



# YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO **WINDOWS 10** CUSTOMIZATION



Christian Bonilla



# Your Complete Guide to Windows 10 Customization

Written by Christian Bonilla

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Do you desire a desktop that looks and feels like your own? This guide will help you create a fully customized **Windows 10** desktop and user interface (UI).

A few minutes is all it takes to turn your desktop into a unique UI suited to your needs and wants. It's fun, it's easy, and the results will be stunning. Let us take you through the process, step-by-step.

## 1. Introduction to Desktop Customization

### 1.1 Why Should I Customize My Desktop?

Your desktop is simple. You use it to send emails, write documents, store photos, and watch movies. In short, you do everything on your computer. Yet it sits there, bare and without a personal touch. Besides, why mess with what works? There are some who stop there.

Others have grown to love the thrill of customization. First, you begin customizing your **Start Menu tiles**. Then, program icons. Next thing you know, you're simulating whole operating systems within your Windows 10 environment.

Think of your PC like a desk. Now imagine working at an empty desk every day. No matter your PC knowledge – whether you consider yourself an amateur or a pro – no one has to settle for a boring desktop. Let your personality flow through your screen. Read on to go from drab and default to outstanding in minutes!

### 1.2 How This Guide Is Written

This guide is best read from beginning to end. Since desktop customization often requires both prior knowledge and multiple programs, it's best to start off with simple feature changes. Slowly but surely – as you gain experience dealing with different parts of the **Windows 10** UI – you'll learn how to customize more and more.

If you'd like a simple one-click solution, though, feel free to jump ahead to the **Themes** section.

### 1.3 Interested in Customization?

If you are interested in some more tutorials and articles on customization, there is a wealth of programs and tutorials right here on MakeUseOf that you can use. Here's a simple list containing some of our best tutorials for using a few of the programs listed below.

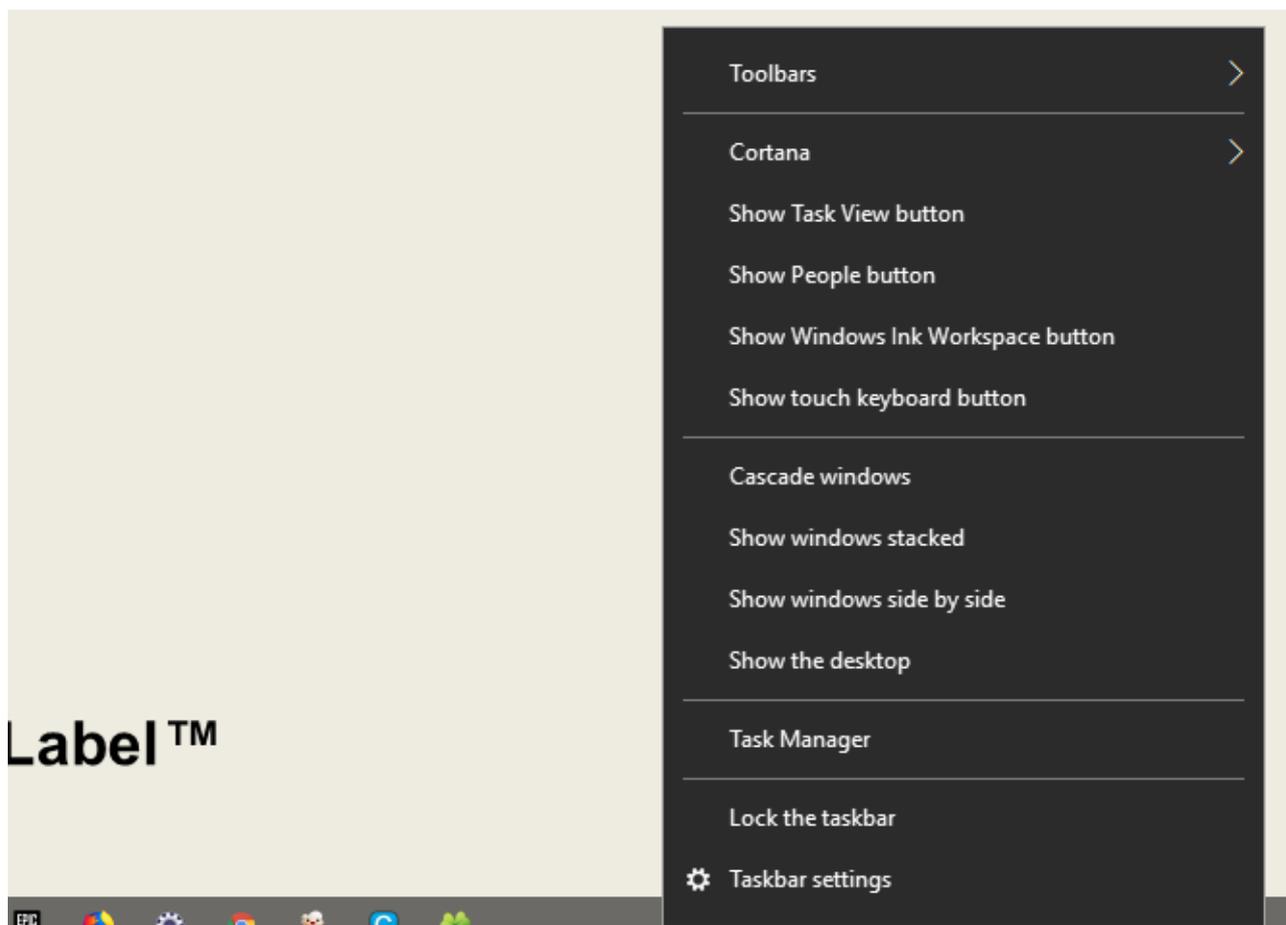
- [Windows 10 Taskbar Customization: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Change the Look and Feel of Your Windows 10 Desktop](#)
- [10 Quick Ways to Customize & Personalize Windows 10](#)
- [7 Best Tools to Tweak and Customize Windows 10](#)
- [How to Customize Any Icon in Windows](#)
- [6 Ways to Hack & Customize the Windows 10 Start Menu](#)

