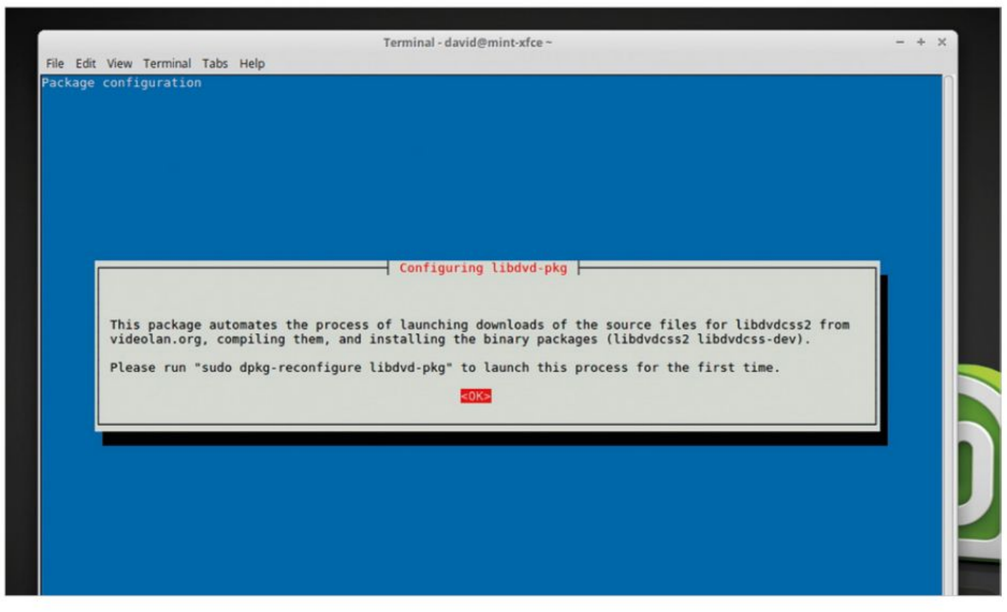
STEP 2

Any missing graphics, Wi-Fi or other hardware drivers can be installed by clicking on the Xfce Menu, entering drivers in to the search box and clicking on the Driver Manager icon that appears. As with the other desktop environments, opt for the recommended driver update and installation.



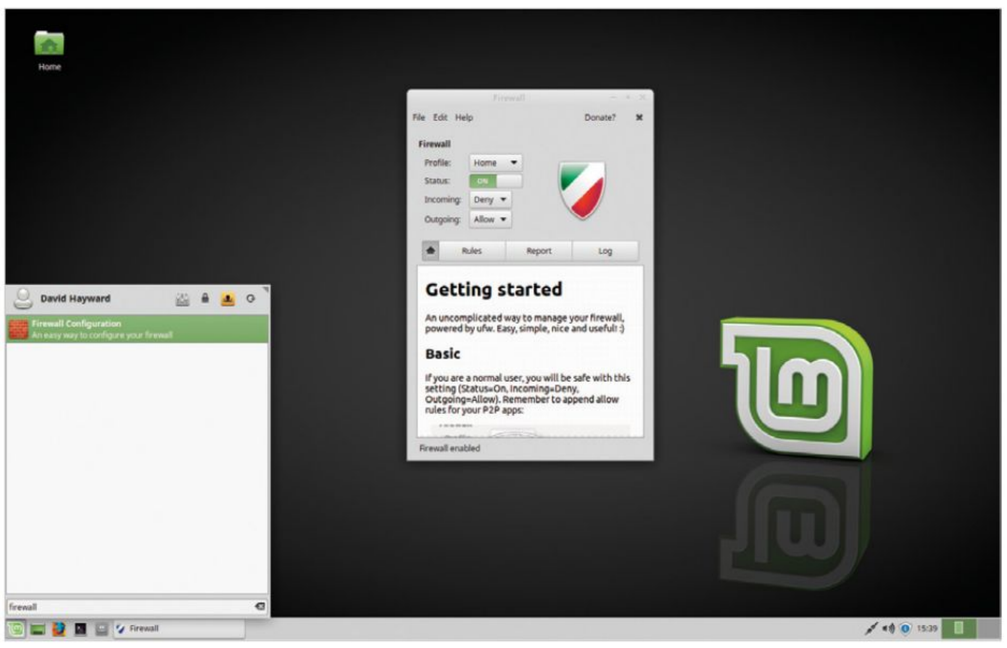
STEP 3

Don't forget to add support for watching encrypted DVDs. Drop into Terminal and enter: `sudo apt-get install libdvd-pkg`. Accept the changes to the system and installation notifications, and if required, use the fix for the dpkg data locked as in Step 8 of the 10 Things to Do after Installing Linux Mint MATE section.



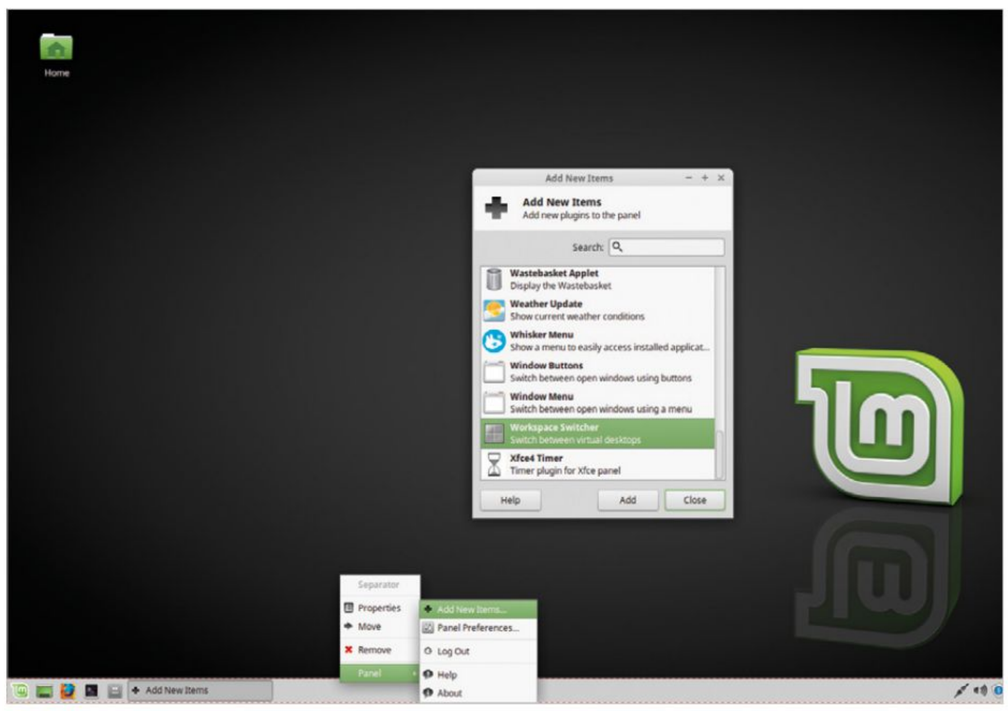
STEP 4

It's always a good idea to enable the Linux Mint Firewall, as previously mentioned. Open the Menu, type firewall into the search box and click the Firewall Configuration app. When the Linux Mint Firewall app is launched, click the slider next to Status to enable it.



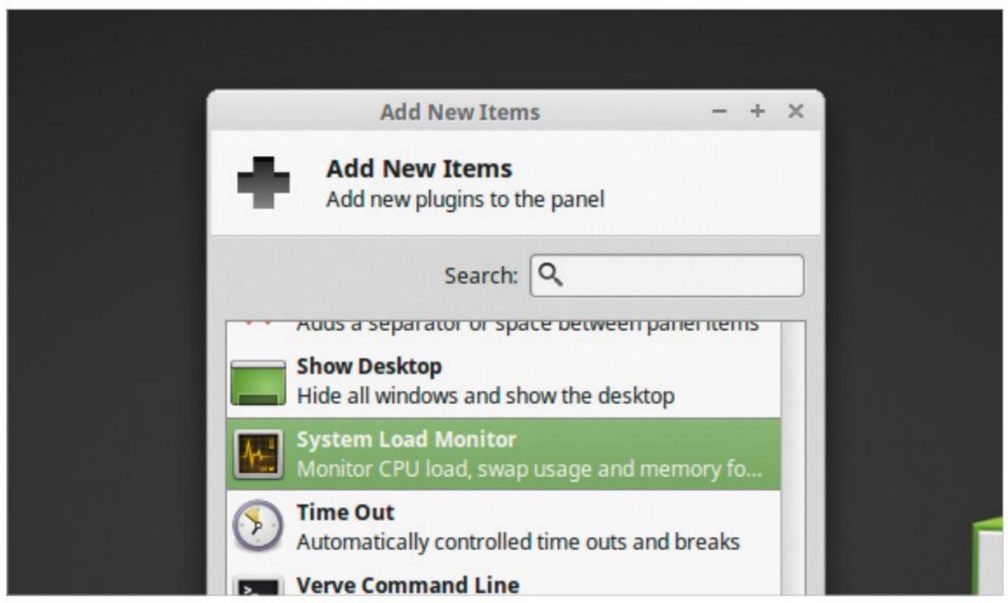
STEP 5

If you haven't already done so, from the previous page, enable Workspaces in the Panel. Right-click the Panel, mouse over the Panel option and click on Add New Items; you can also go through the Panel Preferences but this a more direct option. Scroll, locate Workspace Switcher and click the Add button.



STEP 6

While you're in the Add New Items to the Panel console, consider one or more of the other applets you can install. Examples include, the Mail Watcher applet, Power Management for those of you running Mint on a laptop and maybe the System Load Monitor.

