

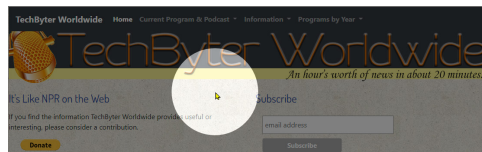


PowerToys: Essential for any Windows Computer

WINDOWS 95 INTRODUCED THE CONCEPT OF POWERTOYS, SMALL APPLETS THAT PERFORMED USEFUL TASKS. MORE THAN 20 YEARS LATER, THE CONCEPT IS BACK.

Most of the functions in the original PowerToys were later added to the operating system and the project languished until 2019 when Microsoft released a new edition of PowerToys. The dozen components are more than just helpful. I consider many to be essential.

PowerToys runs automatically and appears in the Notification Area (Tray). Although Microsoft sponsors the utility, it's an open-source project that can be downloaded from GitHub or from the Microsoft Store. It works with Windows 10 and Windows 11.

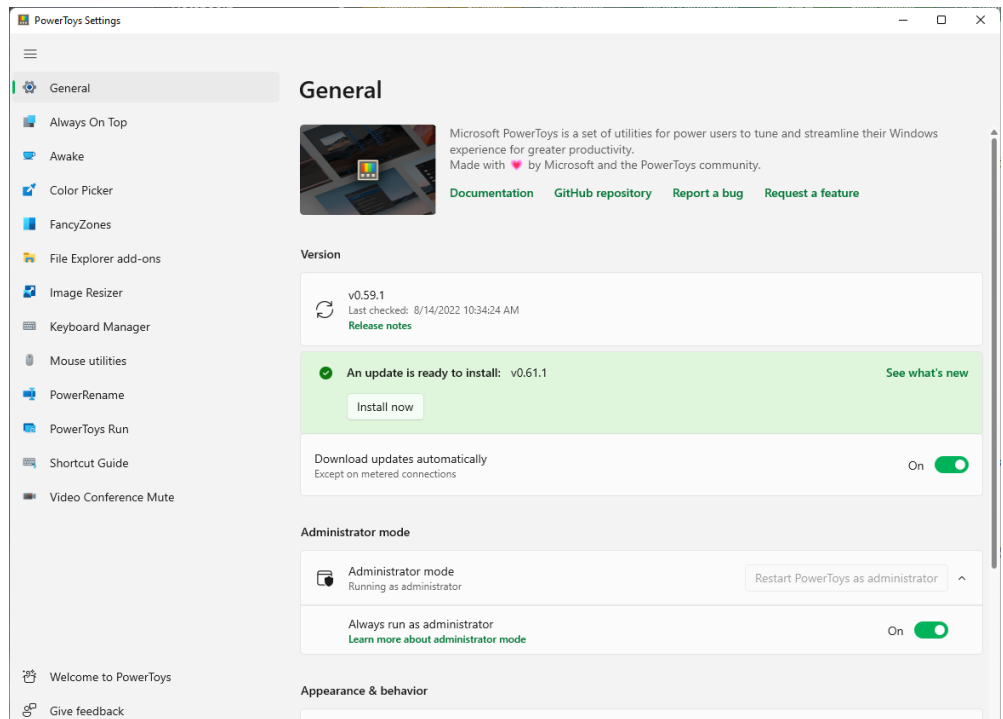


CAN'T FIND THE MOUSE? TAPPING THE LEFT CONTROL KEY TWICE REVEALS ITS LOCATION.

One of the most useful functions is *Find My Mouse*. It's easy to lose track of the mouse, especially if you have two or more screens. Maybe you've let the mouse drift onto the second or third monitor and it's hiding.

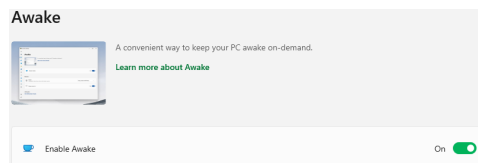
A quick double tap on the left Control key dims all screens and places a highlight around the mouse cursor. There's an additional option that will highlight the mouse cursor each time you click or right-click.

Perhaps you've had the computer go into sleep mode when you're running a long job that requires no user input.



THE MODERN VERSION OF POWER TOYS INCLUDES ONE DOZEN PRIMARY COMPONENTS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE ADDITIONAL SUBSIDIARY COMPONENTS. ALTHOUGH SOME FEATURES MAY EVENTUALLY BE ADDED TO THE OPERATING SYSTEM, THEY'RE WORTH HAVING TODAY.

Instead of opening Settings and modifying the power options, only to have to repeat the process to restore the settings when the job is complete, use PowerToys *Awake*, which spawns background threads to keep the computer from dozing off.

