

# Free Windows software to go

The software list meme never grows old. One person's list cannot possibly cover everyone's needs, so I've linked to some of my favorites at the bottom of this article. Here are some of the finer points to my list<sup>[1]</sup>: Organized so that all the apps can fit on a 256 MB flash drive (available as downloadable ZIP packages on this page). Additional, larger apps will soon be listed at the end which would allow it to fit on a 700 MB CD. **Easy to follow even if you're not computer savvy. All applications are free for home use!**

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## Windows OS maintenance

Before installing any third party applications, make sure you run [Microsoft Update](#) (requires at least Windows 98; you can get the operating system (OS) updates without Internet Explorer using [WindizUpdate](#)). This keeps your computer's Microsoft products up to date with the latest fixes. When running for the first time, it will likely take a long time to download everything (anywhere from .5 to 2,000MB), and you will likely need to reboot several times. It is a good idea to enable the Automatic Updates tool in the Control Panel (requires at least Windows 2000) to keep you protected over time. More detailed Microsoft protection can be gained from the new ('05Nov) [Windows Live Safety Center \(beta\)](#).

Windows needs occasional defragmenting and scanning, as well. It's a good idea to [do this about once a month](#). As a general note about the following programs, I usually go to the vendor's website two or three times a year to see if there are any new versions of their software. Most sites have discussion forums or you can [Google](#) a review of the product's latest version to see if anyone is having problems with it. I've found [SnapFiles](#) and [Nonags](#) to be the most reliable software review sites; [Download.com](#) and [FileForum](#) are more popular, but the comments aren't as helpful as SnapFiles and Nonags.

## Basic protection

### AVG (antivirus)

[15 MB Anti-Virus Free, v. 7.1.375 Grisoft](#). Whether you're online or not, antivirus protection on a computer is essential. Virus updates and scans should be performed at least weekly. Pro (pay) version supports Linux. I've also heard good things about [avast!](#), [AntiVir](#), and [ClamWin](#), each having its own pros and cons.

### ZoneAlarm (firewall)

[10 MB 6.1.737 Zone Labs](#). A firewall basically plugs up any vulnerable holes in your computer network. It is only needed if you connect to [the Internet](#). I used ZA when my home computer had Windows 2000, so I haven't used version 6. If you have XP SP2, the built-in [Windows Firewall](#) works well for the average user (I use it at home in addition to the built-in hardware firewall on my [Netgear MR314 router](#)).

### Windows AntiSpyware

[7 MB 1.0.701 Microsoft](#) ([must renew](#) on '06Jul31). When using Firefox as my browser, I've found this to be adequate [spyware](#) protection. Since AntiSpyware requires Windows 2000 or later, others swear by [Ad-Aware](#), [Spybot](#) (even works with Windows 95) and/or [Spyware Blaster](#) as additional protection. Like the firewalls, spyware-blocking apps probably aren't needed if you're not using the Internet.

## Tools for working online

### Firefox (web browser)

L M [5 MB 1.5 Mozilla](#) (see ad for download; and yes, I personally use the Google Toolbar with Firefox). [Kill Bill's Browser](#) and [Switch](#) both list reasons to use Firefox (FF). The ability to add [extensions](#) alone puts this far above other browsers<sup>[2]</sup>. A steady alternative is [Opera](#) (over [1 out of 100 users](#) browsing the web use the big O). In addition to being the only major player with a [Mobile version](#), an e-mail client, RSS reader, and IRC are all integrated into the product, as well.

### Thunderbird (e-mail)

L M [6 MB 1.5 Mozilla](#). I've never actually found the ideal e-mail client; you may not even need one at all if you don't care to back up your e-mail, calendar, and/or contact list<sup>[3]</sup>. I use Thunderbird to create a copy of my Gmail and @megsnjj.com e-mails. There are many considerations to take into account when choosing your e-mail client. Wikipedia has a good [comparison of email clients](#).

### µTorrent (BitTorrent downloader)

[130 KB 1.4](#). This is the smallest download in the bunch. µTorrent has only been out since October, but it's proved to be the best simple, stand-alone BitTorrent downloader out there. Now if we could all agree how to pronounce it: microtorrent, meetorrent, myutorrent, U-torrent?

### Online applications

[Nedwolf's Best Free Web Applications](#) is just one of many lists of applications that you can use through a web browser. [Web apps](#) usually run slower than conventional apps, but the benefit of universal, community access to a tool is too good not to mention on a list like this. [Wikipedia](#), [Flickr](#), [Gmail](#) and [Remember The Milk](#) are just a few examples of sites that I frequent.