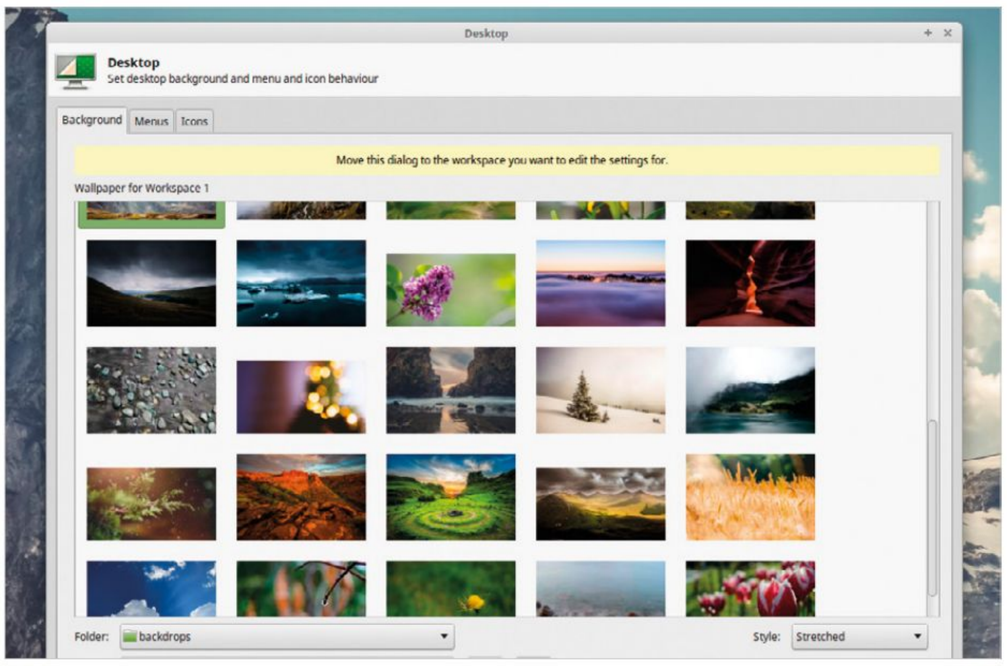


STEP 7

Although we'll cover customising the Mint desktop later on, you can always set a new wallpaper now. Right-click the desktop, choose Desktop Settings and in the Background tab check out the Mint 18.1 default wallpapers. Just left-click one to apply it.

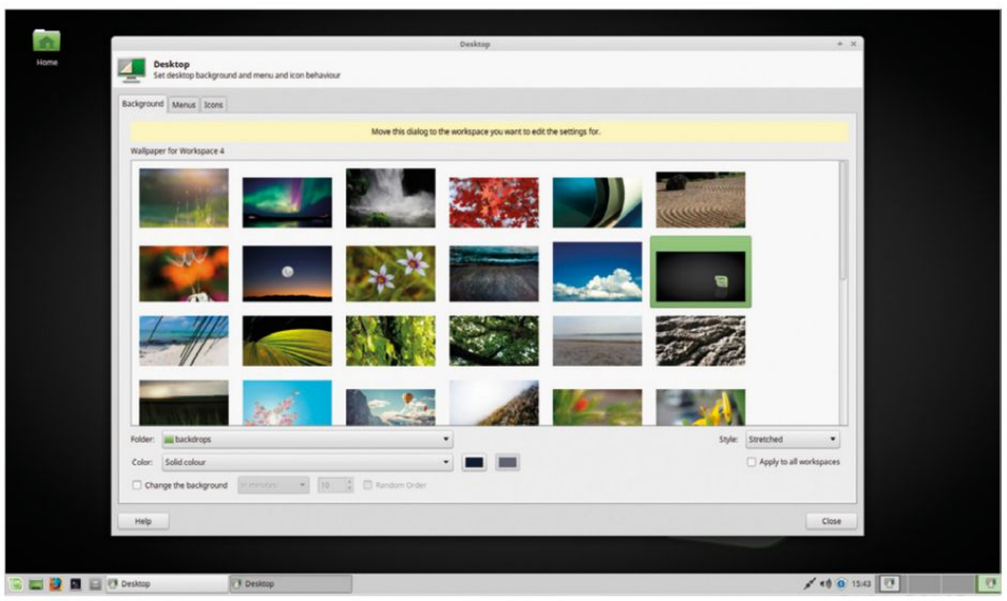
STEP 8

Interestingly, if you've opted for the Workspace Switcher function, you can set a different wallpaper for each separate workspace. In the Background tab, where the Mint wallpapers are located, untick the Apply to all Workspaces option in the bottom right. You need to switch to another Workspace and repeat the wallpaper choice step, though.



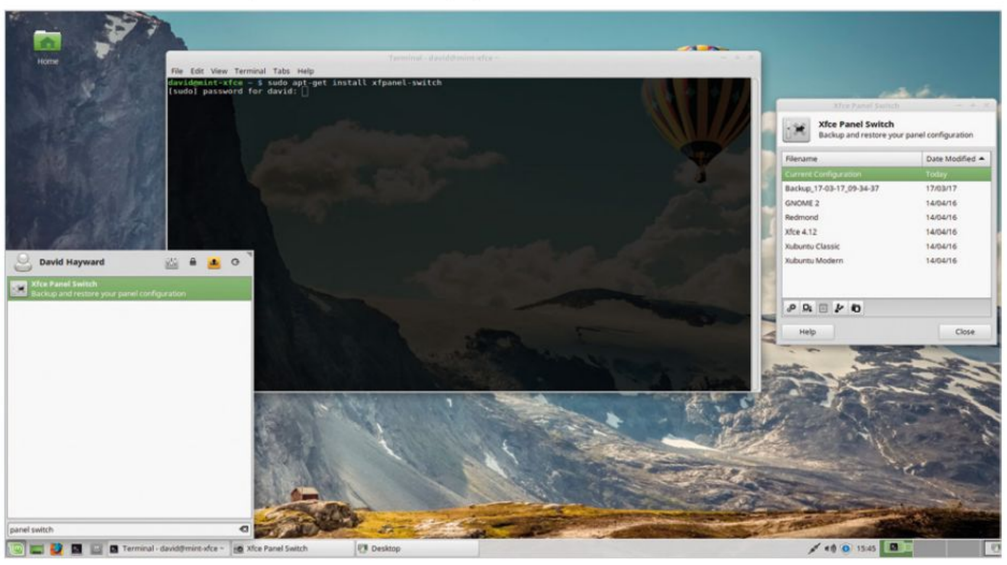
STEP 9

You can see a yellow bar along the top of the Backgrounds tab, Move this dialog to the Workspace you want to edit the settings for. Rather than right-clicking a new Workspace desktop, press Ctrl+Alt instead and tap the Home key to move the Desktop window from one Workspace to the next.



STEP 10

You can back up your Panel configuration and restore it to other user accounts or Xfce machines with Panel Switch. Open the Terminal and enter: `sudo apt-get install xfpanel-switch` followed by your password. When installed, click the Menu and search for panel switch, then the Xfce Panel Switch app. When it's loaded, you can backup your current Panel.



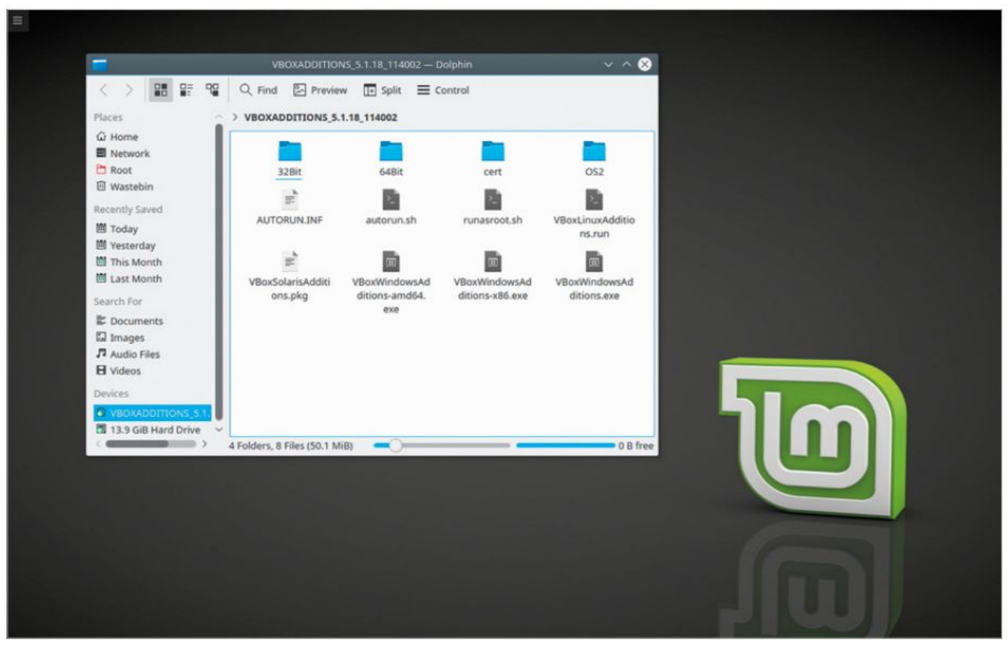
Introduction to the KDE Menu

Linux Mint 18.1 KDE is an incredible looking setup. KDE uses the Plasma desktop, which consists of various themes, widgets and accelerated graphics. The version of Plasma used in Mint 18.1 is 5.8 LTS, with versions 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 up for release later in 2017.

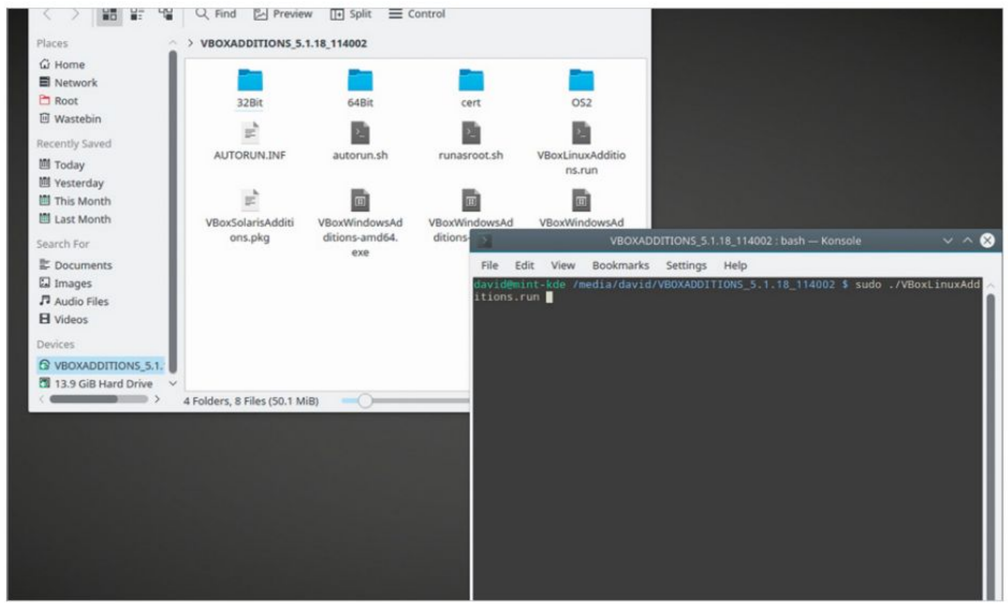
KDE VIRTUALBOX FIX

Although you can probably work perfectly fine with KDE in Virtualbox without the need to apply the Guest Additions CD first, it's usually best to go through the steps to avoid any graphical issues.