## 2. Themes

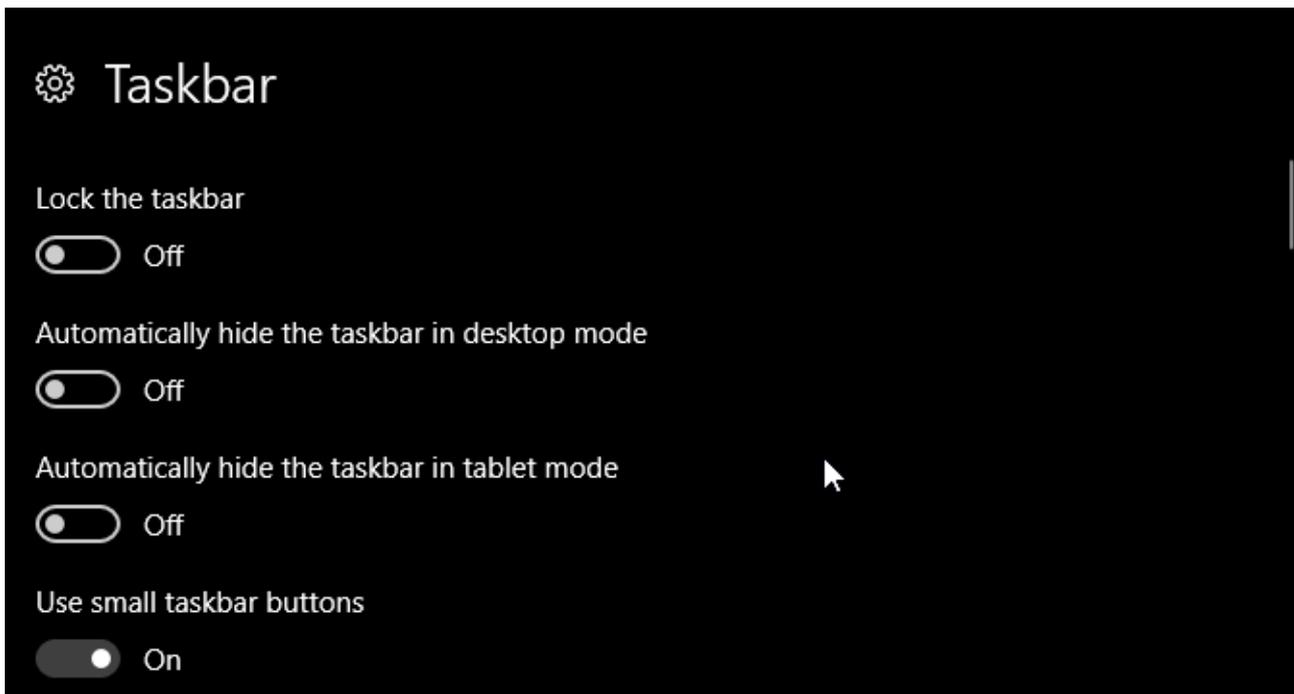
### 2.1 An Introduction to Desktop Themes

No matter what Windows version you're using (Windows XP, Windows 7, **Windows 8**, or Windows 10), making your desktop look fantastic is super simple.

Let's take our Taskbar, for example. **Right-click** on your Taskbar.



Then, select **Taskbar settings**. This will open a window which allows users to customize certain simple features in their Taskbar.



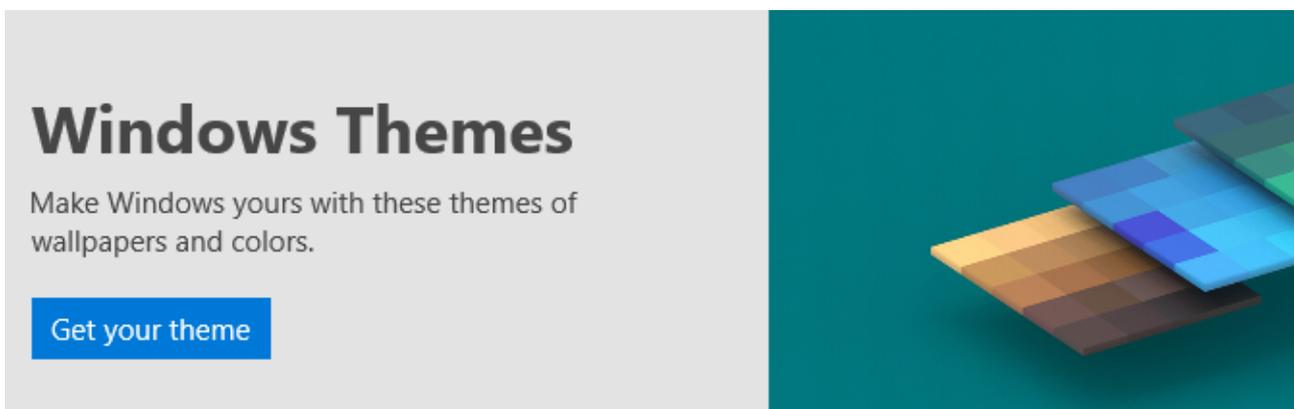
As you can see, we already have several options to change the appearance of our Taskbar. You can choose to hide it, use smaller Taskbar buttons, and lock the Taskbar so you don't accidentally delete a shortcut.