## Other essential applications

### Adobe Reader (PDF viewer)

L M [20 MB 7.0.5 Adobe Systems](#). Reader version 7 only works on Windows 2000 or later. **Earlier versions of Adobe Reader run way too slowly**; while I've never had a need to use them, [Foxit Software](#) has several faster applications like PDF Reader and PDF Editor (both of which are less than 2MB; the Reader is a stand-alone app that doesn't even require an install). If you have a need to *create* simple PDFs, I've found PDF Creator to be very useful; it allows you to create a PDF out of *any* printable document by adding [PDFCreator](#) (also less than 1MB) as a printer.

### OpenOffice.org (office suite)

L M [90 MB 2.0 Sun Microsystems](#). AKA OOo, this open source app opens up more slowly than [MS Office](#).

(there are [workarounds](#)), but it's a small price to pay for a suite that includes spreadsheet, word processing, database, presentation, and drawing components. You can also save directly as a PDF (with advanced content like links and forms).

Real Alternative (media player)

[6 MB 1.46 Free-Codecs.com](#). Includes [Media Player Classic](#) (MPC), a stand-alone app that plays almost any type of sound or video file. Real Alternative can play most [RealMedia](#) formats<sup>[4]</sup>. Free-Codecs.com has several MPC codec packs to choose from, such as [QuickTime Alternative](#) (if you're not already using [iTunes](#) for your media organizer) or the all-out [K-Lite Mega](#) (29MB, includes all of the above functionality and more).

7-Zip (file compression)

L M [1 MB 4.32](#). [WinZip](#) may be the seminal file compression program, but I've found 7-Zip to be the most powerful. I like how it can split an archive file into multiple volumes; I believe that it creates smaller file sizes than any other archiving program, too. If you want a program that can read nearly 50 archive types, try [IZArc](#).

AIDA32 (PC inventory)

[2 MB 3.75 Personal Edition](#). This program is really only essential for users with Windows 95. The native System Information (msinfo32.exe) tool in Windows 98 (and later) does basically the same thing, although it doesn't have nearly as many options as AIDA32<sup>[5]</sup>. AIDA32 is helpful when you want a quick view of your system specs (hard drive space, RAM, exact processor model, installed programs, etc.). This is quite handy when you see a "System Requirements" list for something you want to install on your computer and you're not sure if your computer meets those requirements. It's also helpful for determining versions during firmware and driver updates.

## Other software lists

- [Portable USB Software: A Melange](#), méprisant; '06Jan25.
- [How to fix Mom and Dad's computer](#), Lifehacker; '05Nov18.
- [Windows Reference Installation](#), UrbanMainframe.com; '05Oct27. I have a lot of respect for Jonathan's work and his well-explained list is no exception.
- [10-step security for your PC](#), Computerworld; '05Oct14.
- [Windows security checklist](#), Kottke.org; '04Sep14.
- [Windows-Tools on CD-ROM \(or USB stick\)](#), Dirk Loss; last updated '05Jul22.
- [Favorite apps](#), jesse crouch's log; continually updated.
- [The 46 Best-ever Freeware Utilities](#), Tech Support Alert; continually updated.
- [Best Free Portable Software for Windows](#), Nedwolf Free Software; continually updated.
- [PortableApps.com](#) community.
- [Home PC Firewall Guide](#) website.
- [Complete Embedded & Streaming Quicktime/Real/Windows Media Player Guide for Windows Firefox Users](#), MozillaZine Forums; '05Nov19 update.
- [Ultimate Boot CD](#) falls under a somewhat different category, but it's an incredible diagnostic tool that works on any Intel-based computer.

# Download

I've packaged together a good portion of the programs mentioned above (143 MB total)<sup>[6]</sup>. You can then burn the extracted files to a CD or copy them to a USB drive for a handy Free Windows software to go kit. Each [ZIP](#) file comes with a [readme.txt](#) which outlines the contents of the package. The only major program **missing from the packages is OOo since it is over 90 MB** by itself.

**Instructions:** Unless you have Windows XP (with built-in ZIP support), you will need to [install 7-Zip](#) or make sure you already have something that can open ZIP files. Next, just click on the package that you want below and follow the prompts around the ad-ridden (but fast & reliable) Bigupload site.

- [1-Basic\\_protection\\_1.2.zip](#) (48 MB)
- [2-Tools\\_for\\_working\\_online\\_1.2.zip](#) (15 MB)
- [3-Other\\_essential\\_apps\\_1.2.zip](#) (83 MB)
- **Documentation:** *Free Windows software to go 1.2* includes the download links for the packages. [PDF](#) 140 KB, [TXT](#) 16 KB, [RTF](#) 80 KB, or [HTML](#) 26 KB.

