How to Install a Desktop (GUI) on an Ubuntu Server

May 16, 2019

GUI UBUNTU

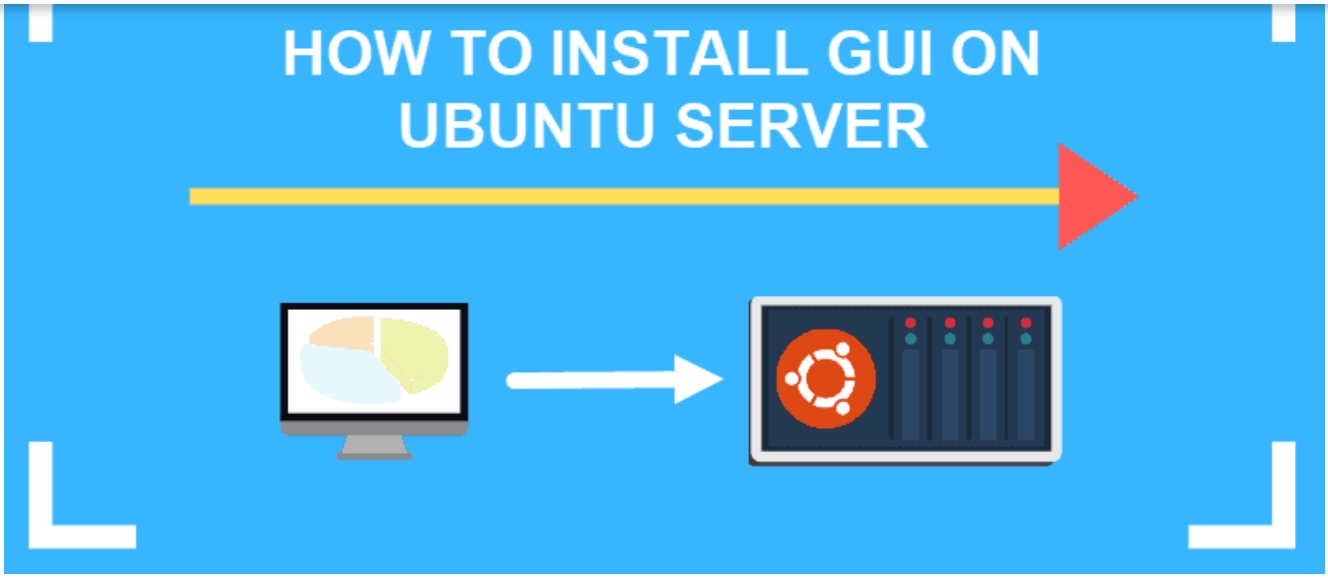
Contents

Introduction

Want to add a desktop environment after you install Ubuntu Server? It can be easily installed.

By default, Ubuntu Server does not include a Graphical User Interface (GUI). A GUI takes up system resources (memory and processor) that are used for server-oriented tasks. However, certain tasks and applications are more manageable and work better in a GUI environment.

This guide will show you how to install a desktop (GUI) graphical interface on your Ubuntu server.