Just like that, you've already started customizing your **Windows 10** UI. That's only the beginning.

## 2.2 Where Can I Get Themes for My Computer?

There are plenty of ways – some official and some not – to download and install themes for Windows 10. For one, Microsoft hosts several Windows 10 themes for free within the Microsoft Store.

To access the Microsoft Store, click on your start menu and type in **store**. Click on the **Microsoft Store** option. Then, type in **Themes** in the search bar, hit **enter**, and select the **Get your theme** option.

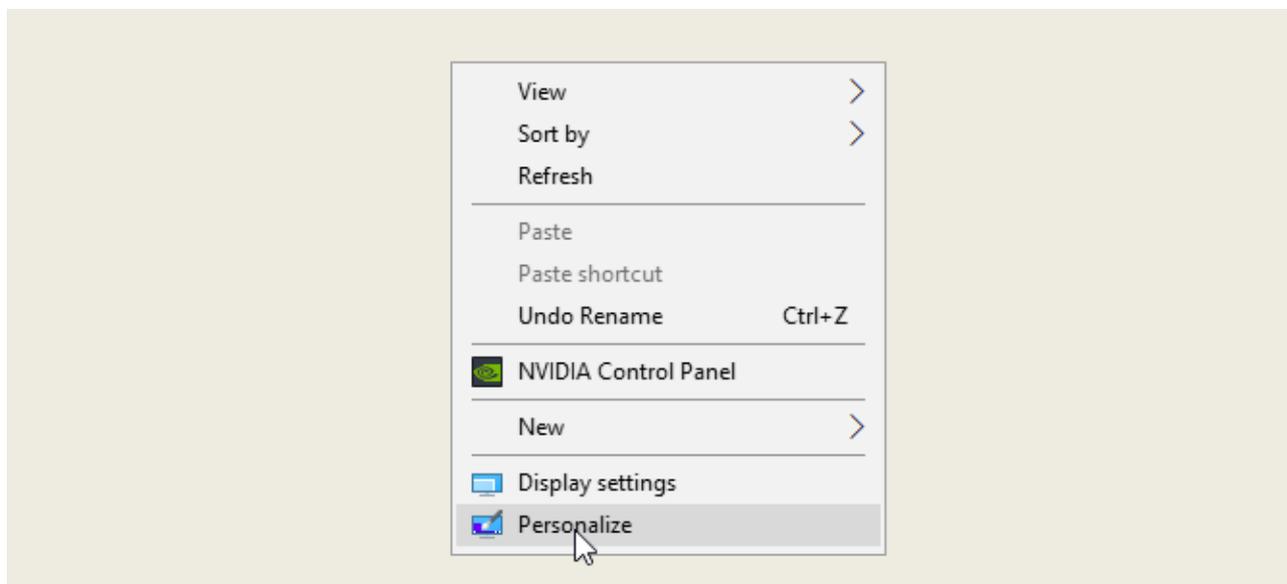


This will allow you to install a simple theme quickly, officially, and for free.

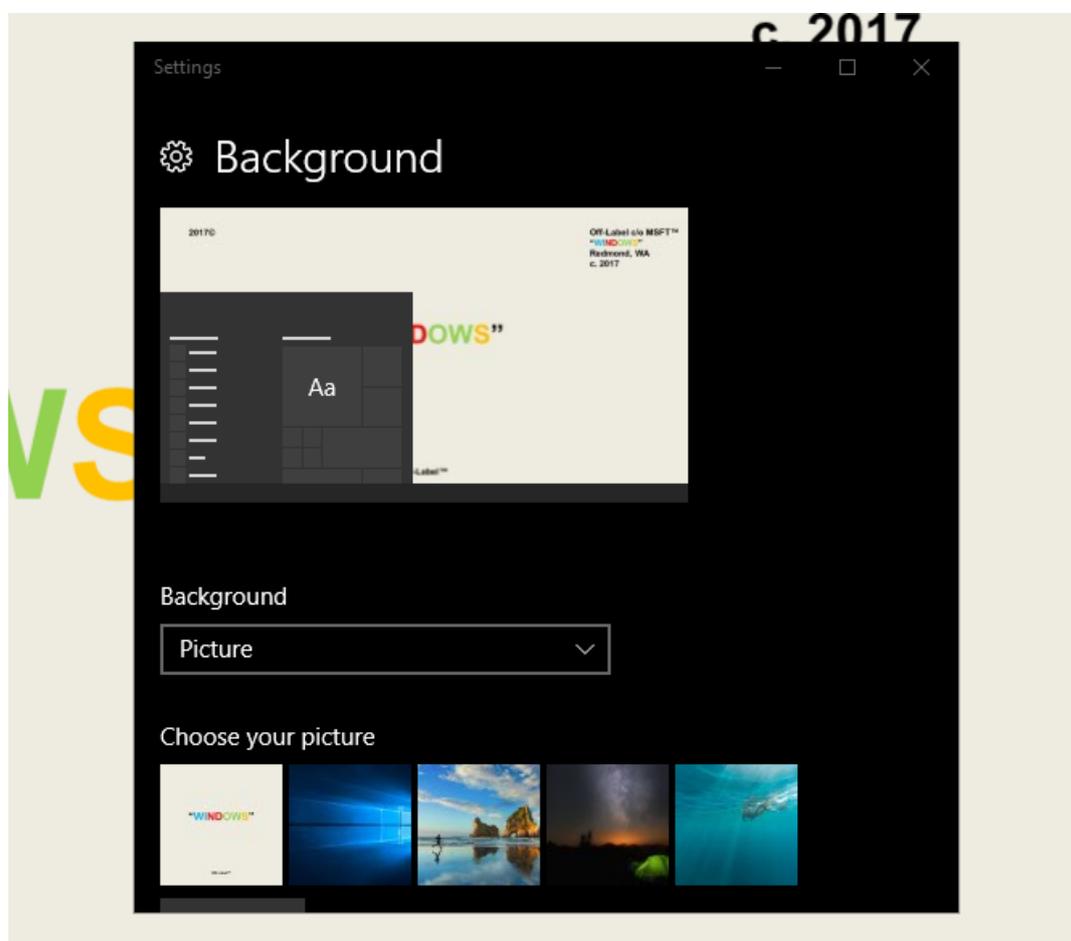
## 2.3 How Do I Use Themes Properly?

