

# Introduction to the Linux Mint Desktop

This section of the guide will focus on the technologies and the tools that are specific to Linux Mint and provide information on some of the applications and technologies included by default in the Main Edition.

## The Gnome Desktop

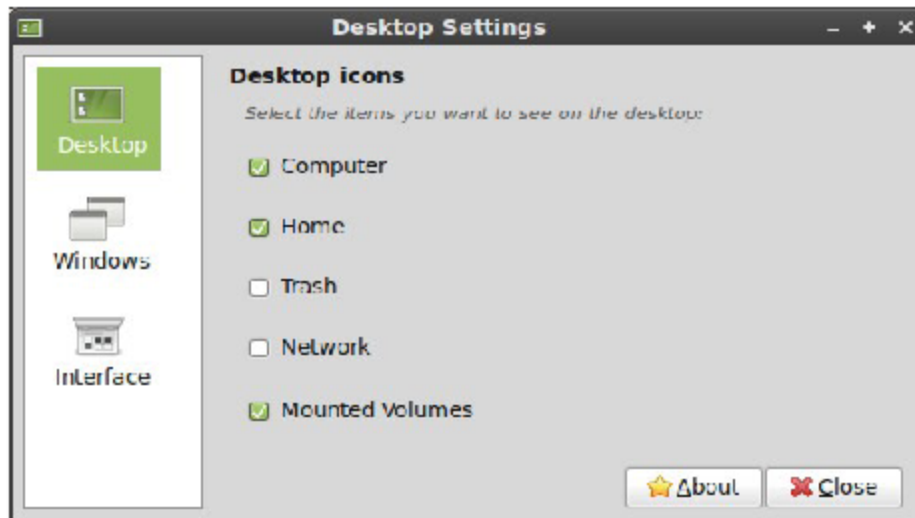
The “desktop” is the component of the operating system which is responsible for the elements that appear on the desktop: The Panel, the Wallpaper, the Control Center, the menus... etc.

The Main Edition of Linux Mint uses the “Gnome” desktop which is both intuitive and powerful.

You can find the Gnome User Guide at this address: <http://library.gnome.org/users/user-guide/>

## Desktop Settings

“Desktop Settings” is a tool developed specially for Linux Mint which allows you to rapidly configure the aspects of your Gnome Desktop that you will use the most.



Launch it by clicking on “Menu” (in the bottom-left corner of your screen), then select “Preferences” and click on “Desktop Settings”.

# The Menu

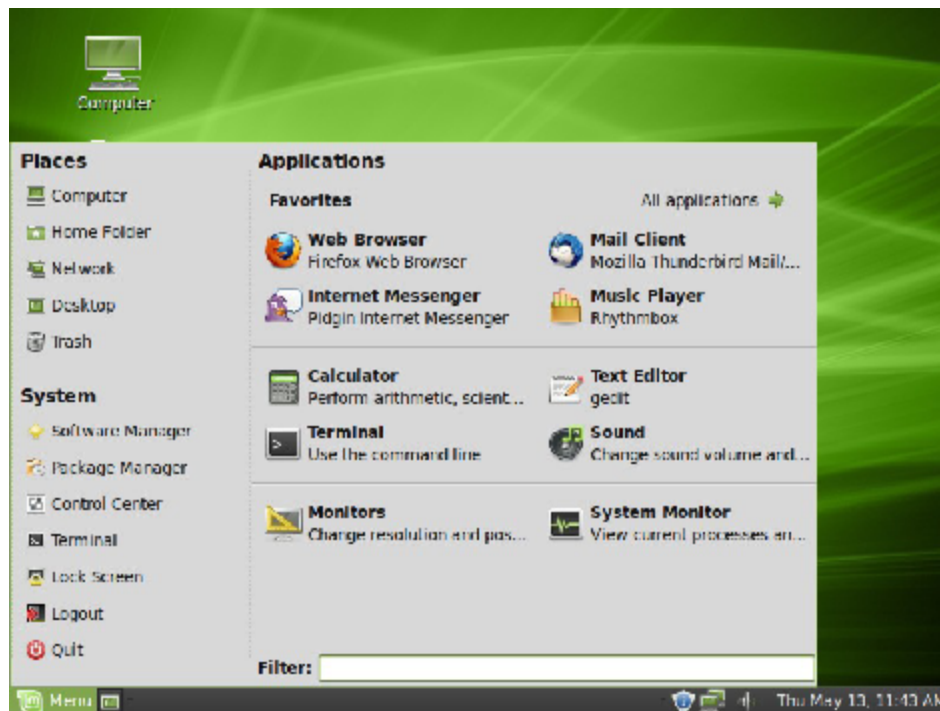
Linux Mint comes with a unique menu. This menu was initially inspired by the “Slab” menu developed by SUSE but differs from it in many ways.