Prerequisites

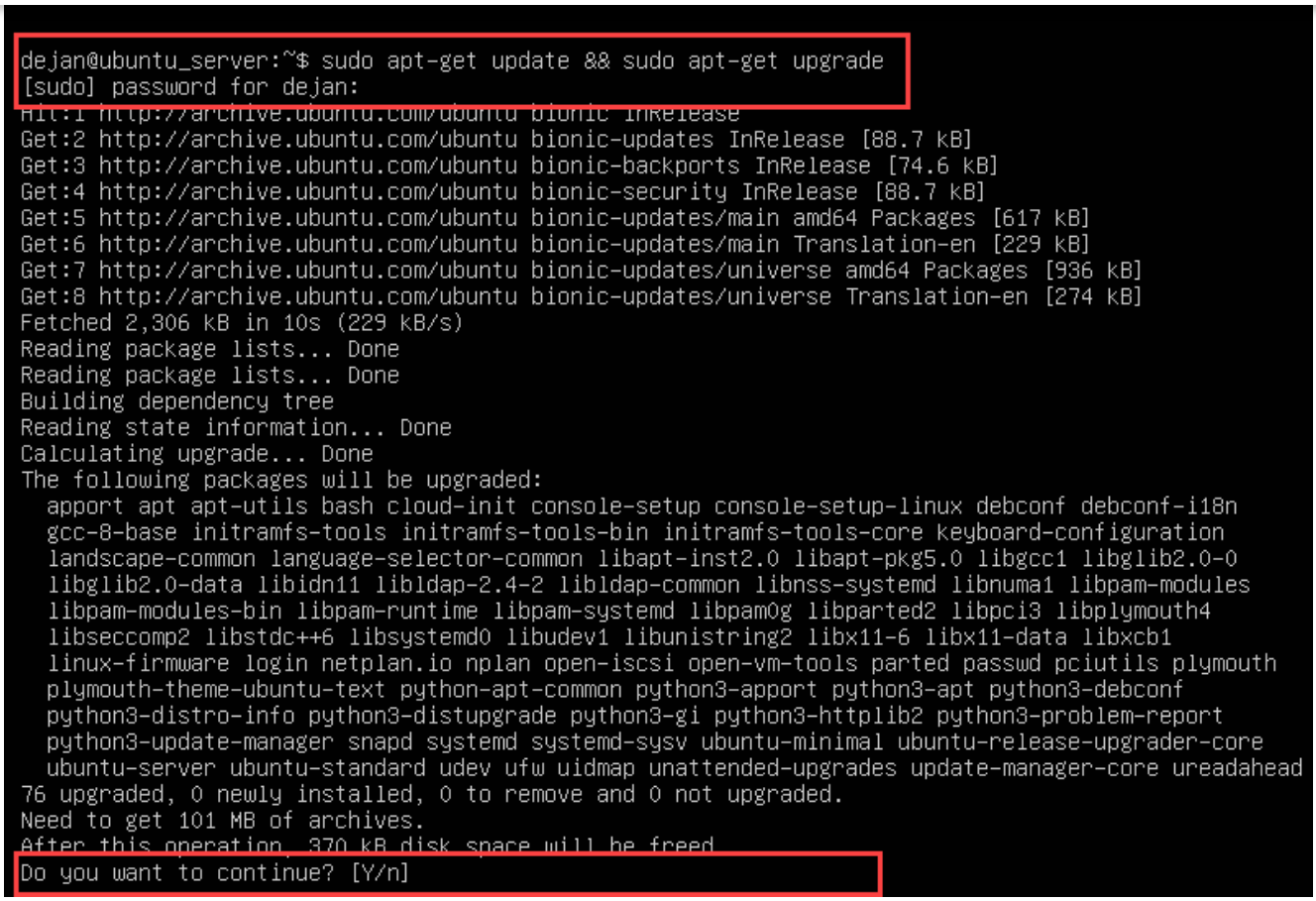
- A server running Ubuntu Linux Server
- Access to a user account with **sudo** or **root** privileges
- The **apt-get** package manager, included by default

Update Repositories and Packages

Start by updating the repositories and package lists:

```
sudo apt-get update && sudo apt-get upgrade
```

Press **Y** and hit **Enter** when asked if you want to continue.



This ensures you are working with the most recent software updates.

Next, install the **tasksel manager** utility:

```
sudo apt-get install tasksel
```

Now it is time to install a desktop environment.

Note: Tasksel is a utility for installing multiple related packages at once. See the documentation for more details.

Select a Display Manager

A display manager is an application that starts the display server, launches the desktop, and manages user authentication. The default **GDM3** (used with KDE-Plasma) is a resource-

By default, only one display manager can manage a server. They can run simultaneously only if configured to manage different servers. This article assumes that you will be using a single default display manager.

To install a specific display manager, use the **apt-get** package manager:

To install SLiM:

```
sudo apt-get install slim
```

To install LightDM:

```
sudo apt-get install lightdm
```

The **SDDM** display manager can be installed from the **tasksel** menu during the KDE installation.

Choose a GUI for Your Server

GNOME is the default GUI for most Ubuntu installations and is (loosely) based on the Apple ecosystem.