Before we get into the more nuanced tweaks, it's best to start with default desktop customization so you familiarize yourself with Windows 10's UI. We'll start with themes. Windows 10 themes are basic background and color combinations you can use for your desktop.

To access Themes, **right-click** an empty space on your desktop and select **Personalize**.

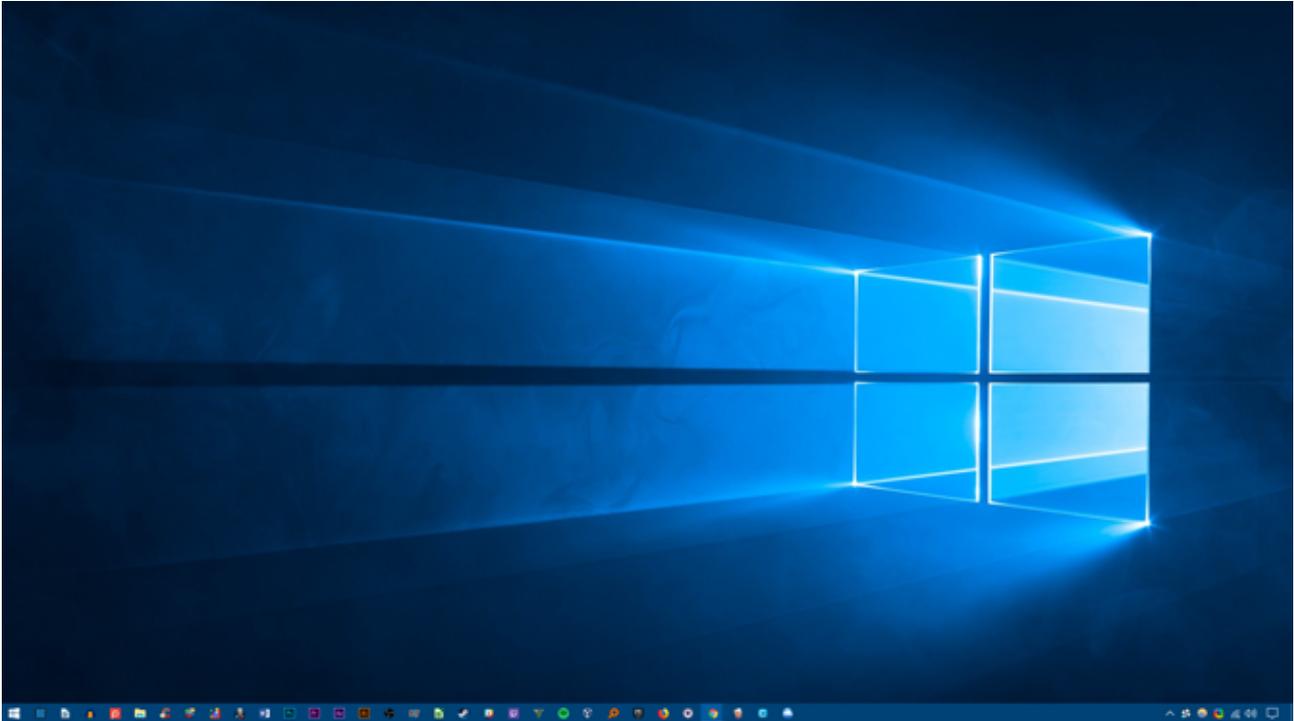


This will open the Background section of your **Windows 10** settings.



Expand your window and select the **Themes** option in the sidebar. You can access and save themes in this window. Then, scroll down to and click the **Get more themes** option. From the list provided, select an option and download the theme. Once the theme is finished downloading, select **Launch** and choose your theme from the selection.

That's it! In a few seconds, we went from the following default desktop:



To this:



All in a few clicks. Note that not only the background changed, but the Taskbar color and all applicable Windows 10 windows as well.

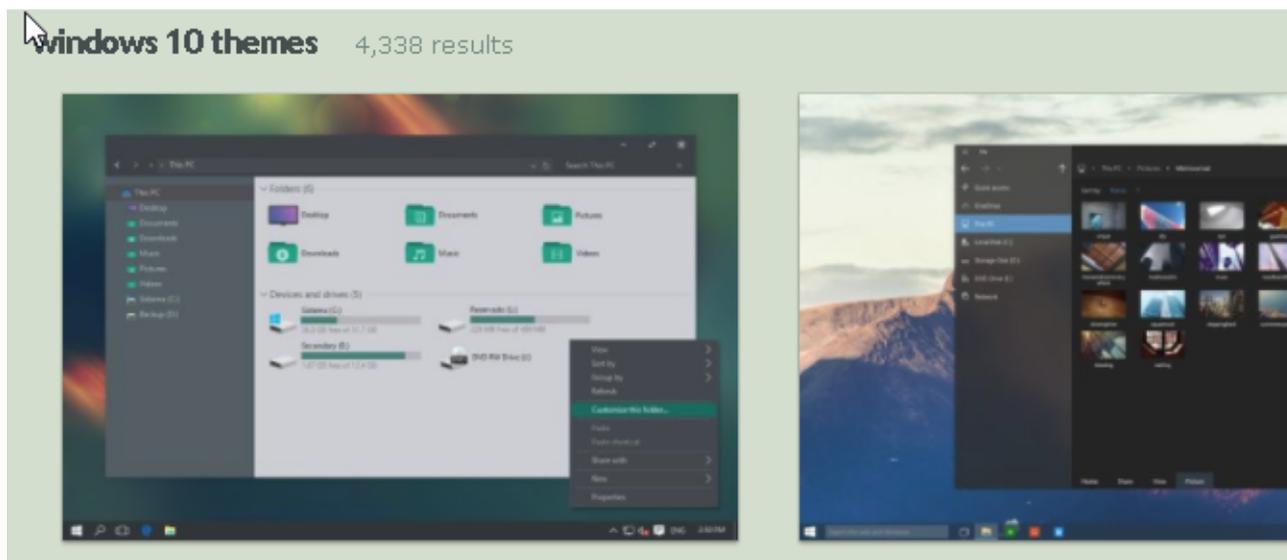
That's enough on default changes for now. Let's go over how to install third-party themes.