Linux Mint also comes with the default Gnome menu which you can activate to replace the Linux Mint Menu, which we’ll learn how to do later on. The Linux Mint Menu is, however, worth learning. Although it is very different from what you might be used to, you’ll probably love it once you’ve gotten used to it.

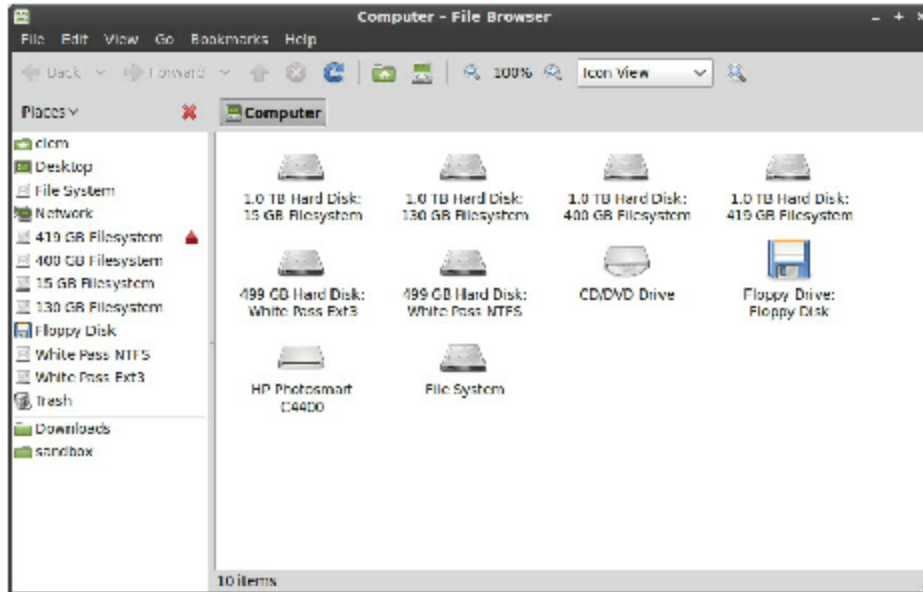
To open the menu click on the “Menu” button at the bottom-left corner of your screen or press CTRL+SUPER\_L (“Super\_L” is the left Windows key on your keyboard).