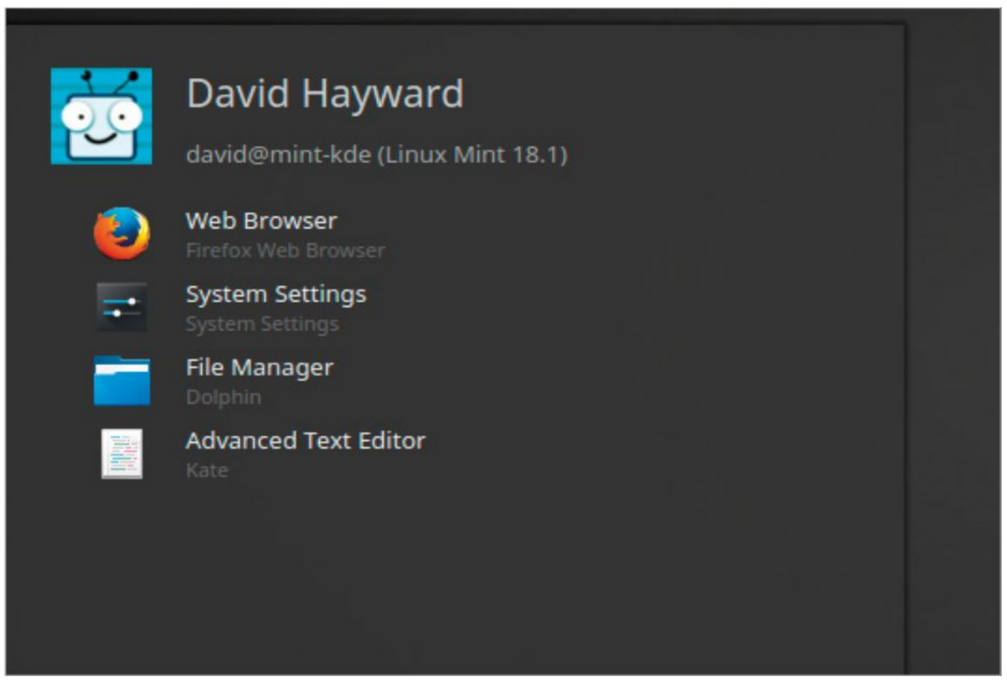
STEP 1 Virtualbox users of Linux Mint KDE will need to install the Guest Additions CD in much the same vein as Xfce's. When mounted from the Virtualbox Devices menu, you get a notification in KDE, that you can then click on and get to the opened file manager.



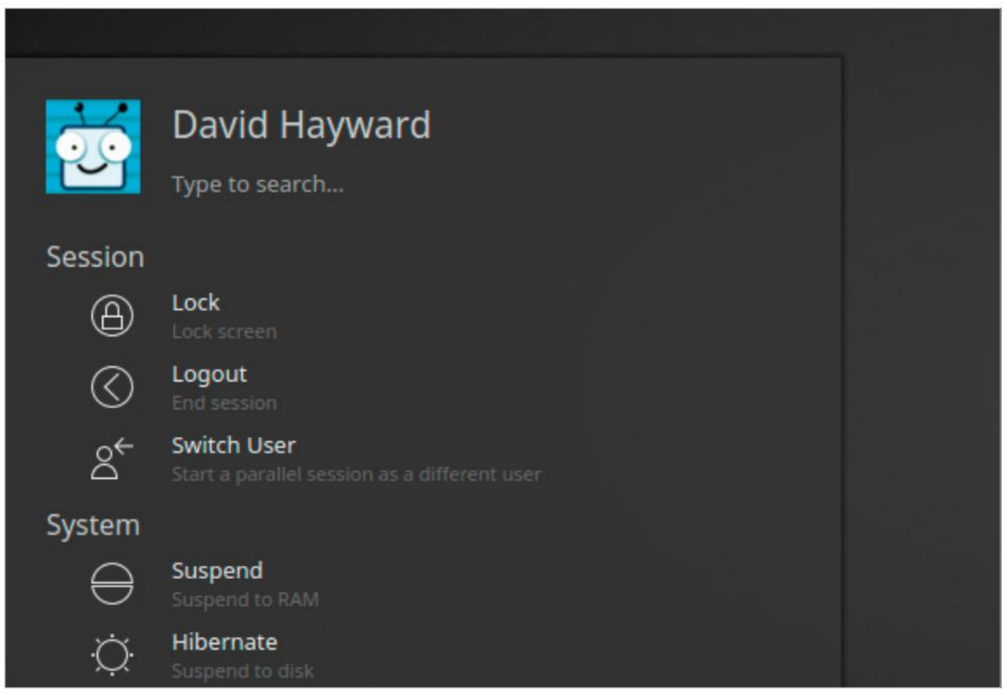
STEP 2 Right-click a blank area within the opened folder and move the pointer over Actions, then click Open Terminal Here. In the Terminal, enter: `sudo ./VBoxLinuxAdditions.run` followed by your password. Follow the same Virtualbox set up as before, then close the Terminal and file manager windows once the installation is complete.



STEP 3 The KDE Menu is located in the bottom left corner, represented by the KDE logo. You need to reboot the system after installing the Virtualbox Additions CD, so click the Menu, then click Leave, located along the bottom strip of the Menu options.



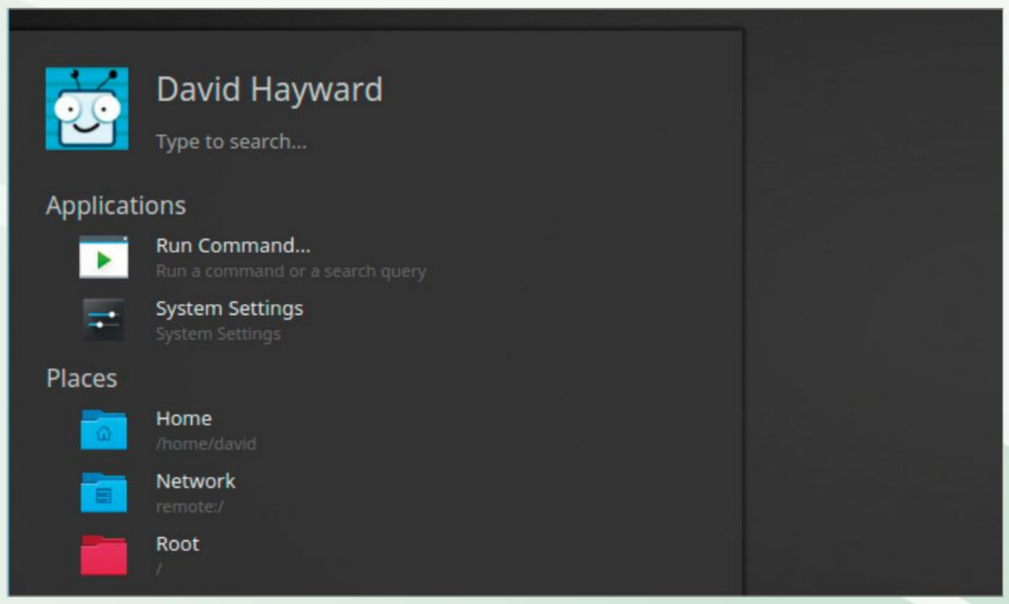
STEP 4 This will alter the appearance of the Menu and with the new options available, click on the Reboot option. The desktop will then change, so click on the Reboot option again. This will restart the Virtualbox instance of Linux Mint 18.1 KDE.



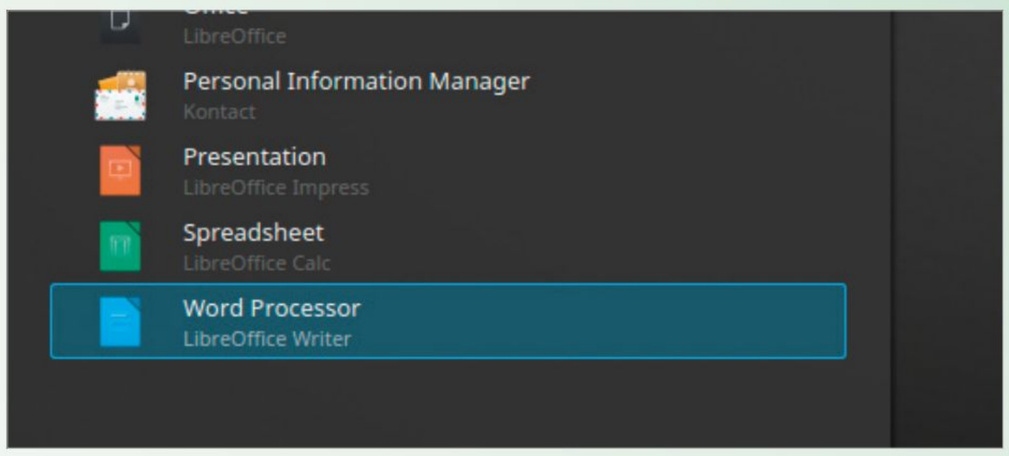
KOOL MENU

KDE is very different to Cinnamon, MATE and Xfce. Its looks and the way it works are really quite remarkable. It's little wonder then that KDE is considered one of the best DEs for Linux.