## 2.4 Should I Use a Third Party Theme Installer?

The following is a very popular method among Windows 10 aficionados to install third-party themes onto their Windows 10 computers. This method will allow you to control the look of your File Explorer, a major component of the Windows 10 UI, and other applicable programs like the Task Manager.

### 2.4.1 DeviantArt Themes

First, head to **DeviantArt** and enter **windows 10 themes** in the search bar. You'll be presented with several popular options by default.



We're going to be installing the **Ades theme** located on the first page of our DeviantArt search. Before continuing on, a few words of warning.

**Always set a restore point** before installing a custom theme. Developers will often explicitly state this in their documentation. Since we're dealing with the Windows UI, we have to take extra precautions when tweaking it so as to not delete a vital part of the UI. Take note of exactly how the developer explains the installation.

### 2.4.2 Theme Installers

As for the theme, you'll need a few programs before installing. **OldNewExplorer**, the first program you'll need, deactivates the *ribbon* section of your File Explorer. The second program, **UltraUXThemePatcher**, will allow for third-party Windows 10 themes.

**Ensure** you are using the **correct version** of each piece of software with the correct Windows version. If you install a version of the software that is not compatible with your Windows version – installing UltraUXThemePatcher for Windows 8 in Windows 10, for example – you may run into problems.

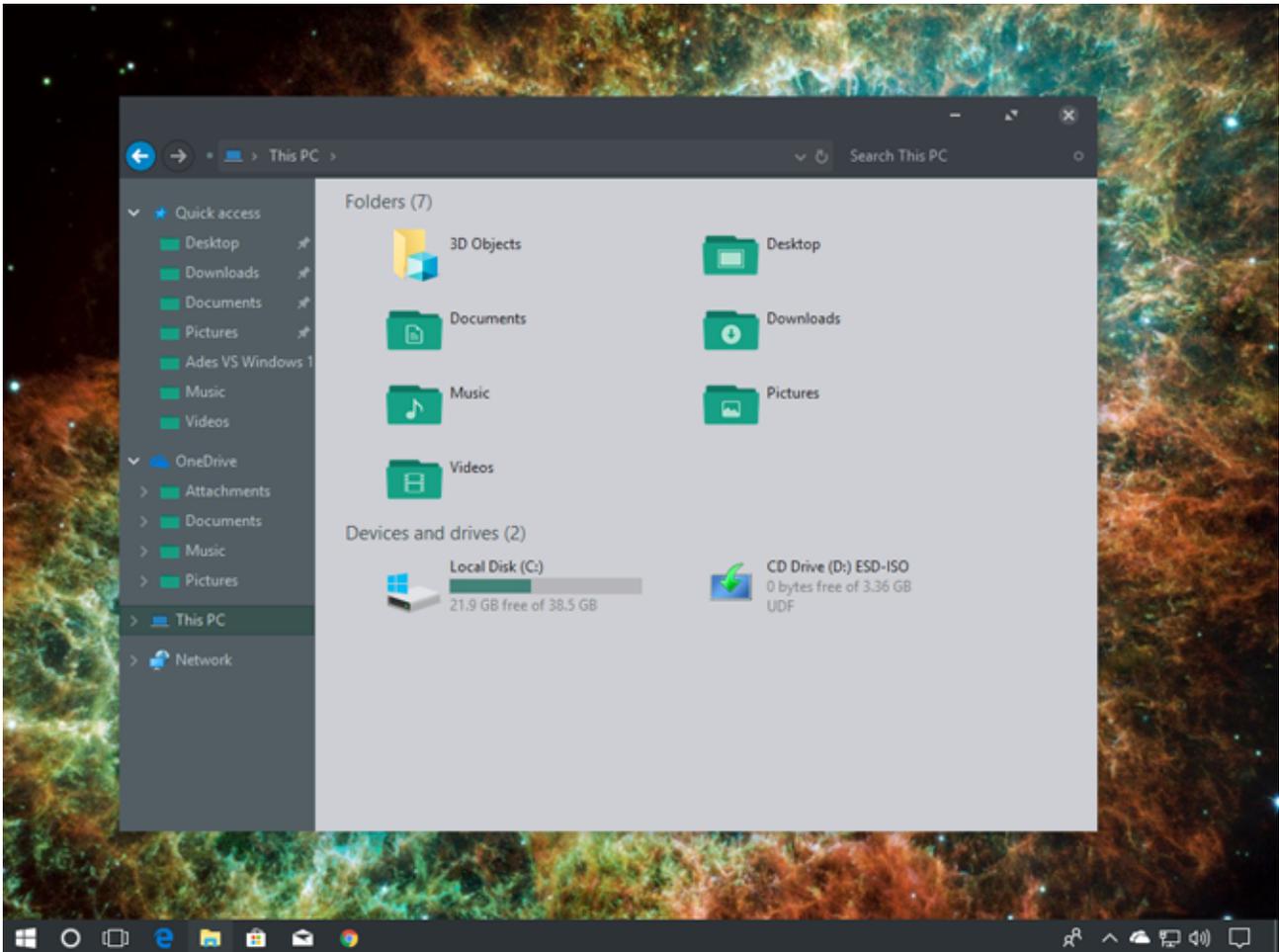
Additionally, you can install **MacType** to **render cleaner fonts** on your screen. It is not, however, required. The same goes for the **WinRemix icon pack**, which will require you rename a file to install correctly.