## Getting to know the menu

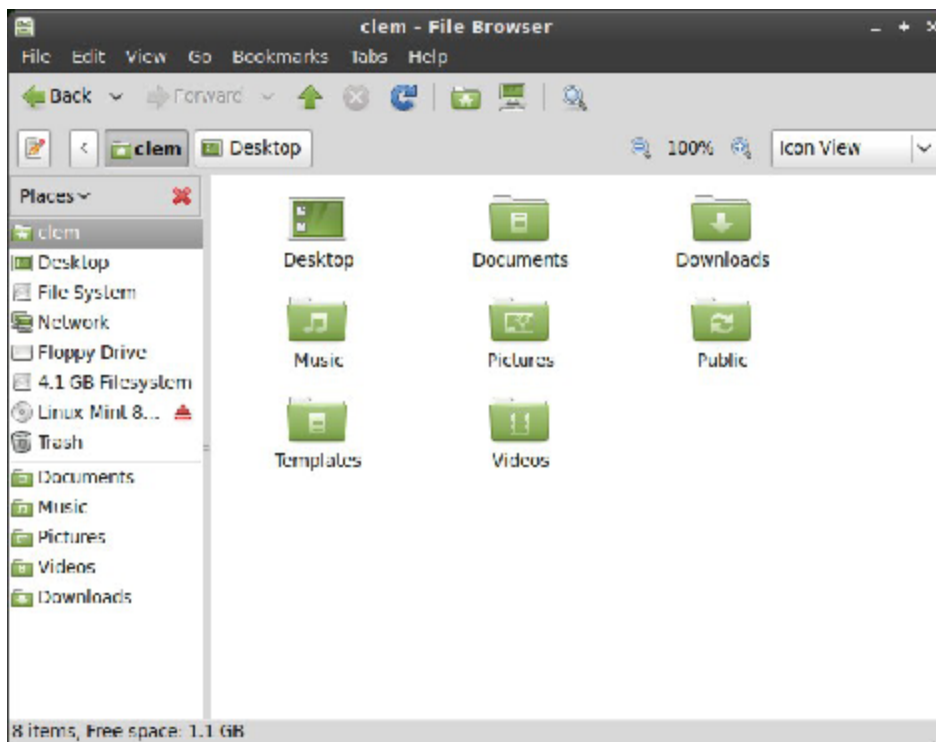
### The “Places” menu



On the top left corner of the menu you can see a section called “Places” which provides five buttons. These buttons give you quick access to the most important places within your Gnome Desktop.



The “Computer” Place shows you the storage volumes present in your computer. If your partitions are already mounted and “Desktop Settings” is set to show “Mounted Volumes” on the desktop, then you probably don’t need to access this Place very often. However, if you choose not to show the mounted volumes on your desktop, or if you need to mount a partition which is not mounted by default, this Place can prove very useful.



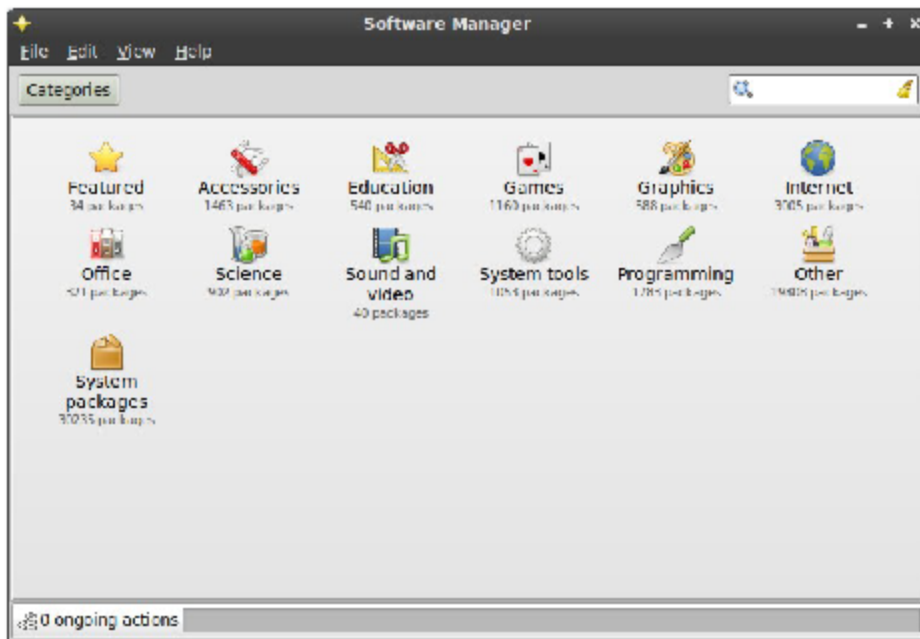
In contrast, the “Home” Place is one of the menu buttons you’ll probably use the most. If you’ve used Gnome before, you’re probably used to clicking on the “Home” icon placed on the desktop. When windows are opened and when the desktop is not completely visible, the menu can prove useful by providing you with a way to quickly access your “Home”.

- Your “Home” folder exists to give you a place to put all of your personal data.
- The “Desktop” folder corresponds to what is shown on your desktop, so placing a file here will also place it on your desktop. The same effect can be achieved by simply dragging the file onto the desktop.
- The “Network” Place simply shows you the other computers, shared services, domains, and workgroups present on your network.
- The “Trash” Place is where files end up after you delete them.