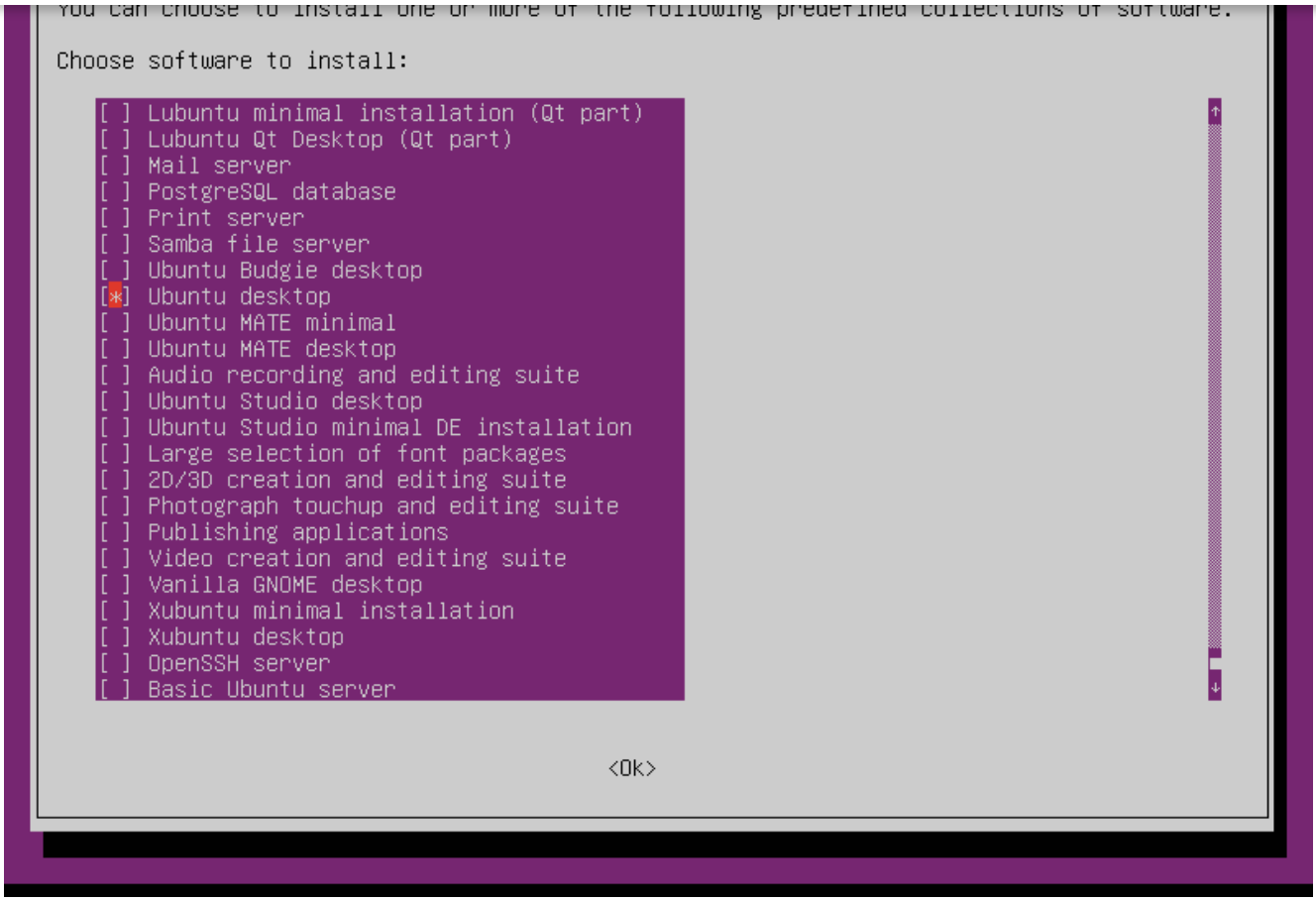
KDE is another popular GUI, (loosely) based on the Microsoft ecosystem. If you want to have the look and feel of a regular Ubuntu system, choose one of these desktop environments.

GNOME

To install GNOME, start by launching **tasksel**:

```
tasksel
```

A colorful interface will launch. Use the arrow key to scroll down the list and find **Ubuntu desktop**.



Use the **Space** key to select it, press **Tab** to select **OK** at the bottom, then press **Enter**.

The system will install the software and reboot, giving you a graphical login screen generated by your default display manager. In our case, it's SLiM.

Enter your **login credentials**. Use **F1** to switch between GUIs if you have multiple interfaces installed.

Below is a typical GNOME UI environment.

