

10 Windows Maintenance Tasks

Keep Your PC Healthy With Built-In Tools; information and graphics by Smart Computing

Use the utilities built into Windows XP and Windows Vista to optimize your computer's performance, organize your data, lengthen the life of your hard drive, and prepare you (and your data) for worst-case scenarios. There are 10 maintenance tasks that will help clean up your PC..

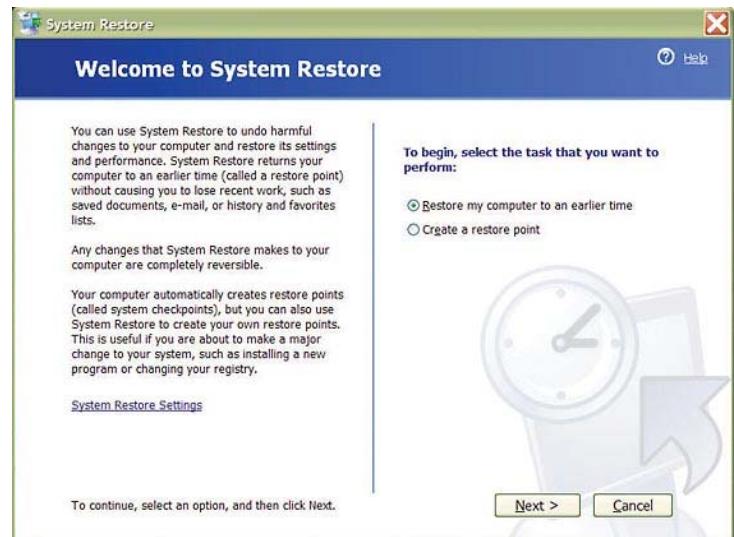
1. Set A Starting Point

It's a good idea to set a System Restore point before you begin, so if a problem occurs, you can reset Windows to a previous time. System Restore won't delete files you've added to your system, such as photos or documents, but it will put programs and settings back to the time of the restore point you return to.

System Restore lets you save the configuration of your PC, so you can return your computer to a working condition if a change causes a problem.

To set a restore point in WinXP, select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and System Restore. Select the Create A Restore Point radio button and click Next. Under Restore Point Description, type a name, such as **before maintenance**, and click Create.

To initiate a restore point in Vista, click the Start button, choose Control Panel, and select System And Maintenance. Click Restore Files From Backup, select Create A Restore Point Or Change Settings, and click the Create button.



2. Clean Up Your Startup

Your PC may take longer to start up than it did when you first bought it. Applications are often designed to automatically insert themselves into Windows' startup sequence, so the application is ready when you need it. As the programs loading at startup accumulate, the longer Windows takes to load. To clean up Windows' startup, you may need to perform a few steps to completely disable the programs from loading at bootup, also known as startup.

In WinXP, click Start, select All Programs, and select the Startup folder. Right-click the applications you don't want to start automatically and click Delete. Next, click Start, select Run, type **msconfig**, and click OK. Select the Startup tab to view the various utilities and programs that automatically load when Windows starts. The Command and Location columns should offer you a good idea of whether you want the item to run at startup. For any programs you want to disable, remove the check mark next to the item, and when you've made your selections, click OK. (Note that disabling an application does not remove it from your PC.)

Vista users can click Start, select Control Panel, select System And Maintenance, and choose Performance Information And Tools. Click Manage Startup Programs, and Vista will open the Software Explorer utility of Windows Defender, which provides a detailed list of the applications that automatically boot up in Vista. Click the Show For All Users Button, because otherwise you may be limited to the applications you can remove. To eliminate a program from startup, select the application and click the Disable button.

If you want to delete the application, click Start, select Control Panel, select Add Or Remove Programs, and then select Remove A Program in WinXP or Uninstall A Program in Vista. WinXP users will need to select the application and click the Remove button. If you use Vista, select the program from the list and click the Uninstall button.

3. Organize Those Files

If you have trouble finding music, photos, or documents because the files are scattered across different folders and directories on your PC, take some time to organize the files and folders in a logical hierarchy. For instance, you could open Computer (My Computer in WinXP), create a folder titled Photos, and copy all the folders with your photos into the common folder. You can also use an external USB drive, or a USB flash drive, for storing data outside of your computer. The advantage of storing your data outside of your PC is in case you have system problems, and need to restore your PC, you don't lose all your data.