# Donation

Contributions to this project can be made with a secure PayPal form at <http://zepfanman.com/free/#donate>

# Endnotes

1. I would not recommend installing most of these programs on a business computer (licensing and network security issues may be violated). Note that an application is only essential if it fits your computer usage style. Some of the online tools aren't really needed if you're not on a broadband connection. Furthermore, there is a fine line between overdoing it and not having enough protection; it all depends on how safe you want your computer, what you use it for, and if you care about the computer getting bloated with too many tools. Sometimes it's better to use two fast, efficient programs instead of one slow, resource-hogging, all-in-one app. This is why it's helpful to look at online discussions about products and decide for yourself what looks the best.

While all these programs work on [Microsoft Windows operating systems](#), I've notated if they have versions for Linux (L) or the Mac (M), as well; this is followed by a link to the latest version of the product that I've used and then a link to the manufacturer's main website.

I will do my best to mark any updates that I make to this list over time—I want people to be able to come to this page and know that they're seeing a reliable list. While I don't review software for a living and am providing this list as free advice, I've been using all of these programs for at least six months on both Windows 2000 and Windows XP Pro, so they've been time-tested. If you're still running Windows 95, I would recommend dropping the money to buy a new computer and Windows XP; many of these programs don't apply to Windows 95 (and not so much to Windows 98, either).

2. While it's sometimes hard to stay up to date with the latest version of extensions (especially since the '05Nov release of FF 1.5 as a major version change), these are a few of my favorites: SessionSaver, Tab Mix Plus, Google Toolbar, and Greasemonkey. Another warning: [FF tends to take up a lot of memory when running](#); I've read of many supposed tweaks, but I've never been able to fix the problem on the three main computers that I use with FF. Version 1.5 seems to work a little faster than previous versions.

3. My ideal e-mail client would consist of a calendar and address book that could sync with my PDA (Palm or Windows Mobile). Microsoft Outlook is currently the only program that does this even remotely to my satisfaction. Unfortunately, it's not free. Currently, I keep all my contacts informally in Gmail and up to date in my Treo 600; I then sync to Palm Desktop using the included HotSync tool or to Yahoo! with the free Yahoo! Intellisync. The biggest problem with syncing contacts is keeping all of the fields updated;. As far as the calendar goes, Mozilla does not have anything that syncs with PDAs easily yet.
4. I've found a mix-and-match of media applications is usually the best option. While MPC is efficient, it doesn't include simple brightness adjustments like [Windows Media Player](#). I'm pretty sure that Real Alternative won't work with some Real files (particularly streaming on the web, even with K-Lite Meta), but I try to stay away from Real for the most part since their software is so bloated and has annoying ties to AOL. Otherwise, I've also found [Winamp](#) to be the fastest and easiest mp3 player over the years; I've never had a need for a huge media library app like iTunes or [Musicmatch Jukebox](#).
5. AIDA32 is also useful for doing computer inventory audits over a network. Versioning is very confusing since [Lavalys](#) took over the AIDA32 project (now called EVEREST). If you look at the [April 2004 aida32.hu Internet Archive](#), you can see that 3.93 was the final version. Note the [variants chart](#), too; I prefer the Network Edition, mainly because it's a little bit lighter in file size. FYI, the embedded [Windows System Information](#) tool is scarce on support; I thought that this *was not* available on Windows 98, but I guess I'm wrong!
6. Using a file upload site is not my ideal solution for distributing packages. First of all, BitTorrents are much more flexible: they allow you to pick and choose the files in the package that you want to download. Also, BitTorrents automatically resume downloads so you don't have to worry about losing it halfway through. Furthermore, while I checked out [several file hosting sites](#), even my choice of Uploading.com had its flaws (the site won't work with the Opera browser, for example). FYI, I tried creating my own BitTorrent to distribute the files, but it was next to impossible to find or create a reliable [BitTorrent tracker](#).

## More about this project

- If you have any comments or suggestions, please use [my corresponding blog entry](#).
- *Free Windows software to go* first posted '05Nov30 by J. J.
- '05Dec11 update: Dirk Loss link added, Microsoft Update revised, FF 1.5 comments.
- '05Dec20 update: Version 1.0 downloads and version 1.1 documentation (PDF, RTF, TXT, and HTML) made available in the Download section.
- '06Jan27 update: Version 1.2 downloads due to unsatisfactory Uploading.com, new Antispyware, AVG, Thunderbird, µTorrent, Mega Codec, PDFCreator (w/ corrected install file), Spybot updates, a version correction on ZoneAlarm, a tip for speeding up OpenOffice.org, MozillaZine link update, and added links PortableApps.com and méprisant.