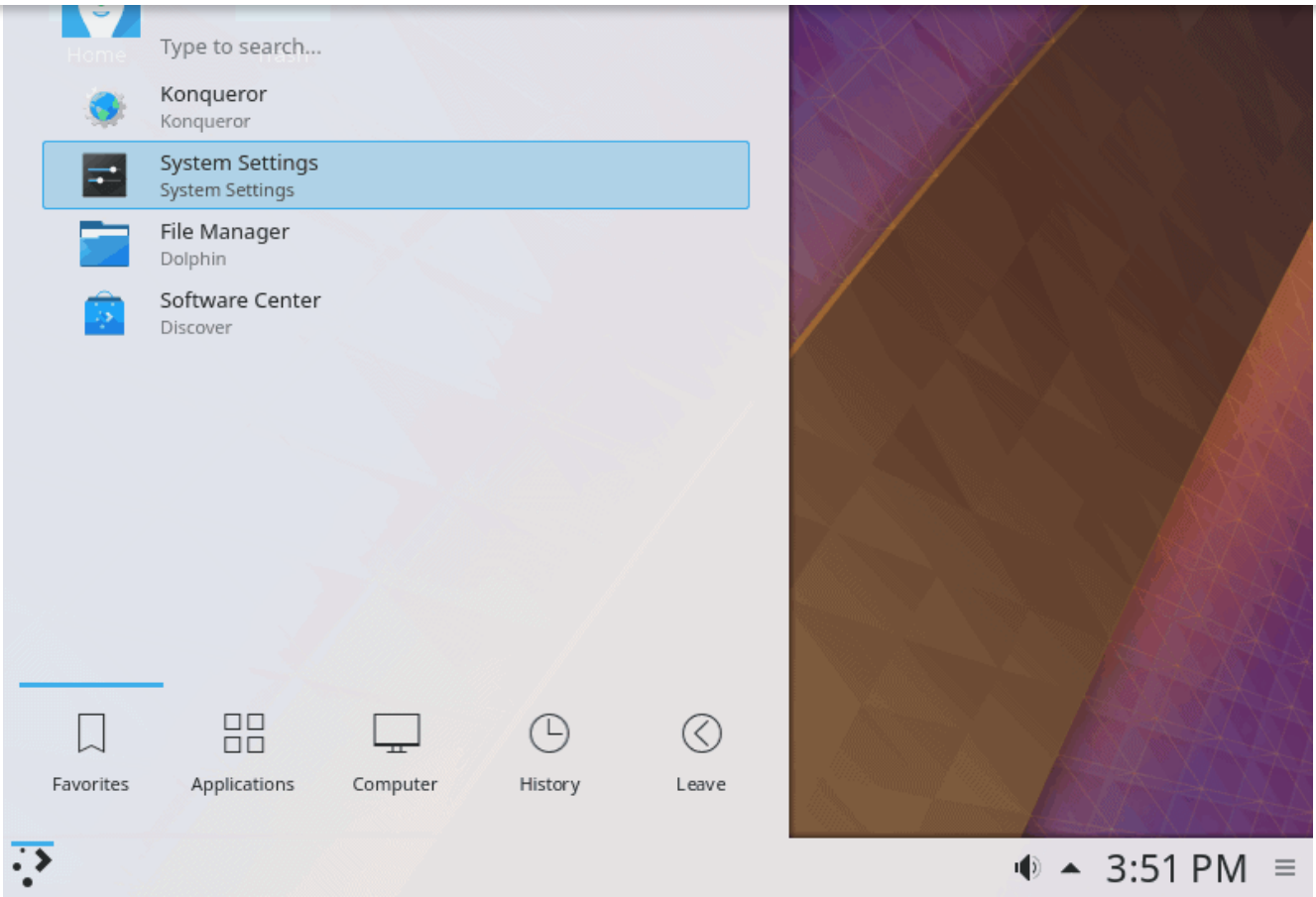
Note: If you are running Arch Linux, learn how to install and customize GNOME on Arch Linux.

KDE Plasma

To install KDE Plasma, use the following Linux command:

```
sudo apt-get install kde-plasma-desktop
```

You may be prompted during the installation to select a default display manager. Use the arrow keys to make a selection, then press **Enter**.



Launch KDE Plasma with the command:

```
sudo service display_manager start
```

Instead of **`display_manager`**, type the name of the display manager you have installed (e.g., SLiM, lightDM, SDDM). Enter your credentials and log in.

Note: These traditional Ubuntu Server GUI applications require substantial system resources. They may impact the functionality of your server. If you need to maximize your server resources, consider one of the lighter GUI applications listed below.

Mate Core Server Desktop

Mate is a popular and lightweight graphical interface. Install it by executing the following command:

Wait for tasksel to complete the action. Once complete, launch the desktop interface with the command:

```
sudo service display_manager start
```

Instead of **`display_manager`**, type the name of the display manager you have installed (e.g., SLiM, lightDM, SDDM). You'll be prompted to log in.