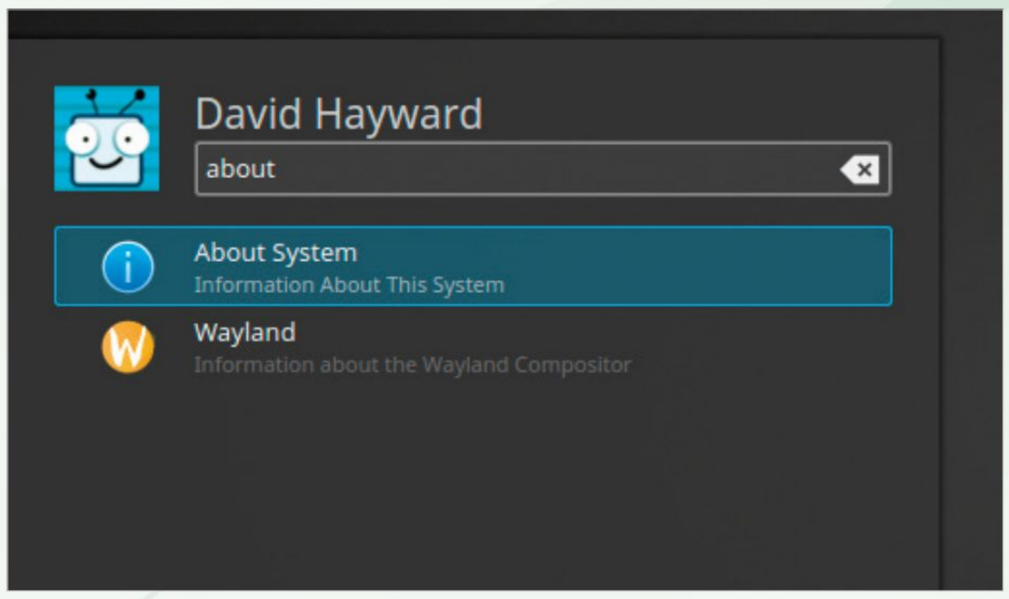
STEP 1 A brief look at the KDE Menu emphasises just how different this desktop environment is from the other Mint DEs. The bottom strip of the Menu features the Favourites links, Applications, Computer places and settings, app History and session options. You don't need to click any of these, just move over them to change the Menu view.



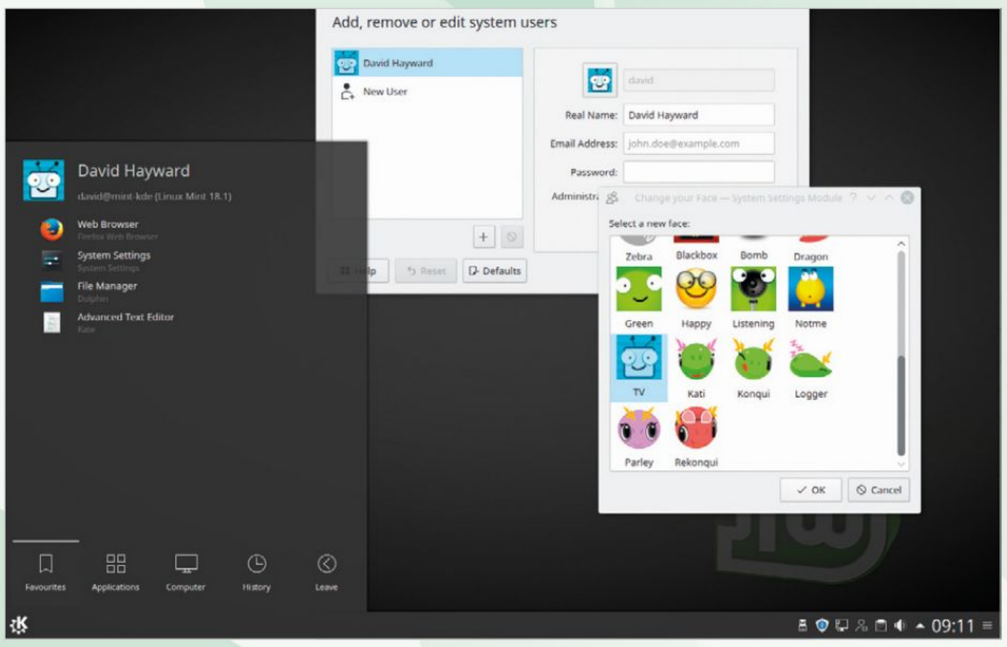
STEP 2 The middle part of the Menu is where you can view the sub-options, apps and so on depending on which of the bottom strip options you're currently on. From here you can click and browse through the available apps, open up a location in the file manager and choose to logout, reboot, shutdown etc.



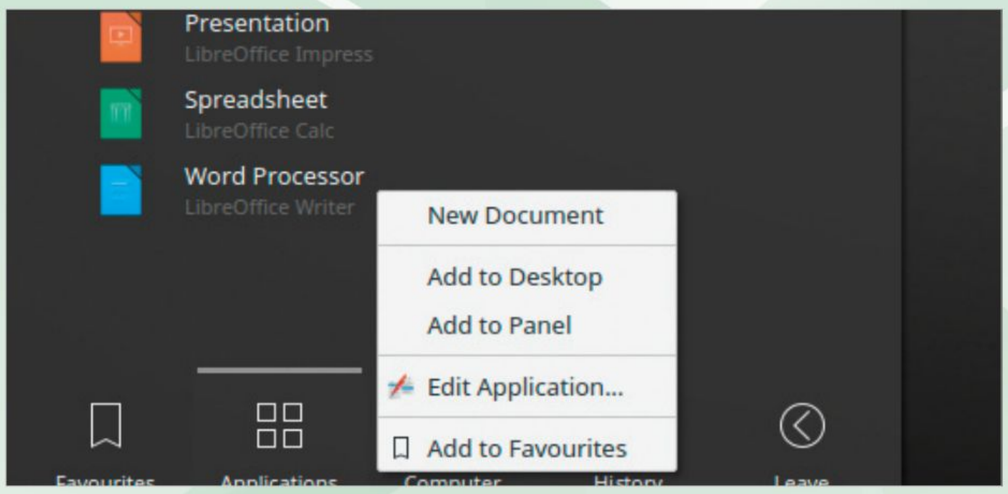
STEP 3 The top part of the Menu displays your Linux Mint username and is where the search box is located. You can start typing on the desktop to search for apps, files and folders but many users prefer to click the Menu first, then start typing for search options.



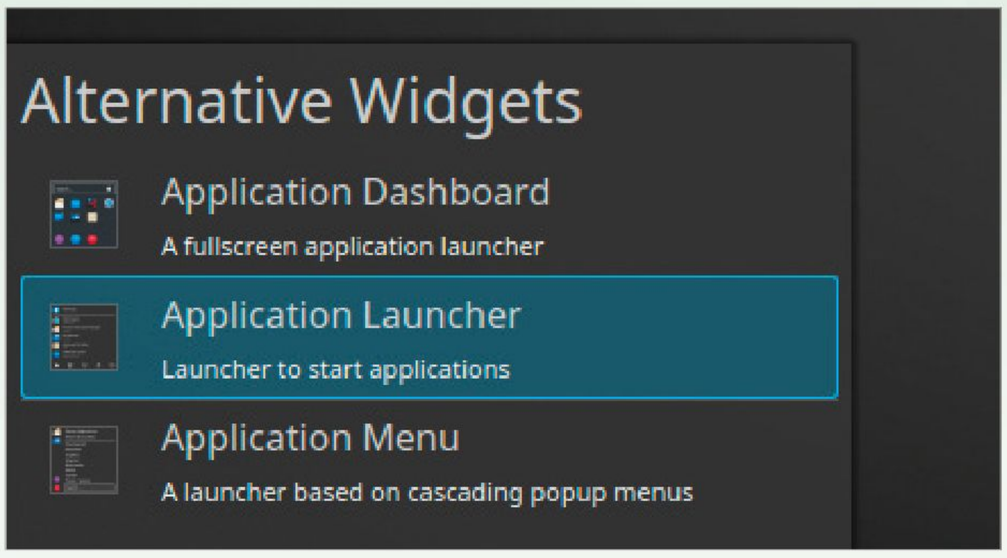
STEP 4 Clicking on your Linux Mint username opens the User Manager console. In here you can alter your name, add an email address, change your password and even choose an image for your login profile. There are some to pick from the Gallery or you can use an image file.



STEP 5 As with the other DEs available, you can right-click an app from within the Menu and add it to the Favourites area, add to the desktop, panel or as a Launcher; or edit the app's launch permissions, file type and so on.



STEP 6 Finally, KDE offers users a different type of Menu. Right-click the Menu KDE icon, and choose Alternatives from the list of options. You get three different Menu options: Application Dashboard, the default Application Launcher and Application Menu. Highlight one, click Switch to change the Menu type. Give them all a try and find one you like.



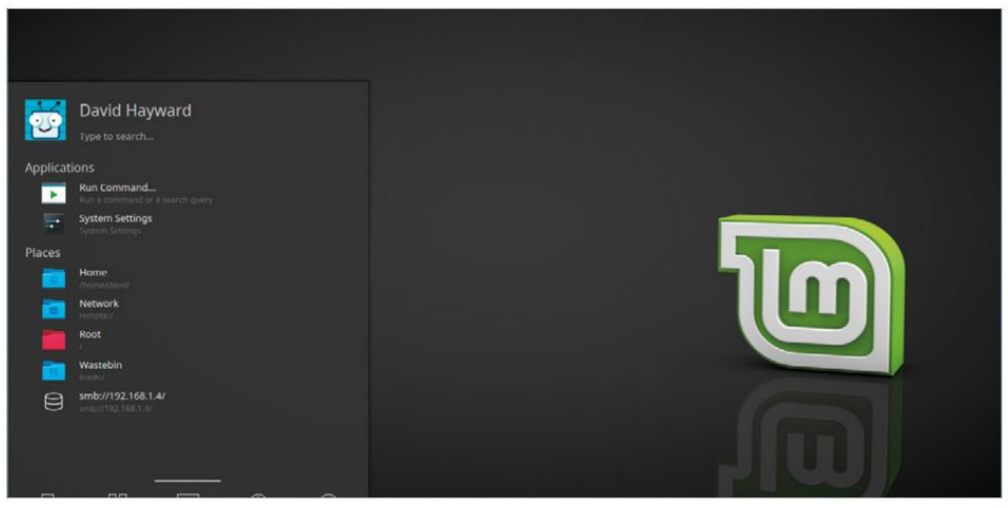
Navigating The KDE Desktop

You are now no doubt aware that the K Desktop Environment is a radically different place to that of MATE, Cinnamon or Xfce. It's a cutting edge environment, with customisation and configuration options galore.