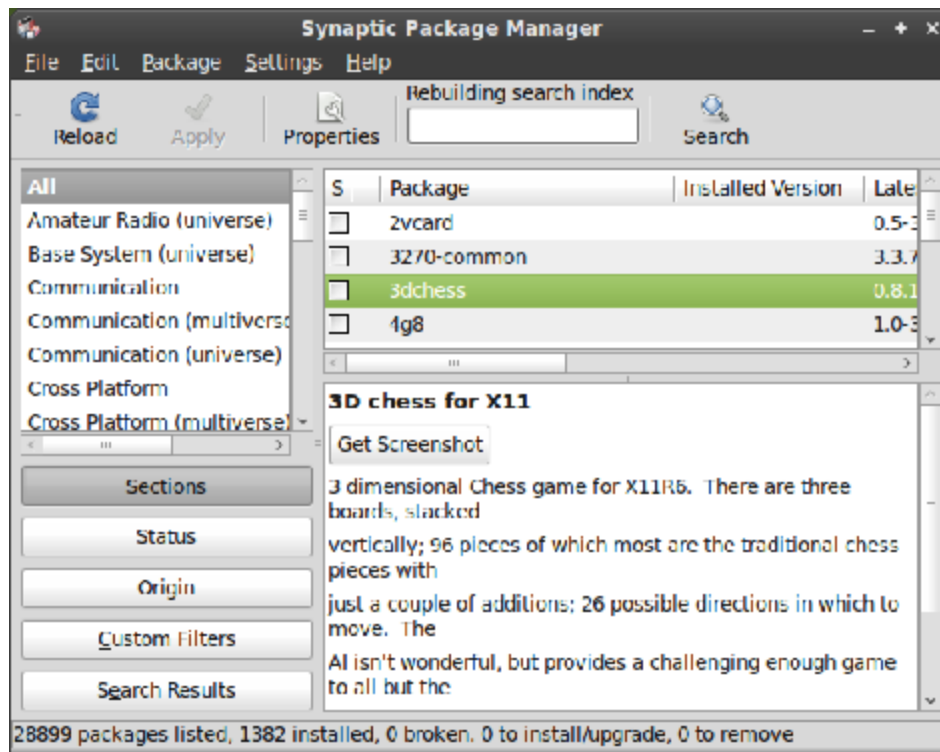
When you right click on a file you can either “Move to Trash” or “Delete”. If you choose to “Delete”, the file will be permanently deleted and you normally won’t be able to recover it. If you choose “Move to Trash” it will be moved to the “Trash” Place, which is accessible from the menu. From there you will be able to drag and drop it somewhere else if you want to restore it, permanently delete one or more files, or select “Empty Trash” if you want to permanently delete all items from the Trash.

### The “System” menu

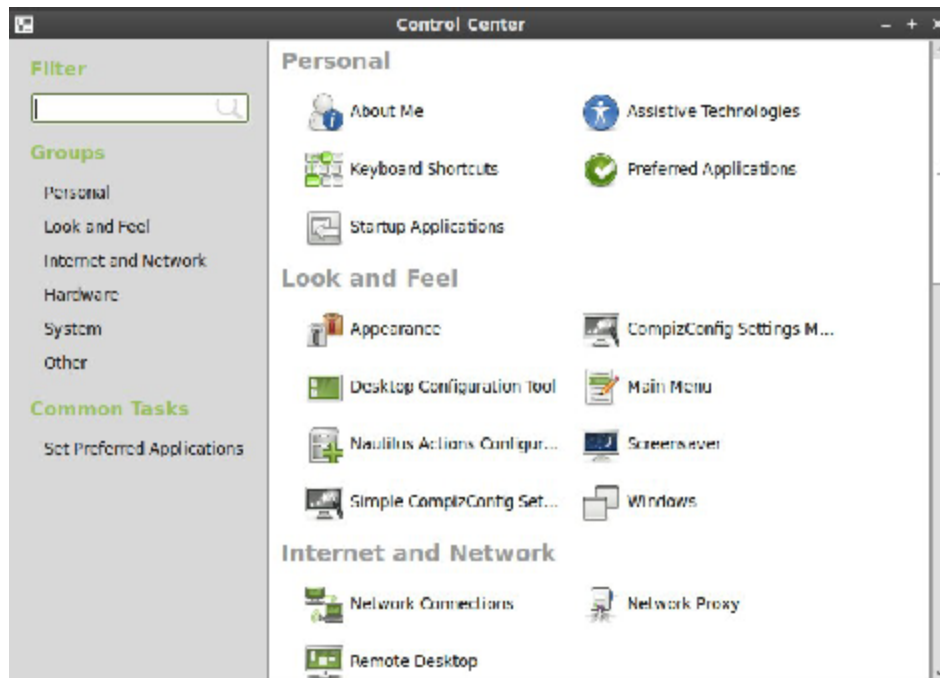
There is a section called “System” in the bottom left corner of the menu. This section provides six buttons which let you quickly access important features of the system.