To exit the GUI, open the command line and enter:

```
sudo service display_manager<em> </em>stop
```

Note: You may need to press **Ctrl-Alt-F1** to get back to the server's

Lubuntu Core Server Desktop

Lubuntu is a very lightweight GUI. Use this application if you need a graphical interface, but want to minimize the impact on system memory and processor.

To install Lubuntu, enter the following:

```
sudo tasksel install lubuntu-core
```

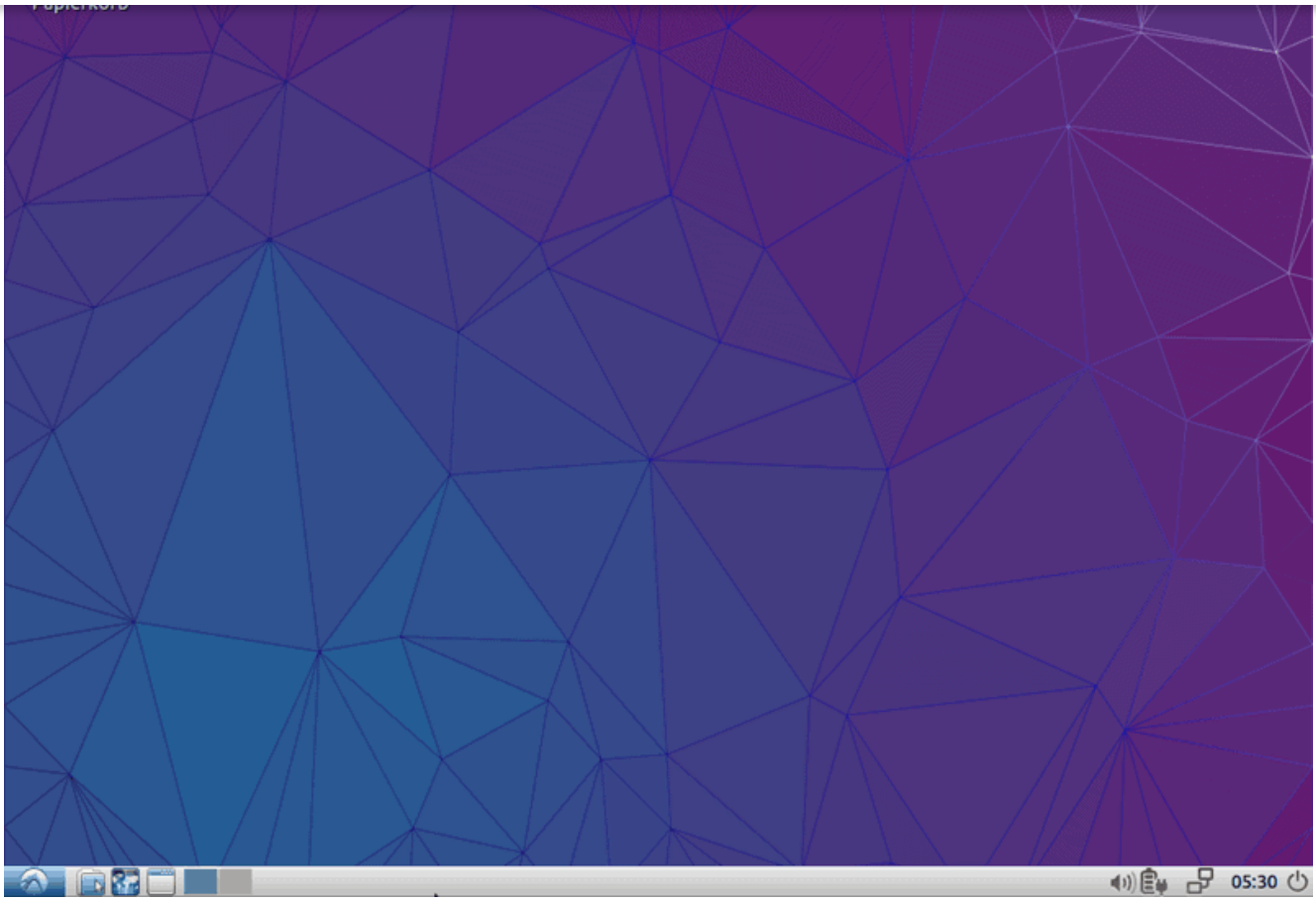
Alternately, you can install from the **tasksel** menu with the command:

```
tasksel
```

Use the arrow keys to highlight the Lubuntu GUI you want to use. Press the **Space** bar to select, then **Tab** to the **OK** button and press **Enter**.