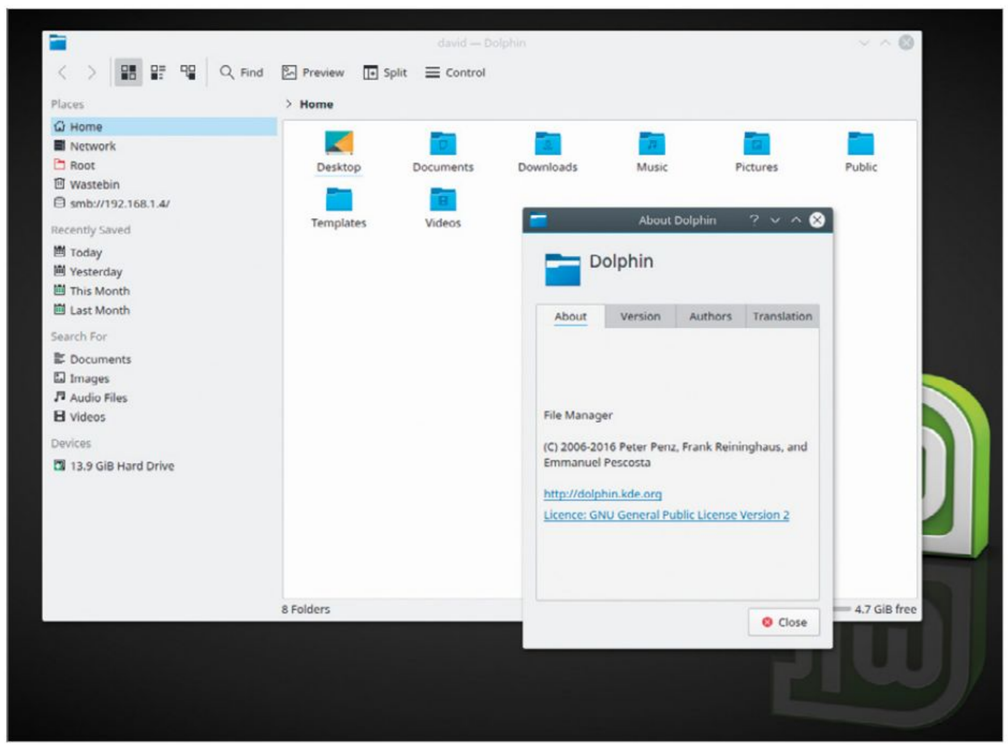
O-KDE-DOKEY

Despite its differences, once you've mastered the finer points of KDE it's really quite a fluid and logical desktop. Let's have a little look around it and see how it all works.

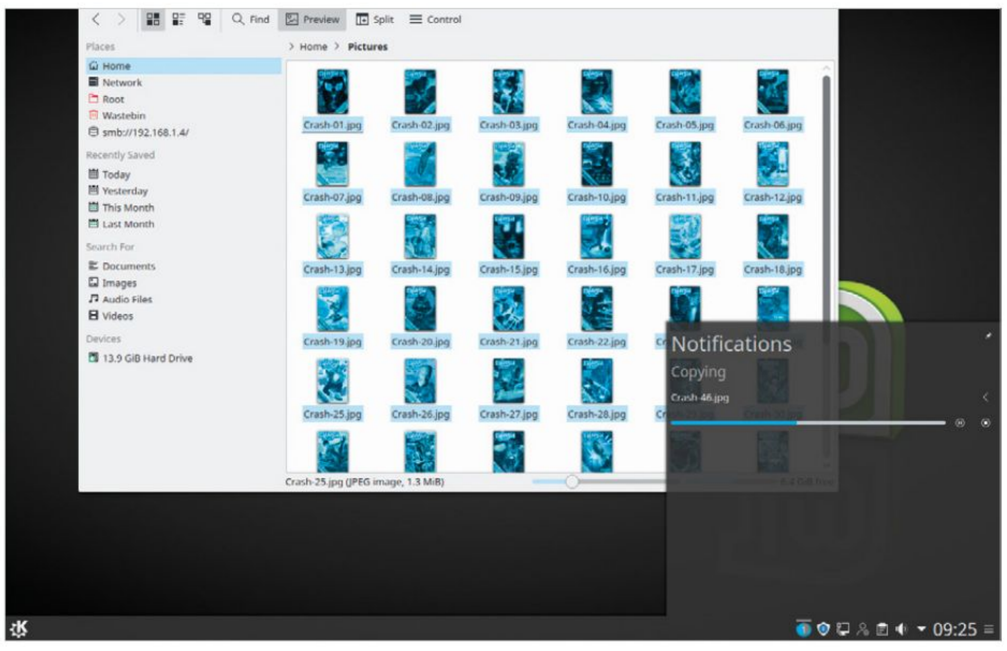
STEP 1 The lack of desktop icons is something that may put off the newcomer. At least with Cinnamon, MATE and Xfce you had a kind of desktop anchor in the form of the Home or Computer file manager icons. The best place to get to the file manager therefore, is via KDE Menu > Computer.



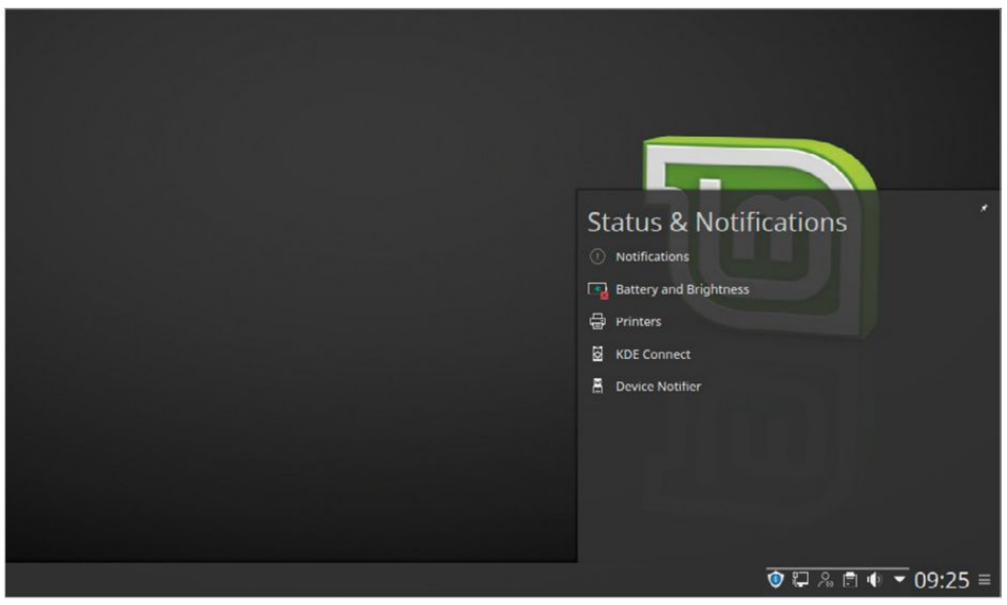
STEP 2 We've already looked at the KDE Menu, so we won't tread over old ground in this section. Instead, open up the Home location from the Computer menu. Dolphin is the KDE file manager and it lists: Places, Recently Accessed, Search locations and mounted Devices on the left, as well as providing the usual file manager options along the top.



STEP 3 Dolphin covers the major file manager duties, such as copying, pasting, opening attached devices, network locations and so on. Anything you do that requires some attention, such as a large file copy, will be displayed in the Notifications icon located in the Panel.

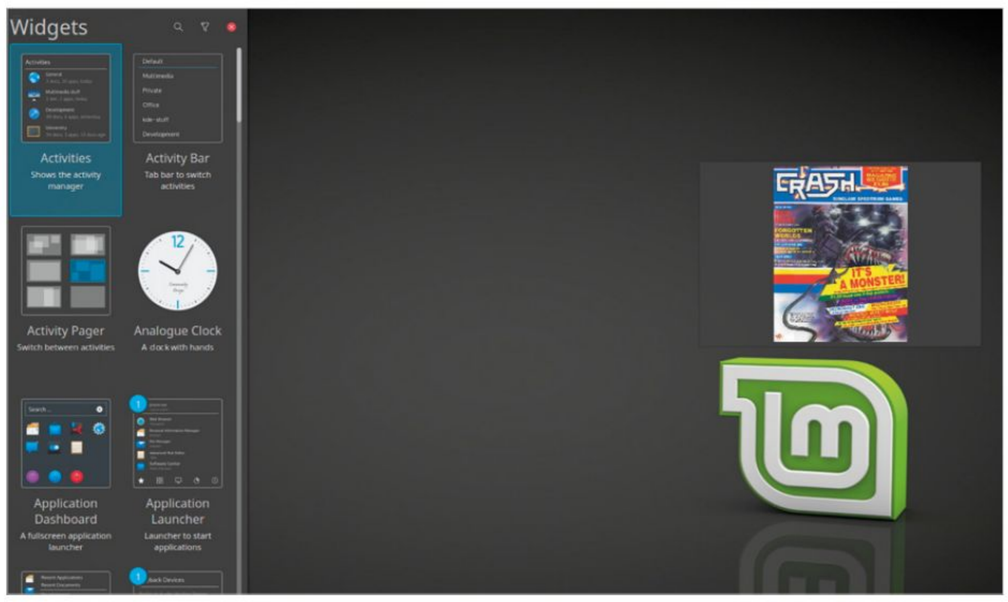


STEP 4 Speaking of the Panel, you can see it's a lot busier than the other DEs. Aside from the KDE Menu on the left, there are several icons located on the right-hand side. The shield is the familiar Update Manager; then you have the Network icon, Instant Messaging icon, the Clipboard and its history, Volume control and a hidden icons arrow.