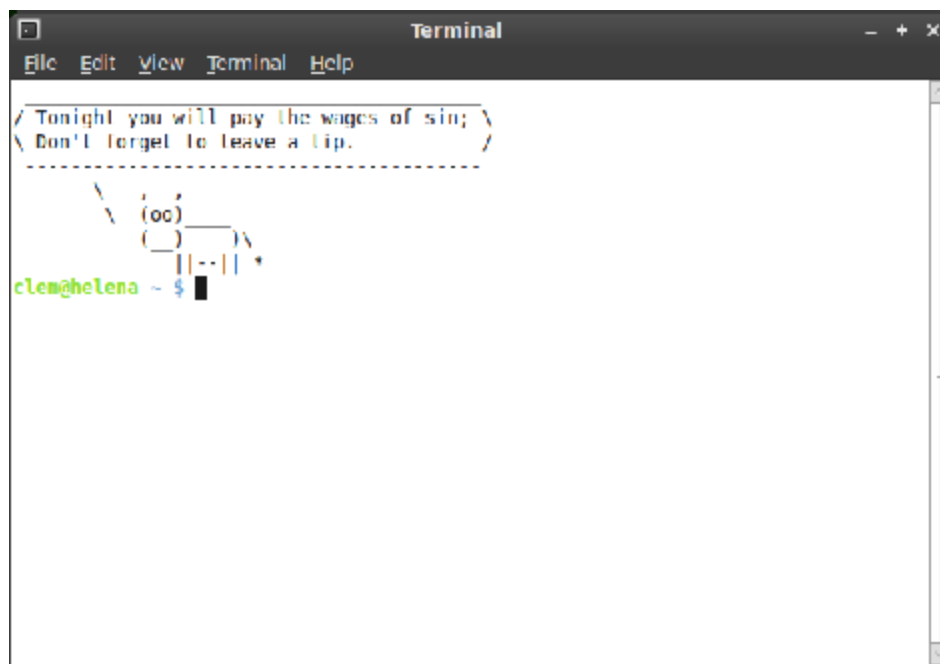
The “Software Manager” button launches the Linux Mint Software Manager. This program is the recommended way to install software in Linux Mint. We will talk more about this feature later on; for now, let’s explore the other options.



The “Package Manager” button launches an application called “Synaptic”. The purpose of this application is to manage the packages that are installed on your computer and the packages that are available in the repositories. If this doesn’t make much sense to you yet, don’t worry, we will talk about packages and how they work in greater detail later on.



The “Control Center” button launches the Gnome Control Center. This application lets you configure every aspect of the Gnome Desktop and of the computer in general. We will go through each item within this Control Center at a later time.

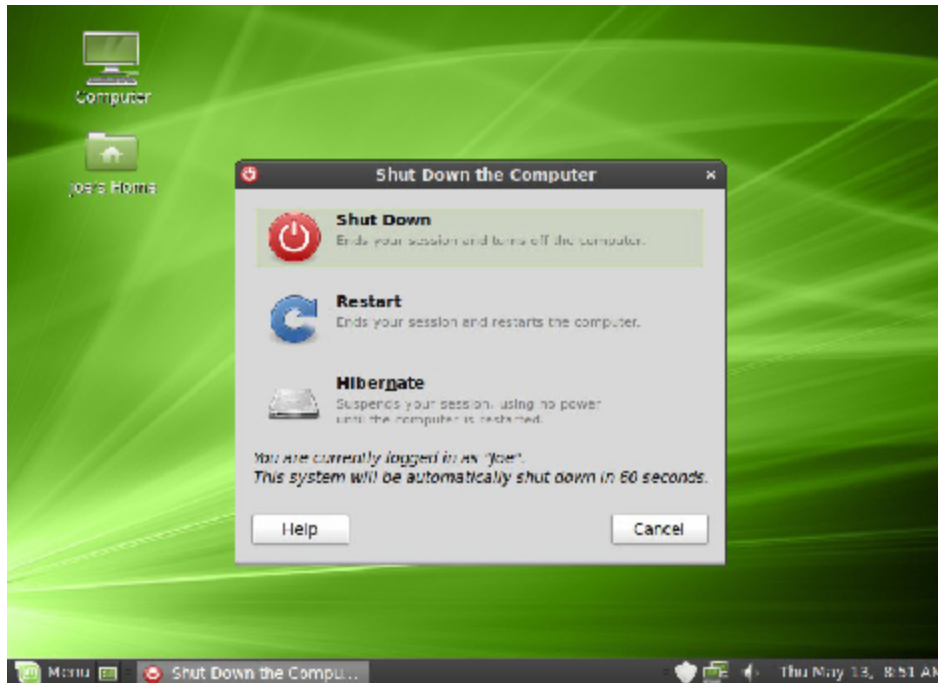


The “Terminal” button launches an application called “Terminal” which lets you enter commands directly using the keyboard. If you’re used to Microsoft Windows you may think that this is old hat, because in Windows the command line hasn’t progressed much further than the “DOS prompt” and is hidden away in an accessories menu. One of the

ways in which Linux systems differ from Windows systems is that the terminal is quite important in Linux, as it is often used as a way of getting more direct control over one's computer. We'd probably agree that the Terminal isn't the most visually appealing application included in Linux Mint, but it is worth knowing that it is by far the most powerful, and once learned it's actually not very hard to use.