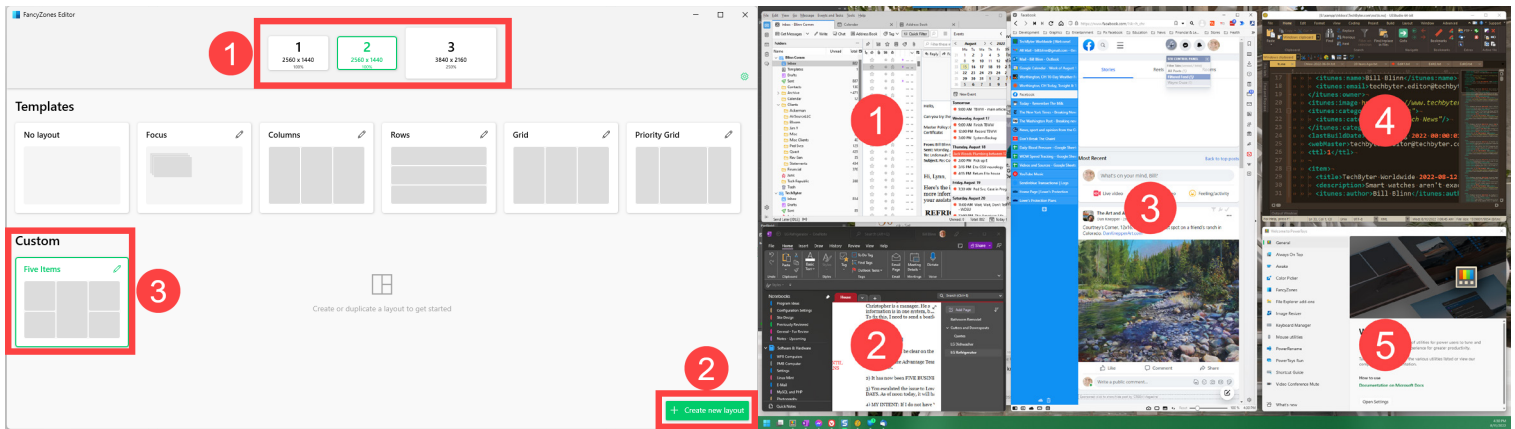


Activate *Always On Top* when you need to keep a particular window in view at all times. When a window is

pinned with this feature, no other application can be displayed in front of it. A supervisory application such as the Task Manager or a temperature monitor in a small window might be most useful when always visible.

If you set more than one window to always be on top, those windows can cover each other depending on which has focus, but no other application can cover either of them.

The *Color Picker* is a tool for identifying colors on the screen. It can display hex, HSL, and RGB values. Although free tools to perform this function exist,



FANCYZONES IS ONE OF THE MORE COMPLEX FUNCTIONS. USERS CAN SUBDIVIDE A SCREEN INTO MULTIPLE AREAS AND THEN PLACE APPS IN EACH OF THE AREAS. START BY (1-LEFT) SELECTING THE SCREEN AND THEN USE ONE OF THE DEFINED LAYOUTS OR (2-LEFT) CREATE A NEW LAYOUT AND THEN (3-LEFT) SAVE IT. A FANCYZONES LAYOUT WITH 5 AREAS COULD CONTAIN (1) THUNDERBIRD, (2) ONENOTE, (3) VIVALDI, (4) ULTRA EDIT STUDIO, AND (5) POWERTOYS.

having it built in to PowerToys means it's always handy.

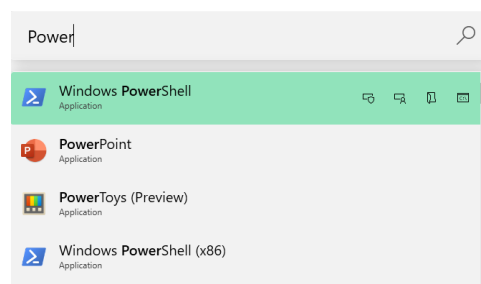
FancyZones is a window manager that can arrange windows into specific layouts. Users define a set of locations that include what Microsoft calls "drag targets". If you've used the built-in function that causes windows to snap to the left or right side of a screen, you're already familiar with the concept. *FancyZones* creates additional locations where apps can be snapped into place. When snapped to a *FancyZone*, the window is resized to fit.

The Windows File Explorer already shows thumbnails for some images, but *PowerToys* adds previews for SVG and PDF files. The ability to see a preview of a PDF document is handy and adding SVG to files that can be previewed is good because they're being used more frequently on websites.

Image Resizer adds a context menu to the Windows File Explorer for quick and easy resizing of images. Instead of overwriting an image, the resizer automatically adds size information to the name and saves it to the same location by default.

Power Renamer is far less powerful than my preferred file renamer, Bulk Rename Utility, but it has a simple and easy to understand interface. It even offers support for regular expressions, so it may be adequate for some advanced users.

Image Keyboard Manager is for users who want to remap some keys without having to use the Registry editor. It also doesn't require rebooting, which is required for Registry edits.



PowerToys Run, a quick-launch utility, is activated by Alt-Spacebar, but the user can specify other keystrokes. To launch *PowerToys* or *PowerPoint*, the user would press Alt-Spacebar, type *power* to display all programs that include "power", select one, and press Enter.

Starting applications without having to reach for the mouse is faster. Using the same process for an open application is a quick, mouseless way to switch between apps, too. This has become my favorite and most-used function.

PowerToys has a built-in shortcut guide for quick reference when you're trying to remember the key combination to enable to disable one of the functions. Pressing the Windows key, Shift, and the Forward slash displays it.

Download *PowerToys*, from the Microsoft Store. Ω

Using FancyZones

FANCYZONES IS THE MOST COMPLEX FEATURE IN POWERTOYS.

At its most basic, *FancyZones* is a window manager utility for arranging and snapping windows into layouts. Users define a set of zones as targets for applications that are resized when dragged into zones.

The illustrations at the top of the page show how to enable the feature and what an arrangement might look like with five zones.

Not everyone likes the feature. Because I have three monitors, I've developed a working arrangement for applications with five or six active applications on each screen. When I need to see two apps side by side, I can place both on one screen or move the reference application to another screen.

If an arrangement like that works well for you, *FancyZones* might introduce unnecessary complexity.

However, if you have a few applications that you'd like to maintain on a single monitor, using *FancyZones* to create the arrangement will save time because you can recall the saved arrangement at any time.

Give *FancyZones* a try to see if it works well in your workflow. Whether you use *FancyZones* or not, *PowerToys* has a lot to like! Ω