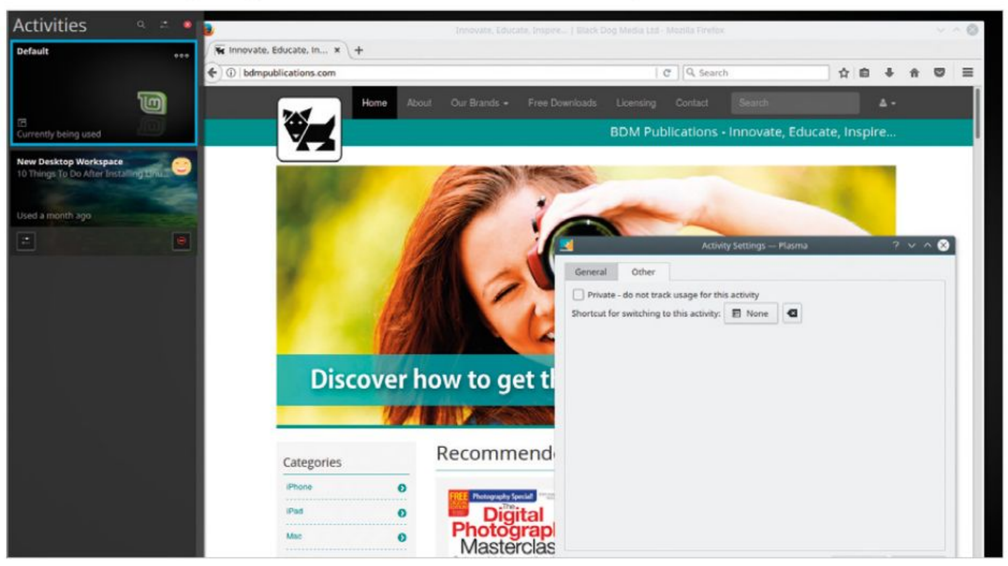


STEP 5 You will have also noticed that in the top left of the desktop there are three horizontal bars, called the Desktop Toolbox. Clicking the bars opens up a desktop configuration panel, offering: Show Desktop, Add Widgets, Activities, Lock Widgets, Configure Desktop, Lock Screen and Leave.

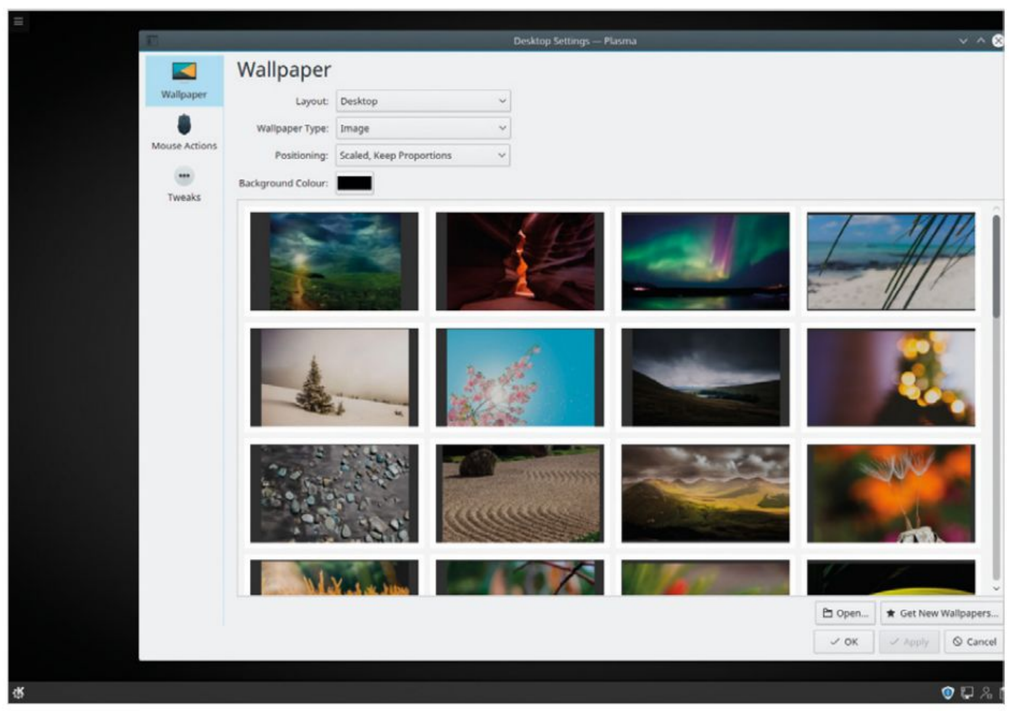
STEP 6 Show Desktop, Lock Screen and Leave are fairly self-explanatory (two of which mimic the options from the KDE Menu). Add Widgets, as with Cinnamon, allows you to add an active app on to the desktop itself, such as a clock, picture frame, weather app and so on. These KDE Widgets are also called Plasmoids.



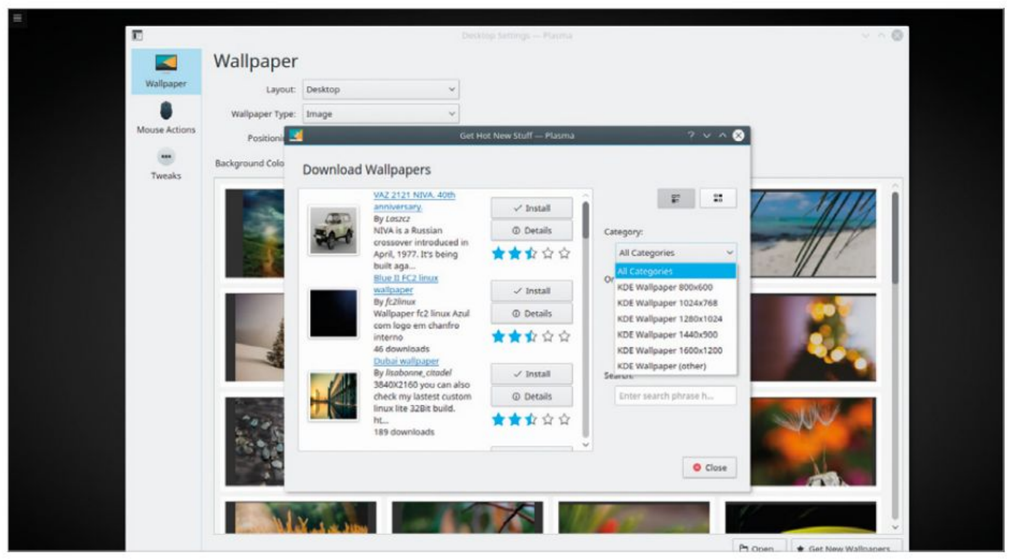
STEP 7 Another option from the Desktop Toolbox menu is Activities. This is KDE's new version of Workspaces, or virtual desktops, each with different characteristics. Activities allows for a greater degree of control over a Workspace. For example you can set one to have different power settings for a presentation, use a different language in another, or mark it as private.



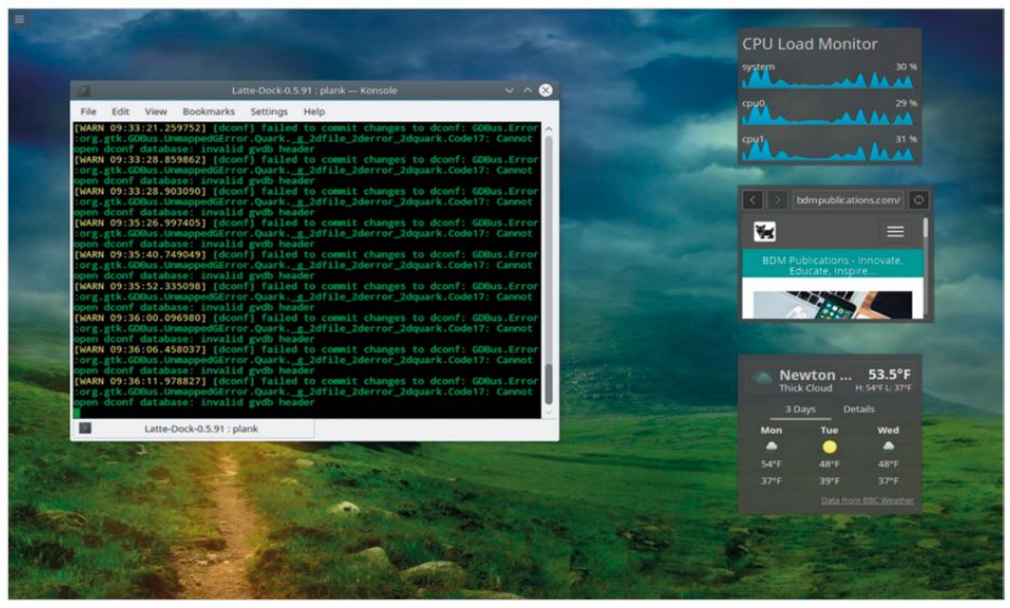
STEP 8 The Configure Desktop option, also found when you right-click the desktop, allows you to change the background wallpaper, colours, define mouse desktop actions and a couple of Tweaks to enable or disable the Desktop Toolbox, or Widget Handling.



STEP 9 The Get New Wallpapers function from the Configure Desktop option will bring up a separate window whereby you're able to download and install hundreds of community created wallpapers based on date created, highest to lowest rated, most downloaded and so on. There's also desktop resolution categories to search from.



STEP 10 With very little effort, KDE can be made to look quite exceptional. This example in the screenshot took a few minutes to set up, including the wallpaper, Konsole (the Terminal for KDE) settings, addition of desktop Widgets and the installation of a new panel (Plank in this case).



10 Things To Do After Installing Linux Mint KDE

Linux Mint KDE is a great start to someone's first adventures with Linux. KDE is cutting edge, highly configurable, runs great on modern and modest hardware and brings out the best in Linux, and what Mint offers the community.

BUILDING KDE FOUNDATIONS

For the final time, here's a look at ten steps to forming the perfect foundation for your Linux Mint experience. There's a ton of potential within KDE, so let's get off to a good start.