### 2.4.3 Installing a Third-Party Theme

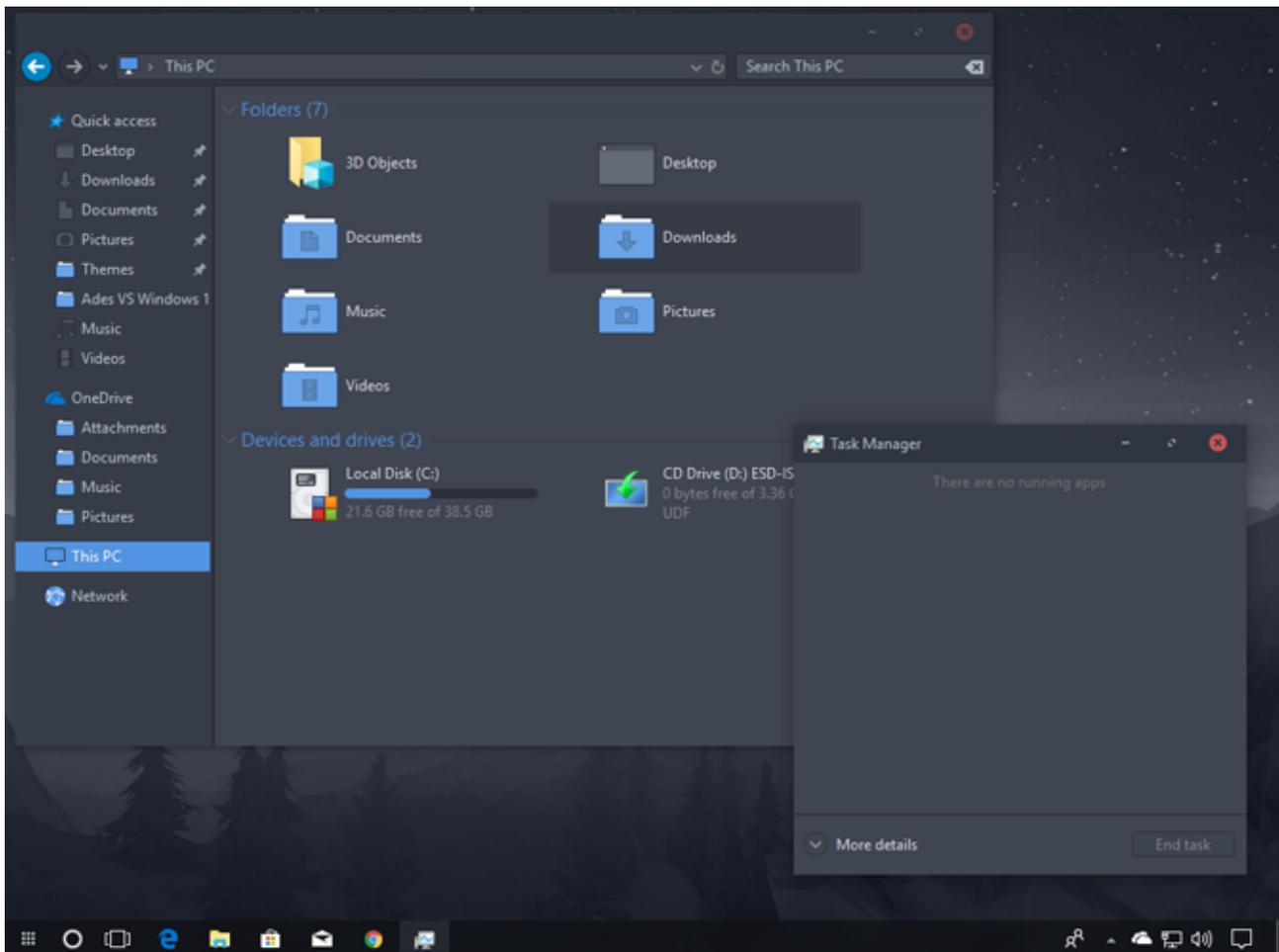
Once you've installed these programs, download and install the actual Ades theme. Then, extract the Ades theme ZIP file and move the contents of the folder to **C:**

**\Windows\Resources\Themes**. Ensure you change the C in the repository address to the applicable driver letter.

Finally, select the theme in your **Settings** options using the method explained above. Voila! You just installed a custom Windows 10 theme.



Below is another theme named **Arc**, correctly installed with its appropriate **Arc icon set**.

