

# Install Linux Mint on a Macbook Air

A set of tips for installation and post install

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## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Install Mint on a macbook air . . . . .	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Setup configuration</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Additional Software setup</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Miscellaneous extra steps for software install.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Appendix 1. Script to set up links from local Home to Dropbox</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Appendix 2. Copy files to new Mint machine</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>7</b>

## 1 Introduction

The specific goal of this “DIY” project is to refurbish a seven year old macbook air laptop with a modern linux operating system. The OS we’ll focus on for this post is **Linux Mint 21.3**. Why Mint? Well, as its been, “since the beginning” of the



linux era (circa 1993) the main challenge to installing a linux distribution on almost any PC or mac is wrestling with the hardware drivers: notably video, audio, trackpad and power management drivers. The Mint distro provides a solution the drivers needed for our target macbook air, making the install much, much more straightforward. There are many other considerations that can go into choosing a linux distribution, but for our purposes, this is the main one.

To get started acquire a copy of the Mint distribution. The simplest way to do this is to download the latest Linux Mint ISO image file using an already setup workstation, and “burn” it onto a USB drive. For example use a “mac” laptop with `macos` installed. Confirm internet connectivity is available (Wifi or ethernet), and the machine has at least one external port.

## 1.1 Install Mint on a macbook air

The target machine is a 2016 13-inch MacBook Air with four Thunderbolt 3 Ports.

To start the process download an `iso` file from the Mint website. The current “Virginia” version of Mint `iso` file is 3.07 GB in size. The “Cinnamon” edition is recommended.

Specifically, download the torrent file for Linux Mint 21.3 Cinnamon edition.

Install the mac app Transmission <https://transmissionbt.com/download> and add the torrent file.

Also download the associated `sha256sum.txt` file.

To check the integrity of your local ISO file, generate its SHA256 checksum and compare it to the content of the `sha256sum.txt` file:

```
> sha256sum -b linuxmint-21.3-cinnamon-64bit.iso
```

We can transfer the `iso` file to a USB flash drive using one of several methods. On `macos` we suggest using the app `balenaEtcher`. You can download `balenaEtcher` [here](#)

Insert the bootable USB flash drive into the target macbook and reboot. Hold the ALT key while the machine reboots and you'll be presented with a screen offering boot drive options. Select the icon for the USB drive. A grub menu will appear.<sup>1</sup>

From the Grub menu choose **Start Linux Mint 21.3 Cinnamon 64-bit**. and the Mint install program will start.

A linux mint desktop will appear allowing you to “test drive” Mint or to continue the install by double clicking the icon labeled “install Linux Mint”.

A setup dialog will start. Select, in sequence

- Language (English for us),
- Network (If ethernet is available startup program will automatically connect. If wifi only, not needed at this point, suggest skip),
- codexes (check box “install multimedia codecs”),
- options for installation type (choose “erase disk and install linux mint”).
- Location (Los Angeles for us),
- name a user who will have administrator privileges, assign a password, and a hostname.

After these screens the install process will proceed without additional user input.

When complete connect the target machine to the Internet. As mentioned above, if you have ethernet connectivity plug the cable directly into the target macbook and Mint should connect automatically to the internet. For wireless wifi access Mint may or may not recognize hardware modem. If not use a supported external modem e.g. Panda Wireless modem. Panda is supported since Mint 21.3 has **Ralink** RT5372 drivers installed.

The final hardware related step is to add a second monitor, if available, via **HDMI** or “USB-C”.

Thats it. The base system is ready to go. Reboot and login with the admin username and password you provided earlier.

<sup>1</sup> **GNU GRand Unified Bootloader (GRUB)**. “When your Linux operating system starts up, GRUB is the first program that runs. It loads the kernel of the operating system, and then the kernel loads the rest of the operating system, including the shell, the desktop environment, and other operating system features.” [codecademy.com](https://www.codecademy.com)

## 2 Setup configuration

Set keyboard and trackpad preferences:

- \* Open ``Mouse and Touchpad`` in settings. Turn on ``Reverse scroll``.
- \* Open ``Keyboard`` > ``Layouts`` > ``Options`` > ``Caps Lock behavior`` and select ``Swap Esc`` and ``Caps-Lock``. This is an important setting for ``vim`` use.
- \* Open ``Shortcuts`` > ``Windows``.
  - \* Set ``Maximize window`` to ``Super-f``
  - \* Set ``Unmaximize window`` to ``Super-g``
  - \* Set ``Close window`` to ``Super-q``
  - \* Move window to other monitor ``Shift-Super-UpArrow``

Next configure the displays.