Launch the GUI with:

```
sudo service display_manager<em> </em>start
```



Exit the GUI by opening a terminal window and entering the following:

```
sudo service display_manager stop
```

Xubuntu Server Core Desktop

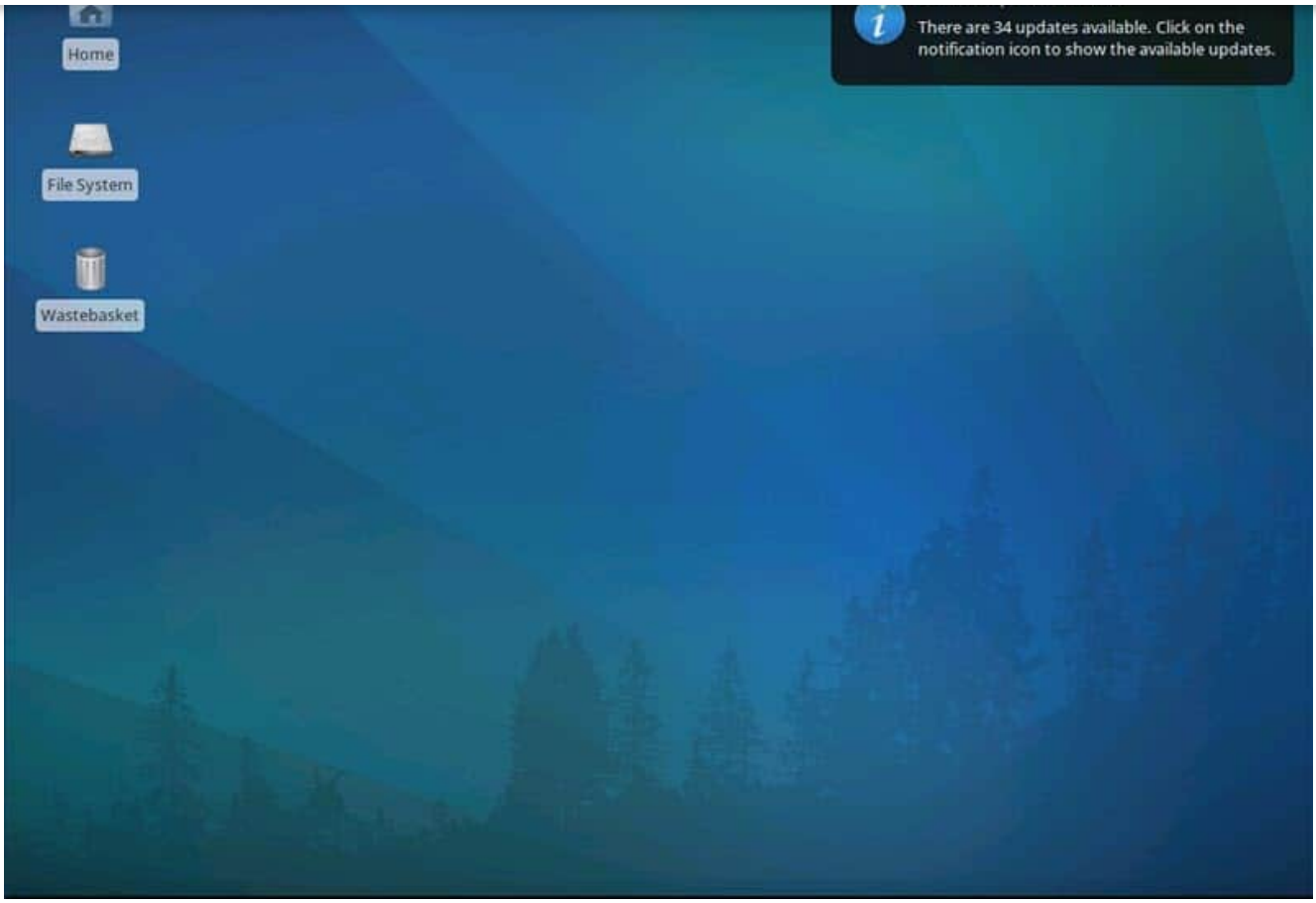
Xubuntu is a derivative of Ubuntu that uses the Xfce desktop environment.