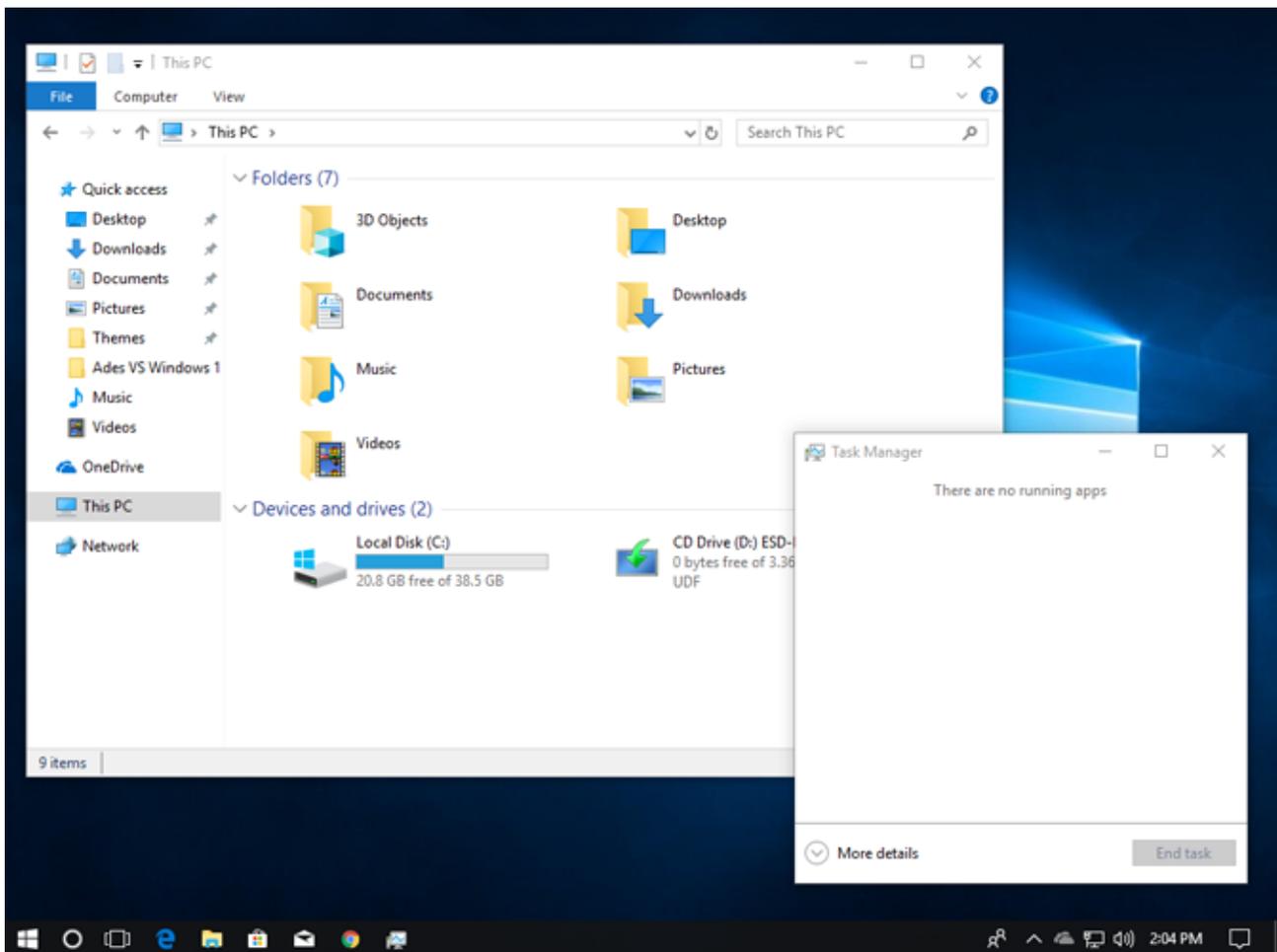


We've managed to completely change our Windows 10 UI in minutes using a few third-party programs. Keep in mind that third-party software can cause errors. Nevertheless, developers are very careful in explaining fully the possible issues you may run into. Moreover, always remember to read the documentation that comes with the programs. **Follow installation steps to the last detail.**

## 2.5 How Do I Revert to the Original Theme?

To restore the original Windows 10 theme, simply **right-click** on your desktop and select **Personalize**. Then, select **Themes** and click on the **Windows** option.

You can also use the **restore point** created earlier.

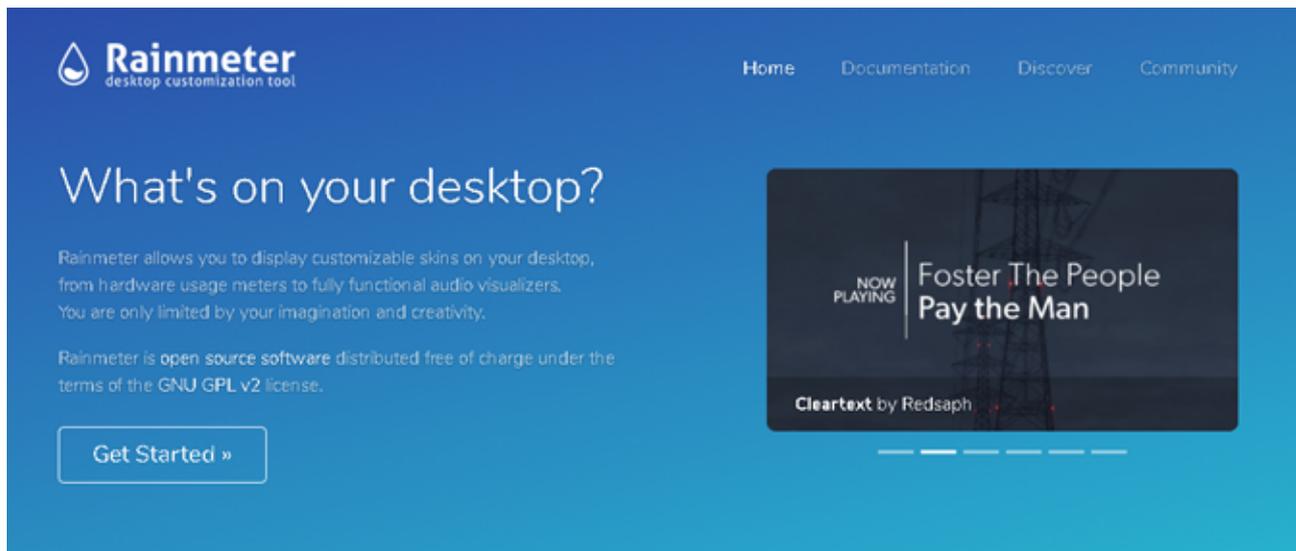


This will not only revert your Theme to default, it will revert your icons and system configurations back to normal as well.