1. On a two monitor sysem open Display menu (press `command` key to open menu and search for “display”). Select the macbook as the primary monitor with 1920x1200 (thinkpad) resolution. Set `Monitor scale` at 150% to increase default font size in apps. Second monitor (e.g. Dell) should be set at 3840x2160.

## 3 Additional Software setup

Start with Dropbox to transfer working environment

```
sudo apt install nautilus-dropbox
dropbox autostart y
dropbox start -i
```

Dropbox startup process will launch a “Sign in” web page. Login with Dropbox credentials through web page.

Next

- Add a PPA for R packages,
- Update the `apt` “listings” and

- install basic utilities `fzf`, `ripgrep`, `ssh`, `git`, `wget`, `curl`, `zsh` and plugins, as well as
- major applications `R`, `vim`, `qutebrowser`, `firefox` `dropbox` and `zathura` with the following commands:

```
# R contributing PPA
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:c2d4u.team/c2d4u4.0+ -y
sudo apt update
sudo apt upgrade -y
sudo apt install \
terminator tree ssh zsh curl git vim fzf ripgrep \
autojump zsh-syntax-highlighting zsh-autosuggestions \
r-base-core r-cran-tidyverse \
r-cran-kableextra r-cran-styler \
r-cran-shiny r-cran-rmarkdown r-cran-tidyverse r-cran-knitr \
texlive-science zathura qutebrowser firefox -y
```

## 4 Miscellaneous extra steps for software install.

Run bash shell script `~/Dropbox/dotfiles/set_up_links.sh` to set up symbolic links (e.g. `ln -s ~/Dropbox/prj ~/prj`). See Appendix 1 below for details.

Make `zsh` the default shell.

```
> chsh -s $(which zsh)
```

Set up the shell (`zsh`) per the post [link to set up terminal post](#)

Install `zotero` and `docker` using software manager and set up syncing (login: `rgthomas`)

add `vimium` extension to `firefox`

Testing: Should be able to render both `Rmd` and `qmd` files.

```

cd c176
vm
ZT

po
cd setupmint
quarto render index.qmd --to pdf

```

## 5 Appendix 1. Script to set up links from local Home to Dropbox

set\_up\_links.sh

```

#!/bin/zsh

# since the install process creates a .config directory move it temporarily
mv ~/.config ~/.config.tmp

# create links to hidden files from ~/Dropbox/dotfiles directories
ff=(".zshrc" ".viminfo" ".vimrc" ".local" ".vim" \
    ".vimplugins" ".config" ".Rprofile")
for P in "${ff[@]}"
do
    echo "create a link for Dropbox/dotfiles version of $P in Home"
    ln -v -s "$HOME/Dropbox/dotfiles/$P" "$HOME/$P"
done

# copy the original ".config" files into new linked .config
cp -R ~/config.tmp/* ~/.config

# create new directories (links) for working files from Dropbox
dd=("sandbox" "bin" "docs" "prj" "work" "ssh" "shr")
for P in "${dd[@]}"
do
    echo "create a link for Dropbox/dotfiles version of $P in Home"
    ln -v -s "$HOME/Dropbox/$P" "$HOME/$P"
done

```

## 6 Appendix 2. Copy files to new Mint machine

Connect to new machine via ssh from mac laptop

First on the new machine (zz)

```
zz> sudo apt install ssh
zz> ifconfig
```

get IP for target, say 10.0.1.196

Either shell in to linux mint machine, or secure copy files over.

```
mac> ssh z@10.0.1.196
mac> scp install_apps.sh z@10.0.1.196:~
mac> scp set_up_links.sh z@10.0.1.196:~
```

Possible Shortcut

Install dropbox first. You could wait for Dropbox to finish installing or you could use scp to copy and run the two shell scripts: `install_app.sh` and `set_up_links.sh` from `~/Dropbox/dotfiles`. These two shells can run in parallel with Dropbox installing.

## 7 Practice