In fact, it is worthwhile understanding that *every* command that you execute using a graphical desktop environment goes through the Terminal. When you click on an icon on the menu, for example, you are instructing Gnome to pass a textual instruction to the Terminal. As an instructional exercise, if you open "Main Menu" from the "Look and Feel" section of "Control Center" (see above), and navigate to any of the application menus, pick an application, and click on the properties button, you will see in the "Command" field the text command that is passed to the system when you click on that application's entry in the menu. In other words, you have already been using the Terminal for some time, perhaps without realizing it. All that was different was that, instead of you typing out the commands, your desktop (Gnome) was doing it for you (which is a good thing because nobody wants to remember hundreds of application names all the time).

Sooner or later, though, you will probably have be in a situation which causes you to use the Terminal directly, either to access commands that are not available through any GUI, or to get a job done more efficiently. Yes, you read that right! It can be more efficient to type a single command, for certain tasks, than to open up lots of windows to achieve the same thing. The more you use it, the more you'll come to actually like it. Remember how you didn't like certain things when you were a kid and how you couldn't do without them now? Terminal is one of these things. In a few weeks, you'll be completely addicted to it. You'll begin to feel in complete control of your computer. There will be times when you won't even have to use the Terminal, but you will anyway, because for some tasks it's faster, more accurate, more versatile and actually simpler to use than equivalent graphical interfaces. And anyone watching you will think you're a complete pro.



The “Logout” button launches a dialog which lets you logout or switch users.

The “Quit” button launches a dialog box which lets you choose what you want to do:

- “Suspend” saves your session to RAM and your computer goes to sleep until you press a key.
- “Hibernate” saves your session to your hard drive and your computer shuts down.
- “Restart” restarts the computer.
- “Shut Down” turns the computer off.

*Note: It is also possible to lock the screen by pressing CTRL+ALT+L.*

### **The “Applications” menu**

The Linux Mint CD is compressed and actually contains about 2.5GB of data. The applications that are included by default when you install Linux Mint are said to be part of the “Default Software Selection”.

Since one of the purposes of Linux Mint is to be easy to use and to work out of the box, a collection of software is included by default in order to let you achieve common/important tasks.

In the right-hand section of the menu, you can see all installed applications. They are organized by categories. The first category is called “All” and, as you probably guessed, it shows you a list of all installed applications.

The last two categories, “Preferences” and “Administration”, show you the tools and applications provided to configure and administrate Linux Mint. We’ll focus on these applications later on, as they are also present in the “Control Center”.

The 5 categories in the center provide most of the applications you’ll use on a daily basis. As you install new software, new categories might appear.

In “Accessories”, you can find the following software:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Calculator	A calculator
Character Map	A tool to easily copy and paste special characters (accentuation for instance)
Disk Usage Analyzer	A tool which shows you what takes space on your hard drive.
Manage Print Jobs	A tool which shows the jobs currently active on your printers.
Passwords and Encryption keys	A tool to manage your encryption keys
Take Screenshot	A tool to take screenshots. You can also launch this with the “Print Scrn” key on your keyboard to take screenshots of the desktop, or with “ALT”+“Print Scrn” to take screenshots of the current window.
Terminal	The Terminal
Text Editor	A text editor called “gedit”
Tomboy Notes	An application to take notes
Tracker Search Tool	A tool that lets you search for files and other resources on your computer.

In “Graphics” you can find the following software:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
GIMP Image Editor	An application that lets you modify, convert or even create pictures. The best Linux equivalent to Photoshop.
OpenOffice.org Drawing	Part of the OpenOffice suite of applications.
Scanner Utility	A tool to capture images from a scanner

In “Internet” you can find the following software:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Firefox	A Web browser
Giver	A quick file-sharing utility
Thunderbird	An Email application
Pidgin	An Internet Messenger (compatible with AIM, Bonjour, Gadu-Gadu, Google-Talk, GroupWise, ICQ, IRC, MSN,

	MySpaceIM, QQ, SIMPLE, Sametime, XMPP, Yahoo and Zephyr)
Transmission	A Torrent client.
Xchat	An IRC chat program. It is configured by default to automatically connect you to the Linux Mint chat room (very useful if you want to talk to other Linux Mint users).

