Extreme Windows XP Makeover

Outfit your desktop so it's truly your own

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Unleash your creative energy by personalizing XP with a custom theme

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At a Glance

If you're a creative type and your job doesn't allow you to express this side of your personality, you may often feel stifled and uninspired while you're at the office. If the budding designer in you is clamoring to get out, you'll be pleased to know that you can personalize the XP operating system with a custom theme designed to reflect your vision.

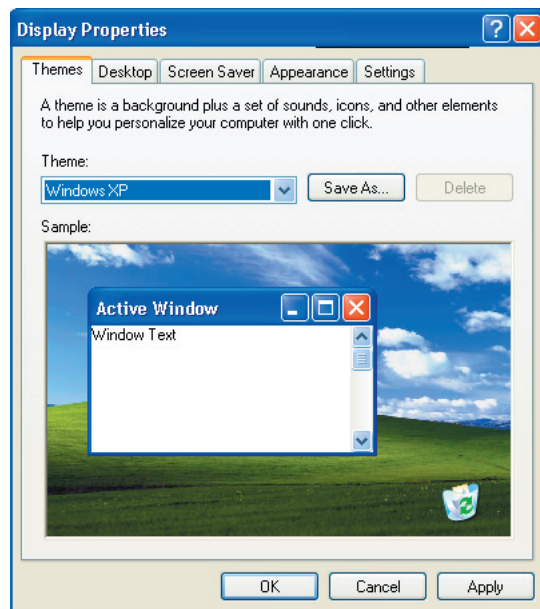To help you add some personal flare to Windows XP, we'll:

- Locate XP's default themes and explore how they function on your system.
- Add a custom image and color to the desktop background.
- Remove unwanted shortcuts to give your desktop a more streamlined look.
- Apply new icon images to desktop shortcuts.
- Customize an appearance scheme and add visual effects to your system.
- Save the finished theme and apply it to your PC.

A: A preview of your current theme appears in the Sample box.

What is a theme?

A theme is a set of elements that create a coordinated look for Windows. These visual elements include the look of the windows, colors, fonts, background, and screensaver images, all of which provide a unified look for your desktop. Themes can also encompass the set of sounds associated with Windows events, such as opening and closing a program.

You personalize your home by painting the walls and hanging up artwork you enjoy viewing, and you personalize your car by programming your favorite radio stations. But, when the operating system you work with for eight hours a day doesn't express the creative vision you apply to other areas of your life, you may begin to dread turning on your computer every morning. Luckily, with a few simple techniques, you can redesign the XP GUI (graphical user interface) with minimal effort.

Explore existing XP themes

Your desktop currently reflects one of two default XP themes: Windows XP or Windows Classic. You can customize either of these two themes by making a few simple changes to a few XP operating system design components found in the Display Properties dialog box.

To access the Display Properties dialog box:

1. Right-click on your desktop and choose Properties.

2. Select the Themes property sheet, if necessary. Your computer's theme appears in the Theme text box, as shown in **Figure A**.
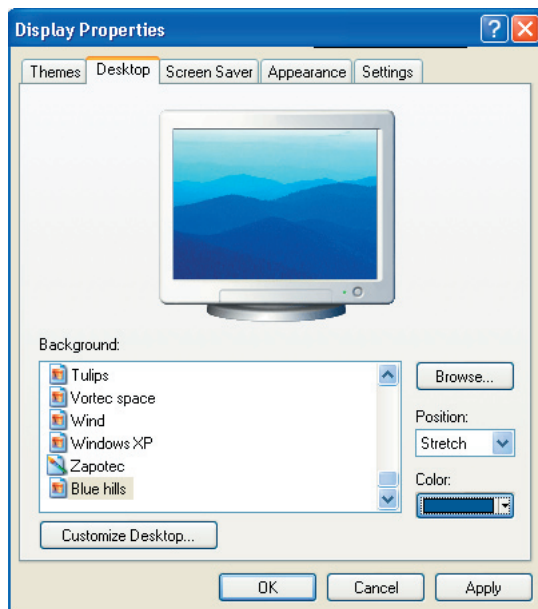
If you're currently using the Windows XP theme, you can quickly check out the Windows Classic

theme by selecting it from the Theme dropdown list and clicking OK. Your operating system will now reflect the familiar look of Windows 98 or Windows 2000.

Personalize the desktop background

Now that you're familiar with both of Windows XP's default themes, it's time to create your own by adding your own creative touch to one of them. The easiest place to start is by customizing the desktop. To do so:

1. Re-open the Display Properties dialog box, if necessary, and select the Theme tab.

2. Select the theme (either Windows XP or Windows Classic) you wish to customize from the Theme dropdown list.

3. Select the Desktop tab, and from the Background list box, select the wallpaper of your choice.

B: Ensure that the color you select complements the colors in your selected background image.

Download themes from the web

In this article, we demonstrate how to customize Windows XP with a theme using the design elements built into the operating system; however, a plethora of themes are readily available for downloading from the web as well.

Note: To personalize your desktop even further, add your favorite digital photo or other image as your wallpaper. Click the Browse button, navigate to and select your image, and then click Open. The image will appear in the Background list box.

4. From the Position dropdown list, select how you'd like your wallpaper to appear (either centered, in tile format, or stretched to fit your screen), as shown in **Figure B**.

5. From the Color dropdown list, select a color that will complement your selected wallpaper image. Keep in mind that you're designing a cohesive look and feel for your theme, so the color you choose here should be reflected in other theme elements as well.

Note: If you choose to stretch or tile your image, you won't see the background color.

Switch up your desktop components

Once you've chosen a background image and color scheme for your theme, it's time to alter the components that appear on your desktop.

To add or remove desktop icons:

1. Click the Customize Desktop button to open the Desktop Items dialog box.

2. Select the General tab, if it's necessary.

3. In the Desktop Icons section, select the checkboxes corresponding to those icons you want to appear on your desktop, and deselect those you don't. (By default, only the Recycle Bin and My Computer appear on your desktop with the Windows XP theme applied.)

To change the image associated with your selected desktop icons:

1. From the horizontal list box in the center of the General property sheet, select the icon whose image you want to change, as shown in **Figure C**.

2. Click the Change Icon button.

3. Type the following file path in the Look For Icons In This File text box:

   C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM32\shell32.dll.