Install Xubuntu by entering the following:

```
sudo tasksel install xubuntu-core
```

Launch it by entering:

```
sudo service display_manager start
```



Xfce Desktop

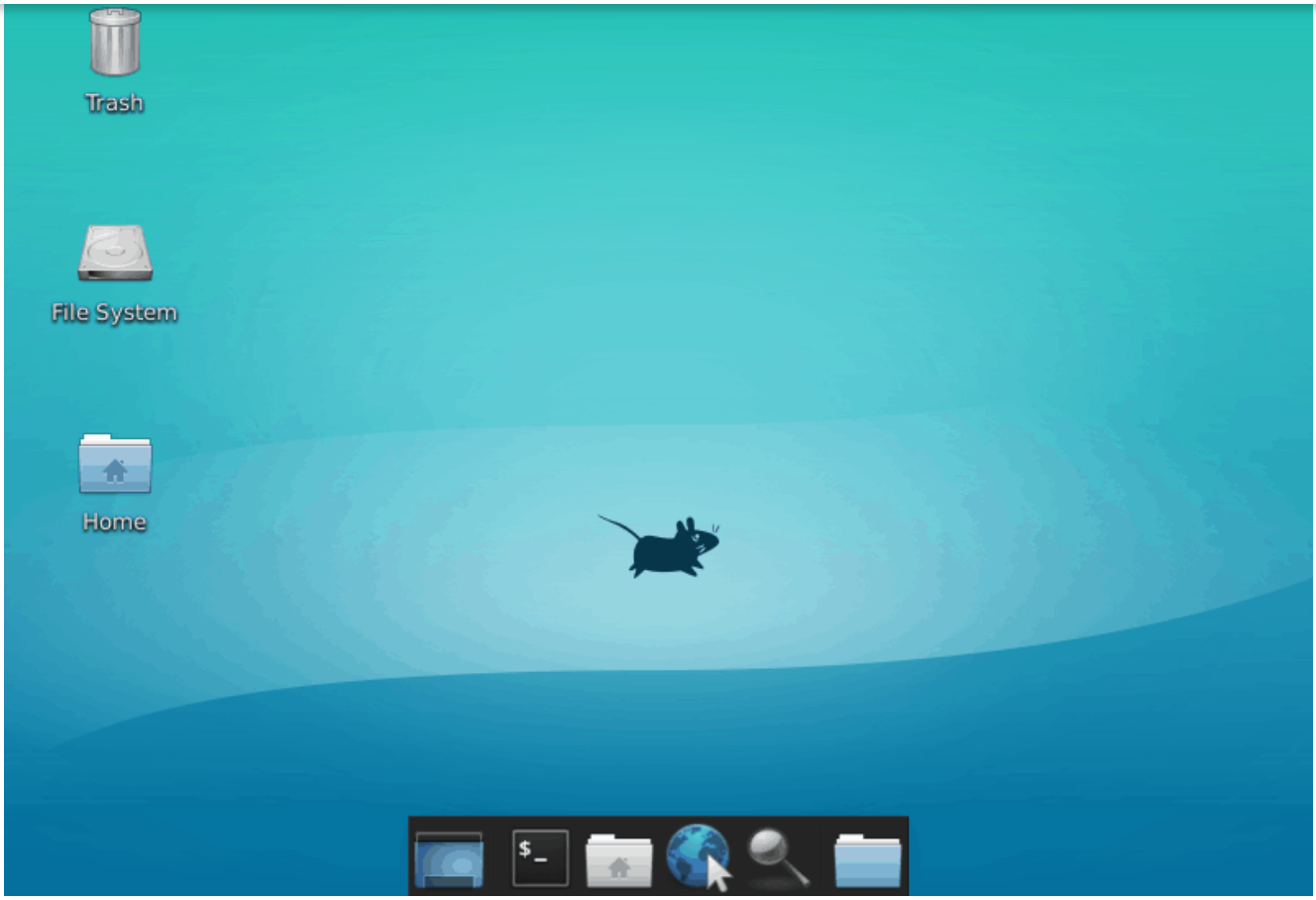
The Xfce desktop environment can be used by itself. It's designed to be responsive, lightweight and user-friendly.