In “Office” you can find the following software:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Dictionary	A dictionary (requires an Internet connection)
OpenOffice.org Base	A database application (alternative to Microsoft Access).
OpenOffice.org Impress	A presentation application to make slides (alternative to Microsoft Powerpoint and compatible with PPT)
OpenOffice.org Calc	A spreadsheet application (alternative to Microsoft Excel and compatible with XLS)
OpenOffice.org Writer	A word processor (alternative to Microsoft Word and compatible with DOC.)

In “Sound & Video” you can find the following software:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Brasero	A CD/DVD burning application. Brasero can also make audio CDs from multimedia files.
Movie Player	A multimedia application which is associated with most video and audio files (alternative to Microsoft Media Player)
Mplayer Movie Player	An alternative multimedia player. This tool is also used as a plugin within Firefox to play most of the multimedia content.
Pulse Audio Device Chooser & Volume Control	Tools to configure and manipulate the Pulse Audio sound server. For instance, to move one sound stream from the speakers to some USB headset, or from your computer to another one on the network...
Rhythmbox	A music application to play online radio, stream music from the Internet and online music services and to listen to your collection of music files (alternative to iTunes). Rhythmbox also manages podcasts, portable players and can rip CDs.
Sound Recorder	A sound recorder.

### **The “Search” field**

If you can’t remember how to find a particular application within the menu or if you want to get quicker access to it you can use the search feature. Simply click on “Menu” in the

bottom-left corner of your screen and start typing the name or a description of the application you're looking for.

As you're typing, only the applications matching your search will stay visible within the menu.

If your search yields no results, the menu will provide "suggestions" related to the keyword you typed. For instance, if you type "opera" and if the Opera web browser isn't installed on your system, the menu will show a button to install it, or to search the software portal or the repositories for it.

### **Define your favorite applications**

You'll use some applications more than others, so you'll quickly find that you want fast access to the applications that you're using the most.

The menu lets you define "favorite" applications and keep them on a special menu for easy availability.

Right click on an application of your choice with the menu and select "Show in my favorites". You can also drag & drop an application on the "Favorites" button which is located on the top-right corner of the menu.

Click on the "Favorites" button in the top-right corner of the menu and you should now see your favorite applications (click the button again to switch back to the complete application list). Note that as of Linux Mint 7, the favorites menu is automatically populated with some of the most commonly-accessed applications.

When the favorites section of the menu is active, you can reorganize the applications. Dragging and dropping allows you to change their order, while the right click menu lets you insert spaces and separators, as well as removing items (including spaces and separators) from the menu.