With Vista's built-in partitioning abilities, you could also choose to make one hard drive appear as two separate drives. Dividing your hard drive is particularly useful if you need to reinstall your OS, because you can move your music, videos, and documents to another drive and format the C: partition without losing your personal files.

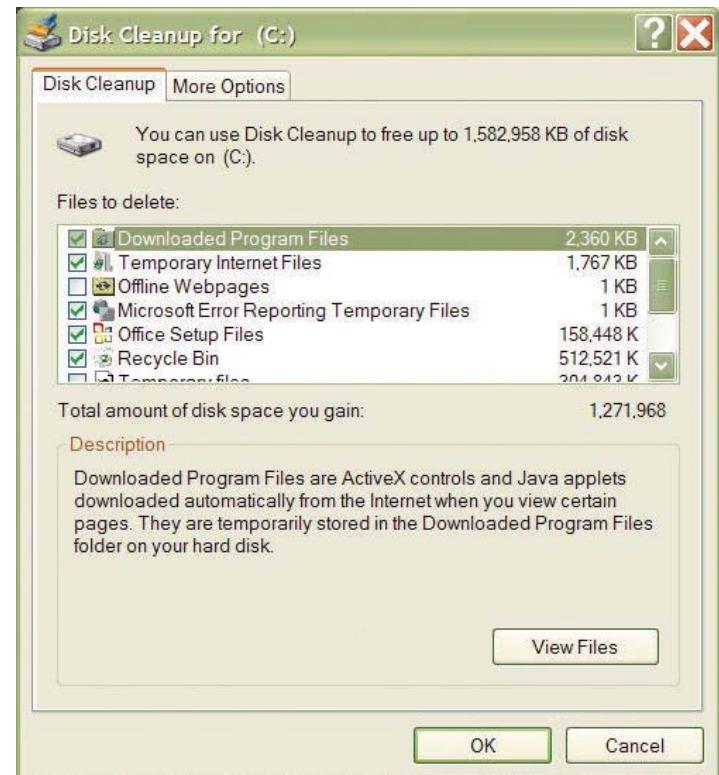
To partition a drive in Vista, click Start, right-click Computer, select Manage, and click Disk Management. Each listed block represents a drive on your PC. Right-click the block you want to partition, select Shrink Volume, and under Enter The Amount Of Space To Shrink In MB, type the amount of storage space you want in the new partition. Once Vista shrinks the volume, you'll need to format the partition and assign it a drive letter.

4. Tidy Up Internet Explorer

Disk Cleanup allows you to rid your hard drive of unnecessary files that accumulate over time.

In the Tools menu of IE (Internet Explorer), the Internet Options dialog box allows you to maintain the security and performance of IE. Select the General tab and click the Delete button under Browsing History. From the Delete Browsing History window, you can purge files IE stores, including cookies, form data, and passwords, that may pose a risk to your security and privacy. For instance, the Form Data option allows you to delete the information you typed into forms on the Web sites you visited. If you're looking to free up some drive space, click the Delete Files button under Temporary Internet Files. This option lets you remove copies of the Web pages, which IE saves so it can quickly load Web pages.

The Programs tab of Internet Options also offers a Manage Add-ons tool that lets you configure IE add-ons, such as toolbars, browser helpers, ActiveX controls, and browser extensions. Although most add-ons are helpful, some tools may have been downloaded to your PC without your knowledge by a virus or spyware program. If your Web browser starts acting slowly or shuts down unexpectedly, open the Manage Add-ons tool and disable any questionable services.



5. Update Your Applications

To improve security and functionality, most programs offer an "update" feature that allows the application to search for and download the latest version from the manufacturer. Many programs can be configured to check for updates each time you open the program. For best results, make a list of the applications you regularly use and, once a month, open the applications, select the update feature, and allow the application to update itself.

If an application doesn't offer an integrated update option, visit the manufacturer's Web site and look for the Support or Downloads section. Then, search for the updates or patches that are compatible with your application.

6. Maintain Your Hard Drive

Applications sometimes create temporary files that are no longer necessary once you've closed the program. As these "junk" files fill up your hard drive, the longer it will take for your computer to open files and perform security scans. Windows Disk Cleanup utility is designed to locate and remove the unnecessary files and free up storage space on your PC. To open Disk Cleanup in WinXP or Vista, click the Start button, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and Disk Cleanup.