STEP 1

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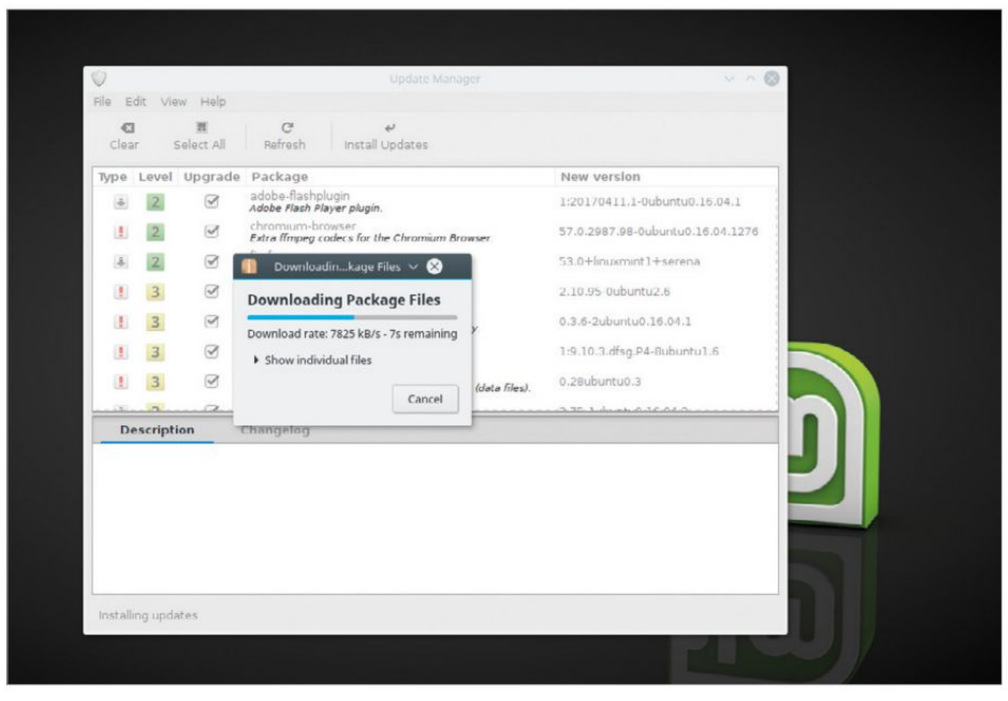
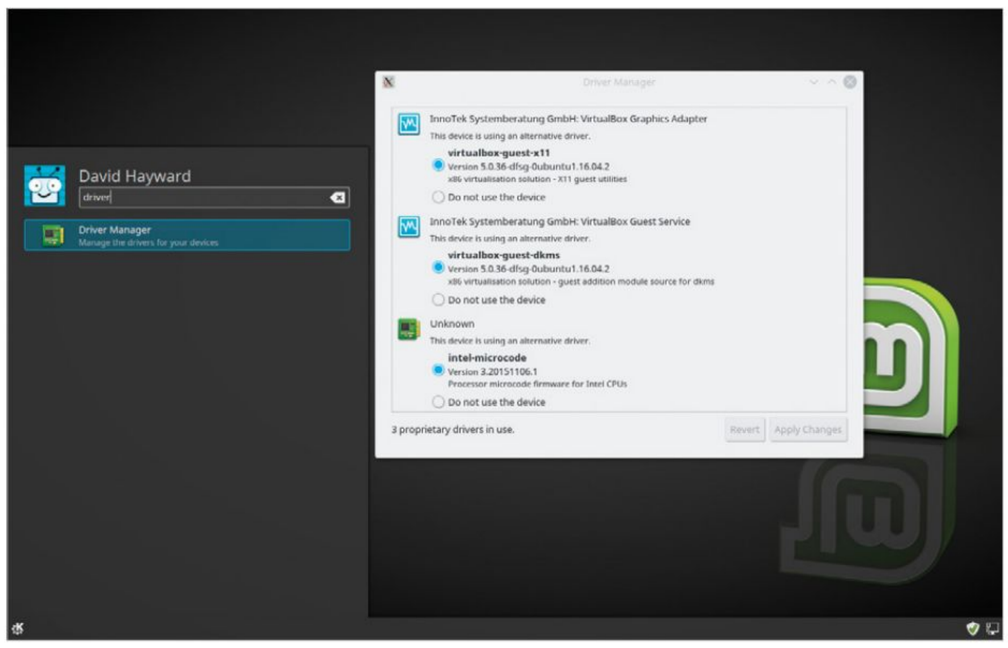


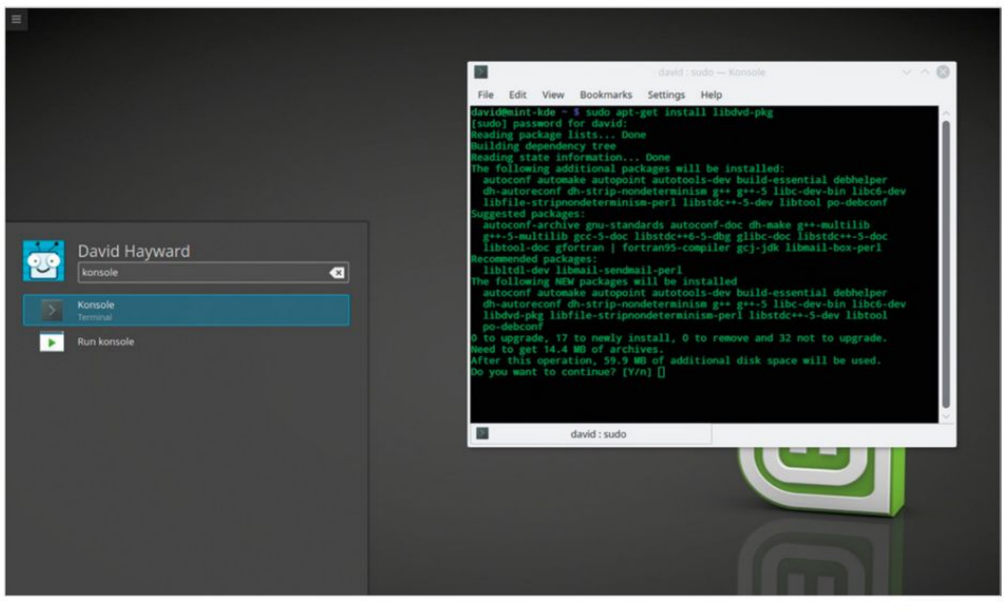
STEP 2

Click on the KDE Menu and start typing "driver", then left-click the Driver Manager app that appears in the search results. Enter your password and choose the recommended drivers as detected by the Driver Manager. Click the Apply Changes button to install the relevant drivers, and reboot the system.



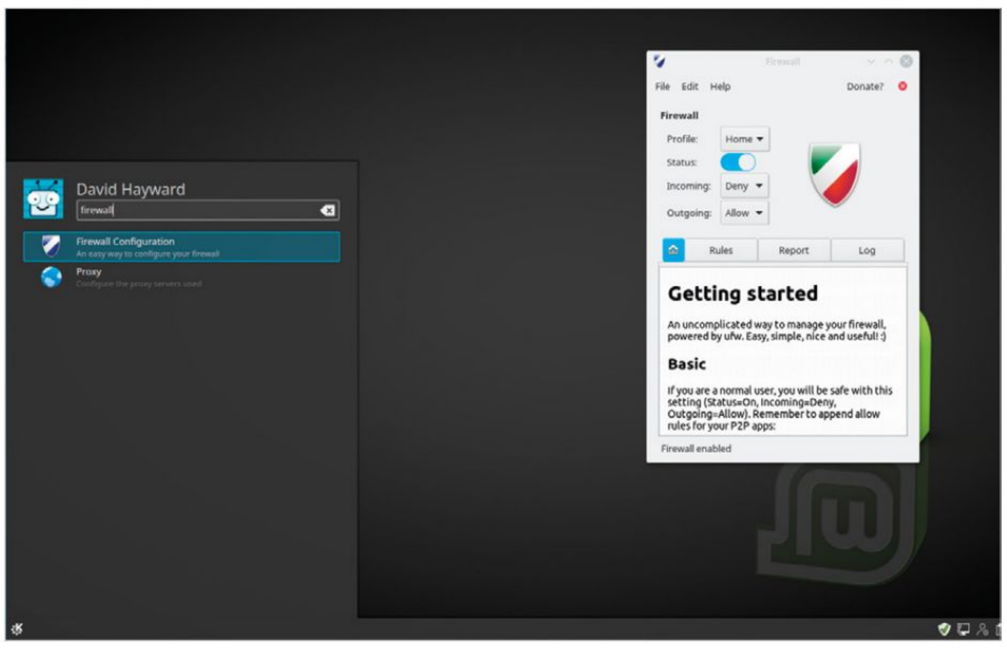
STEP 3

Don't forget to add support for watching encrypted DVDs. Drop into a Terminal (KDE Menu > type konsole) and enter: `sudo apt-get install libdvd-pkg`. Accept the changes to the system and installation notifications and if required, use the fix for the dpkg data locked as in Step 8 of the 10 Things To Do After Installing Linux Mint MATE section.