### **Make your own shortcuts**

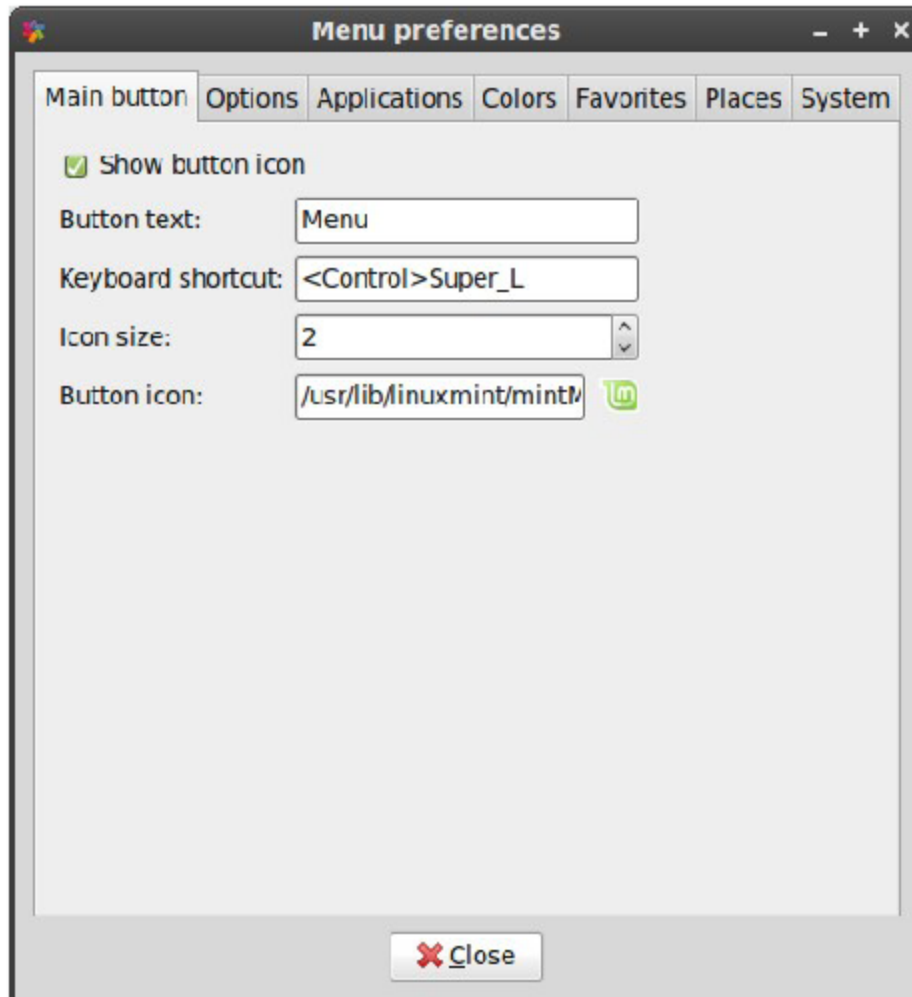
If you don't like the idea of having "Favorite" applications, you can simply use your panel or your desktop to achieve similar results, (namely, giving yourself quick access to your applications). Simply drag & drop the application of your choice from the menu to your panel or to your desktop.

### **Launch applications automatically when you log in**

You can right-click on any application in the menu and select "Launch when I log in". The application will then be launched automatically each time after you log in. This can be disabled by following the same procedure again.

## Change the appearance of the menu

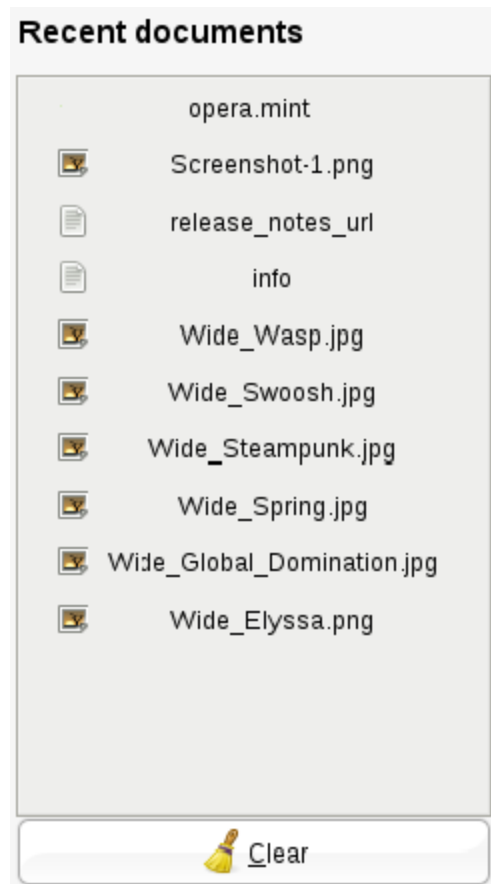
You can customize the menu in many ways. Right click on “Menu” and select “Preferences”.



The configuration tool for the menu appears. Here, you can modify almost every aspect of the Linux Mint menu. Most of the settings take effect immediately, but some require the menu to be restarted this can be accomplished by right clicking the menu button and selecting “Reload Plugins”).

## Activate the Recent plug-in

The menu comes with a plugin which is not activated by default (mostly because it makes the menu bigger). This plugin shows the 10 most recently opened documents.



To activate this plug-in, open the menu preferences and select “Show Recent Documents”.

### Restore the default settings

If you want to revert to the default settings, right click on the menu button within the panel, choose “Remove from Panel”, then open a terminal and type:

```
mintmenu clean
```

Then right click on an empty part of the Panel and choose “Add to Panel”.

Then select “mintMenu” in the list.

### Replace the menu with the default Gnome menu

If you decide you don’t like the menu and that no matter how cool it is, you want to use the default Gnome menu instead, then follow the steps below.