In WinXP, Disk Cleanup will search your hard drive and produce a Files To Delete list that categorizes the junk files on your PC, while Vista will ask you to select a specific drive before scanning and then generate the Files To Delete list. To select or deselect a category, click the checkbox next to the option. When you've chosen the files you want to erase, click OK and Yes. Note that WinXP only runs Disk Cleanup on the system drive where you installed your OS, and if you want to use Disk Cleanup on another drive, you'll need to press the Windows logo and *E* keys simultaneously, right-click the drive you want to maintain, choose Properties, and click the Disk Cleanup button. After you've removed your unused programs and junk files, it's a good idea to run Disk Defragmenter, which is a utility that rearranges the data on your hard drive so it's easier to locate. Both WinXP and Vista users can select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and Disk Defragmenter to open the program.

Microsoft also includes a Check Disk (abbreviated as CHKDSK) utility to scan your hard drive for problems, such as **bad sectors** (portions of the drive that can no longer hold data) and **lost clusters** (an area of the hard drive that the operating system has mistaken as in use). To access Check Disk, open Computer (My Computer in WinXP) and right-click the drive you want to check. Click Properties and select the Tools tab. Click the Check Now button under the Error-Checking heading and select the Automatically Fix File System Errors and the Scan For And Attempt Recovery Of Bad Sectors checkboxes. Before you click the Start button, close all open applications, because otherwise the utility will request that you restart the computer before proceeding.

7. Back Up Your Data

The OS and applications on your PC can be reinstalled if your hard drive crashes, but you'll lose any photos, important documents, financial spreadsheets, videos, and emails you haven't backed up. Both WinXP and Vista include utilities to back up your files, and you can also use the Backup utility to restore the data, should catastrophe occur. Note that if you run Windows XP Home, you'll have to install the WinXP Backup utility using your WinXP CD. After you insert the disc, click Perform Additional Tasks, select Browse This CD, and navigate to the VALUE-ADD\MSFT\NTBACKUP folder. Double-click Ntbackup.msi to install the WinXP Backup utility.

To help you protect your data, Windows Vista comes with a Backup utility that lets you copy specific files or your entire hard drive.

In WinXP, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, and System Tools and click Backup, which will launch the Backup Or Restore Wizard. Click Next, select Back Up Files And Settings, and then click Next. At the What To Back Up window, you're offered the choice between My Documents And Settings, Everyone's Documents And Settings, All Information On This Computer, and Let Me Choose What To Back Up. The All Information On This Computer option allows you to create a recovery disc for your PC, while the other options allow you to configure what is and isn't copied. Once you've selected the files you want to back up, click Next. Click Browse and select a location to save the data, such as to an external hard drive or your hard drive (you can burn it to a CD or DVD later on). Click Next and Finish to run the Backup utility.



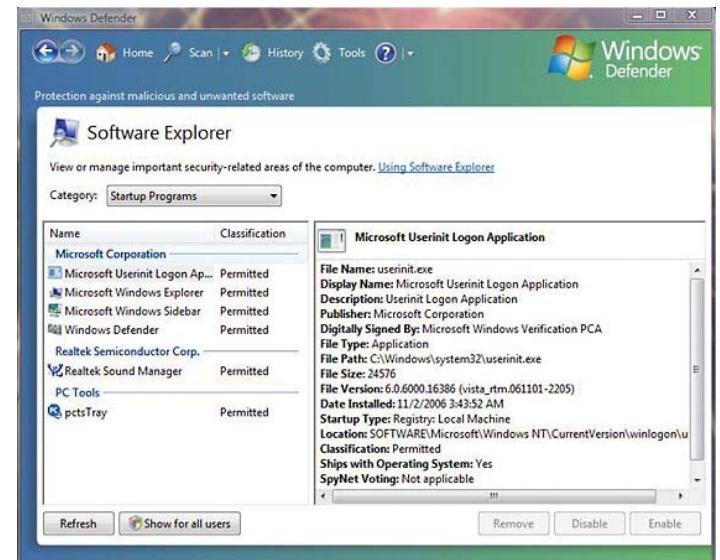
To run Vista's Backup utility, click Start and choose Control Panel, System And Maintenance, and Backup Your Computer. At the Backup And Restore Center window, you can choose either the Back Up Files option to copy specific files and folders or the Back Up Computer option to create a copy of your hard drive that can be used to restore your PC after a system crash. Select a location to save your backup. Vista won't allow you to save the backup on the system drive where the OS is installed, so you'll need to save the data on an external storage device, a secondary hard drive, or a partition of your hard drive (see maintenance task No. 3).