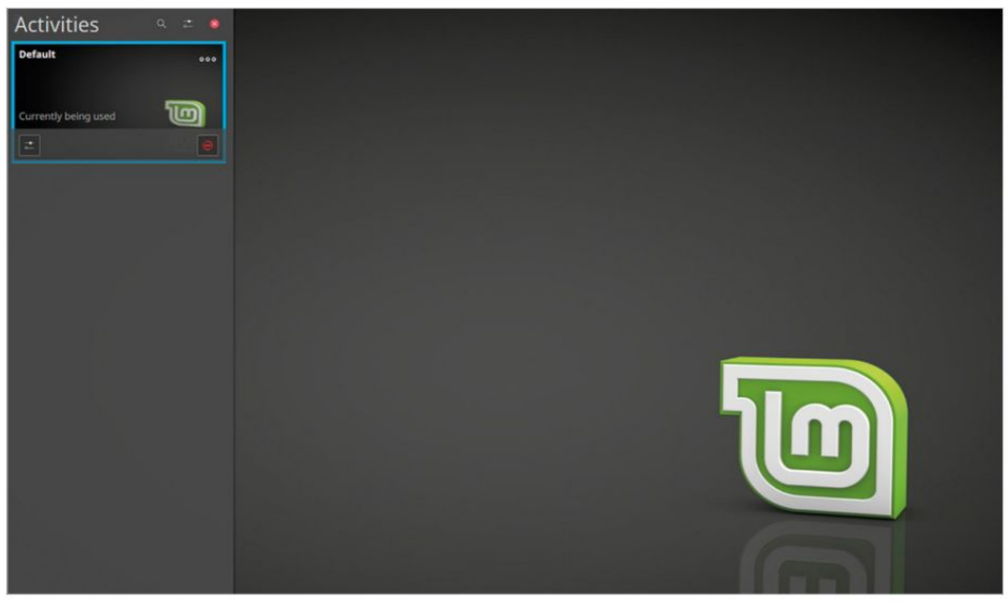


STEP 4

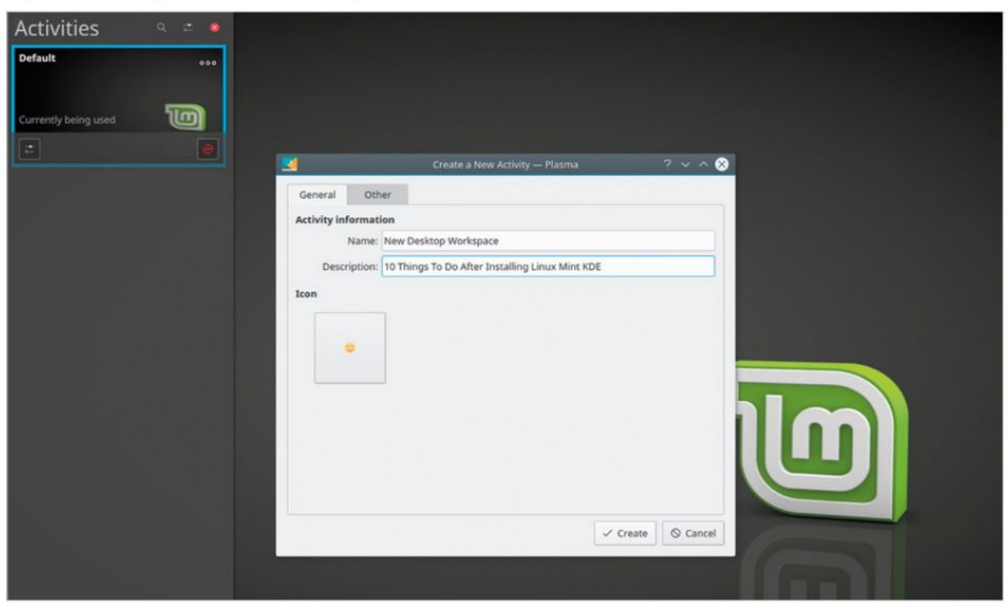
It's always best to make sure the Linux Mint Firewall is up and running, so open the KDE Menu, type firewall and click the Firewall Configuration app that appears in the search results. Once opened, click the On slider next to the Status option in the Firewall window.



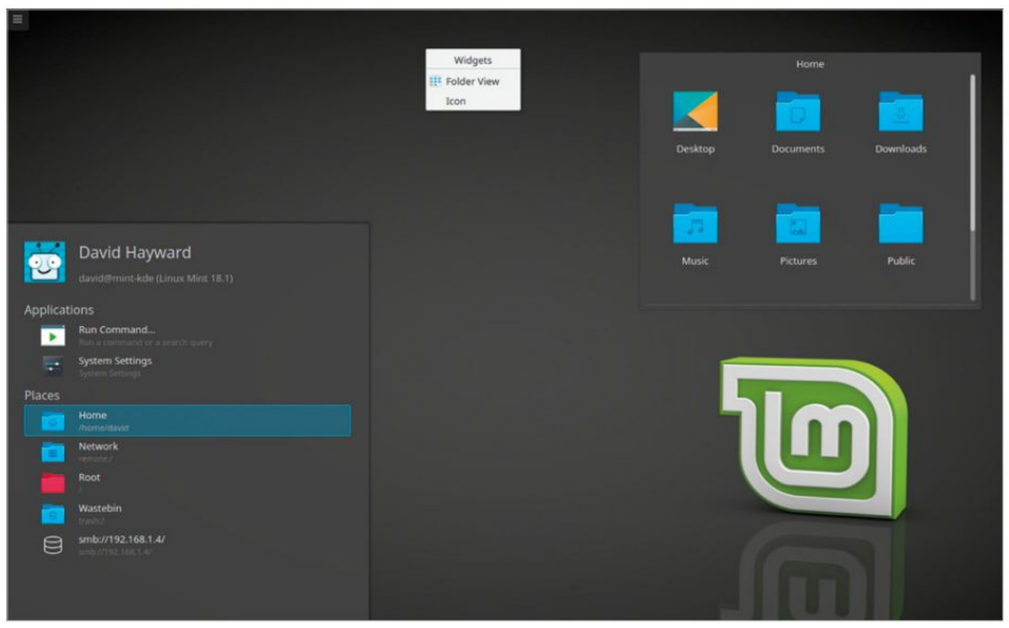
STEP 5 It's not really necessary but handy to set up the extra Workspaces, or Activities in the case of Linux Mint KDE. Click the Desktop Toolbar, the top left three bars, and choose Activities from the menu. There is a side menu now loaded on the left-hand side of the desktop. From there, click the Create Activity at the bottom.



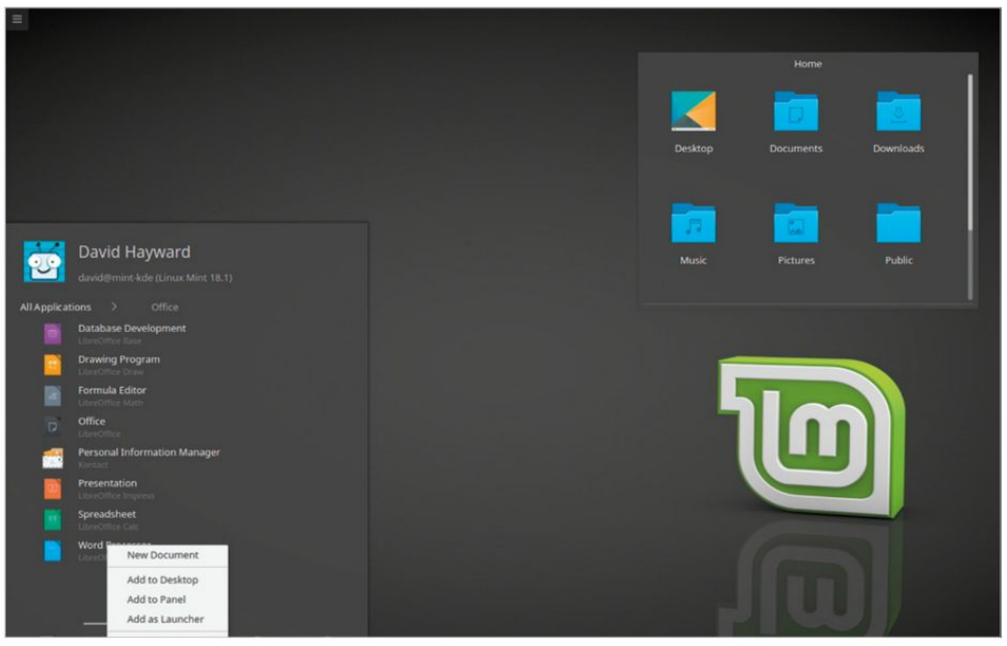
STEP 6 You now see a new window appear, Create a New Activity. Give a name to the new Activity (Workspace) and a Description if you like, along with an Icon. The Other tab enables privacy mode, where there's no usage tracking. When you're ready, click on the Create button. You can quickly switch between Activities by pressing Windows Key+Tab.



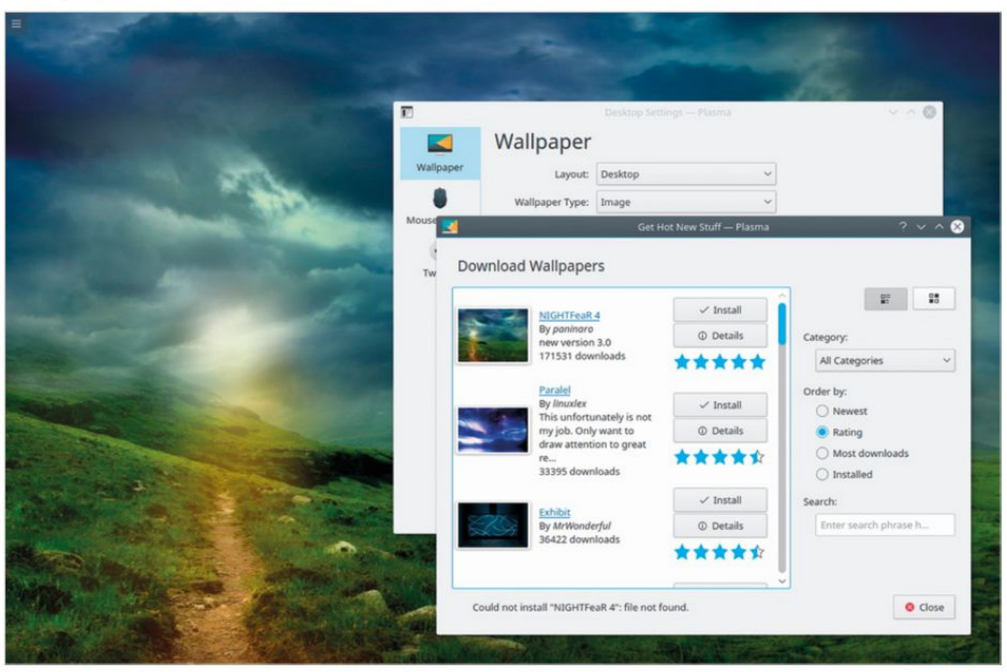
STEP 7 To start with, the KDE desktop is a little bleak for some users but you can easily add installed apps or locations. Open the KDE Menu > Computer, left-click the Home icon and hold and drag it to the desktop. This will give you two options: Folder View and Icon. Choose which, but experiment with both. We prefer the Folder View.



STEP 8 Equally as simple, adding an app to the desktop or Panel can be achieved by right-clicking any of the apps from within the KDE Menu and choosing one of the options: Add to Desktop, Add to Panel or Add to Launcher.



STEP 9 In case you haven't done so already, right-click the desktop and choose Configure Desktop from the menu. You can pick a better desktop wallpaper from Mint's default selection or click the Get New Wallpapers button and organise the available wallpapers by Rating. Click the Install button to add the new wallpaper to the available collection.



STEP 10 Finally, you can right-click the KDE Menu and choose Alternatives from the menu. Pick a new Alternative menu and look from the list available, followed by the Switch button to activate the new look.