Install Xfce with the following:

```
sudo apt-get install xfce4 slim
```

Launch Xfce by entering:

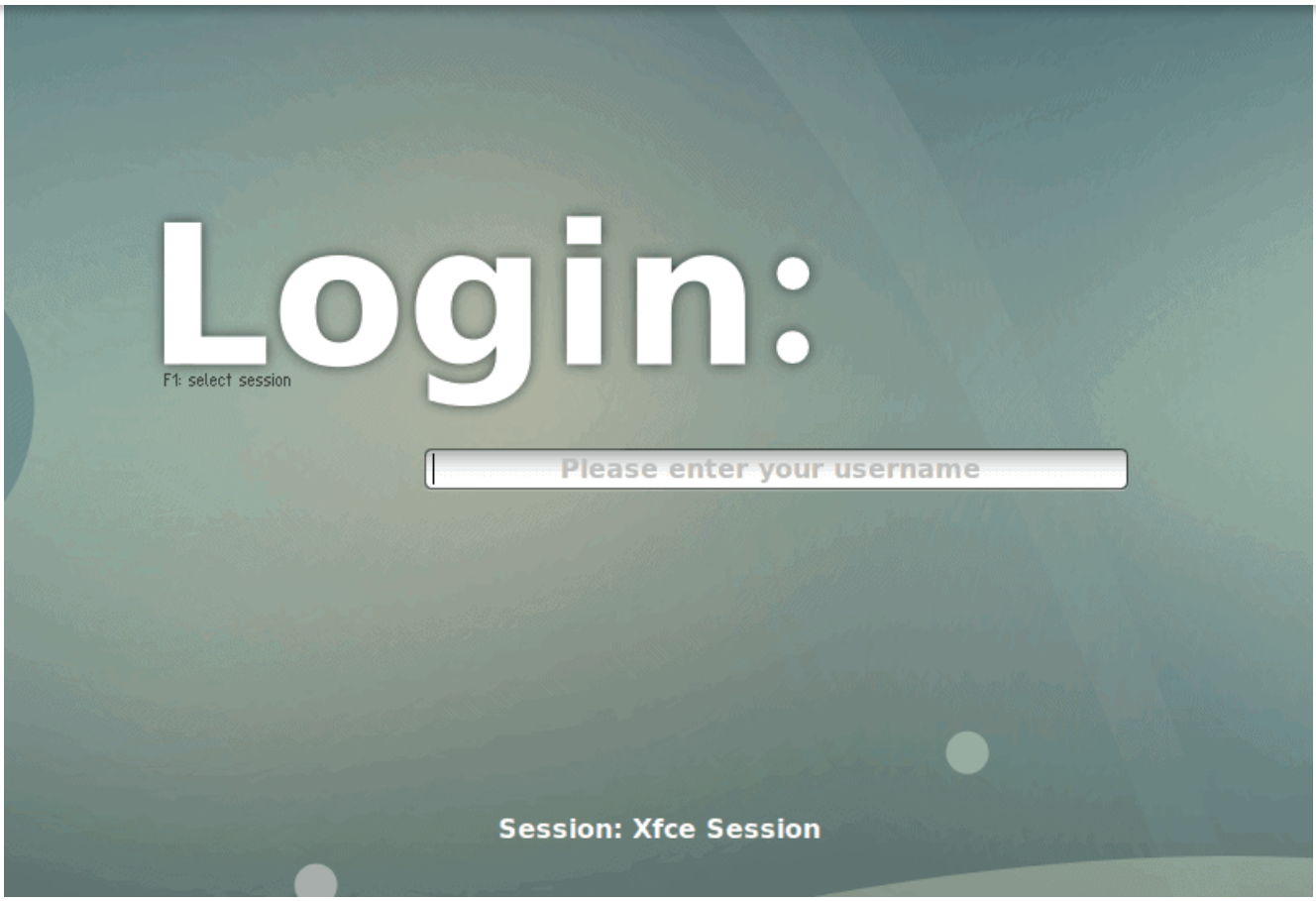
```
sudo service slim start
```



Note: The Xfce GUI is compatible with the SLiM display manager only.

Switching Between GUIs

If you have several GUIs installed you can select which one to use. Once you start your display manager, you will be prompted to log in. However, that screen also allows you to pick which GUI you want to enable.



The image above represents SLiM's login screen. Switch between GUIs by pressing **F1**. The interface will toggle between sessions (or GUIs). Log in once you toggle to the GUI of your choice.

Conclusion

There are many GUI desktops available for Ubuntu Server. Most can be installed using the **apt-get** package manager or the **tasksel** tool, as detailed in this guide.

If you've worked extensively with conventional operating systems, it can be challenging to have to work in a command-line interface. Fortunately, Ubuntu – like many Linux systems – is open-source, thus there are many GUIs available.

Dejan Tucakov

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