Click Next. If you chose one of the Documents And Settings options or Let Me Choose What To Back Up option, the Backup utility will let you pick and choose the types of data it will locate and copy. Click the checkboxes to select or deselect the category and click Next after you've made the selections. At the next window, the Backup utility offers How Often, What Day, and What Time drop-down menus to let you configure future backups. Click Save Settings And Start Backup to begin the backup process.

8. Update Windows Security Tools

With a built-in firewall and Windows Defender (available as a free download for WinXP; built into Vista) to prevent spyware, Windows includes a few security tools that you'll want to keep up-to-date to protect your PC from malware threats. To update Windows Defender, click Start, select All Programs, and click Windows Defender. The antispyware tool should automatically search for new definitions, but if it doesn't, you can click the Help options arrow next to the Help icon and select Check For Updates. Click the Scan button to search your PC for malware.

Windows Defender features a Software Explorer tool to let you disable programs that load when Windows Vista starts up.



To keep Windows' firewall current, you'll only need to enable automatic updates on your computer. To do so in WinXP, click Start, Control Panel, Security Center, and Automatic Updates. In Vista, click Start and select Windows Update. Because neither Vista nor WinXP come with antivirus software, purchase an antivirus tool if your PC doesn't

have third-party virus protection. For more information on how to protect your PC from malware, see our May issue, "Protect Your PC & Your Privacy."

9. Adjust The Aesthetics

Vista's Aero interface enhances the appearance of your Desktop, but if Vista seems slow, you can give up some of Vista's visual effects to improve performance. To do so, click the Start button, select Control Panel, choose System And Maintenance, and click Performance Information And Tools. Under Tasks, select Adjust Visual Effects. If you select the Adjust For Best Performance radio button, Vista will turn off all of the visual effects. If you want to improve performance but retain some effects, click the Custom button to pick and choose from the list.

10. Create A Maintenance Schedule

If you have performed the tasks we have covered thus far, you're probably wishing there was a way to automate the maintenance process. WinXP's Scheduled Tasks feature and Vista's Task Scheduler feature are ideal for the job.

In WinXP, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and Scheduled Tasks. Double-click the Add Scheduled Task icon and click Next. At the next window, you'll find a number of utilities mentioned in this article, including Backup, Disk Cleanup, and System Restore. You can also click the Browse button to schedule a task for specific programs on your PC.

The Task Scheduler feature of Vista is a bit more complicated than Scheduled Tasks, but the basic steps of task creation are similar. Click Start, Control Panel, and System And Maintenance. Under Administrative Tools, select Schedule Tasks. Click the Create Basic Task option and follow the steps in the wizard. You can automate many more processes through Task Scheduler, but the steps require more space to cover than we have here.

There's Still More To Do

If you were unable to schedule automatic maintenance for a specific task through Windows, consider creating a routine by using a monthly checklist. Because Windows' built-in maintenance tools are only part of a computer cleanup, you can add tasks from our other articles in this month's feature package—including updating your BIOS (Basic Input/ Output System), updating drivers, and physically cleaning your PC—to your to-do list.

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or

<http://tinyurl.com/ap8dph>

<http://www.helpwithwindows.com/WindowsXP/howto-16.html#tmp>

Over time, your Hard Disk fills up with all kinds of stuff, and before you know it, that drive you bought just a year or so ago, and whose capacity looked great back then, is already alarmingly full. You need a certain amount of "headroom" or empty space on your harddrive for Windows to function properly.

Remove unused applications on your hard drive, to free-up space for new applications or data.

Uninstalling unused Components

Many people never bother to check which components of Windows are installed, and which ones can be removed. Are you using Microsoft Fax Services? If not, you can save around 3.7MB. Use Internet Explorer, but not MSN Explorer? Uninstalling MSN Explorer gets you 13.5MB back! Don't play the "standard" Microsoft games? They use 12.1MB of space!

Note: Some programs will only be available on Windows XP Professional.

To uninstall Windows components:

1. Open your **Control Panel** (select **Start > Control Panel**)
2. Open **Add or Remove Programs**
3. Click the **Add/Remove Windows Components** button
4. Select the components you want to remove and press **OK**