## 3. Rainmeter

### 3.1 What Is Rainmeter?

A particular dynamo when it comes to desktop customization is Rainmeter. A long-time favorite Windows program, Rainmeter will allow you to include various tweaks to your desktop.



## ↓ Downloads

Version History - Old Downloads

## 📧 News

### 4.2 Beta Release - r3018

📅 December 20, 2017

Download Beta

[Mirror](#)

[Release notes](#)

### 4.1 Final Release - r2989

📅 November 6, 2017

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[Release notes](#)

### [Rainmeter 4.2 Beta Release](#)

December 20, 2017

### [Rainmeter 4.1 Final Release](#)

November 6, 2017

### [Need Help with Localization](#)

November 6, 2017

There's no cutoff to what you can do with Rainmeter. Want to create an **interactive, parallax 3D wallpaper**? Rainmeter can do that.

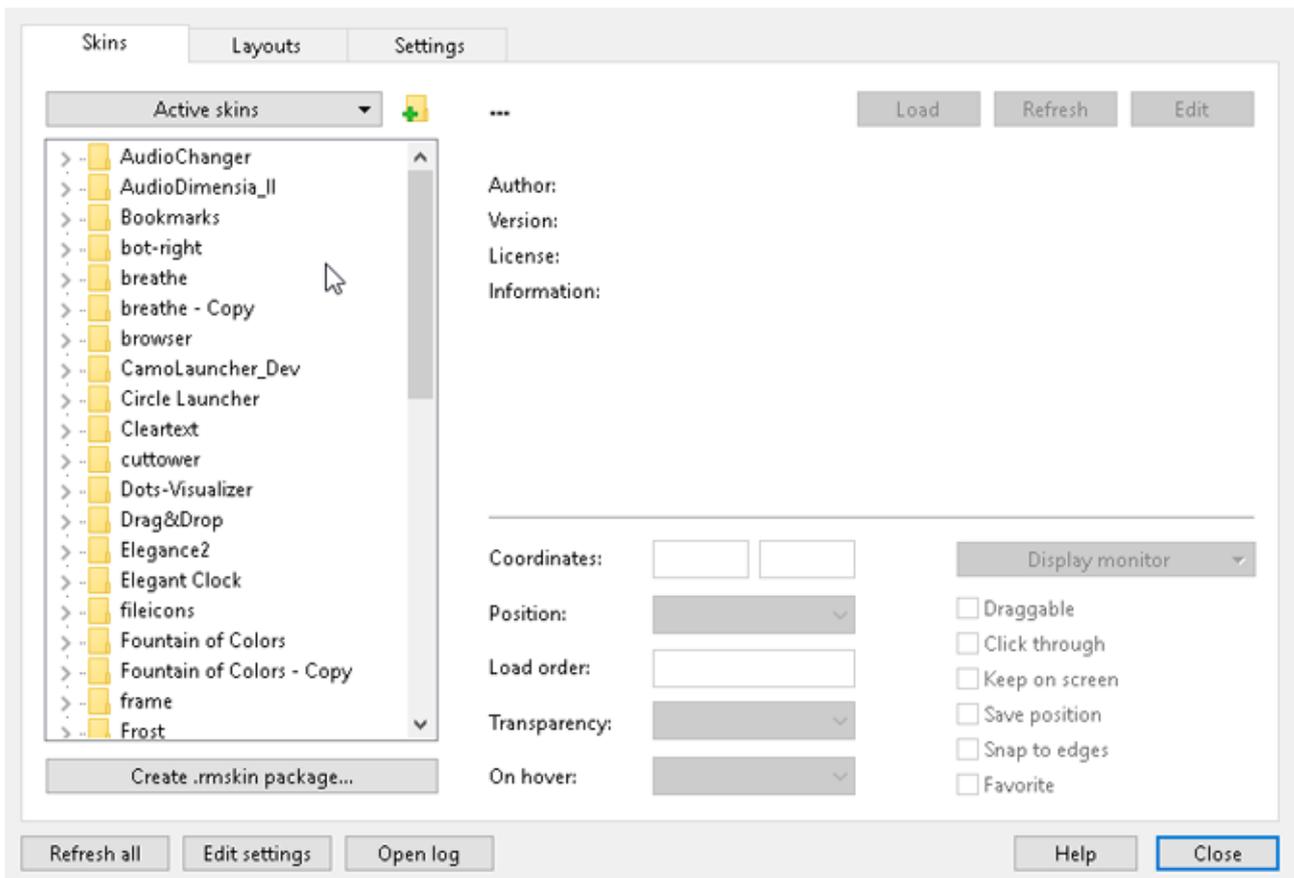
Want to include your **favorite images and GIFs** directly on your desktop, like one would picture on a desk? You can do that as well.

Simply head to the **Rainmeter website** and download the application. For a complete rundown on how to install and edit widget skins, along with download third-party widgets, read our **Rainmeter guide**.

## 3.2 Getting Started With Rainmeter

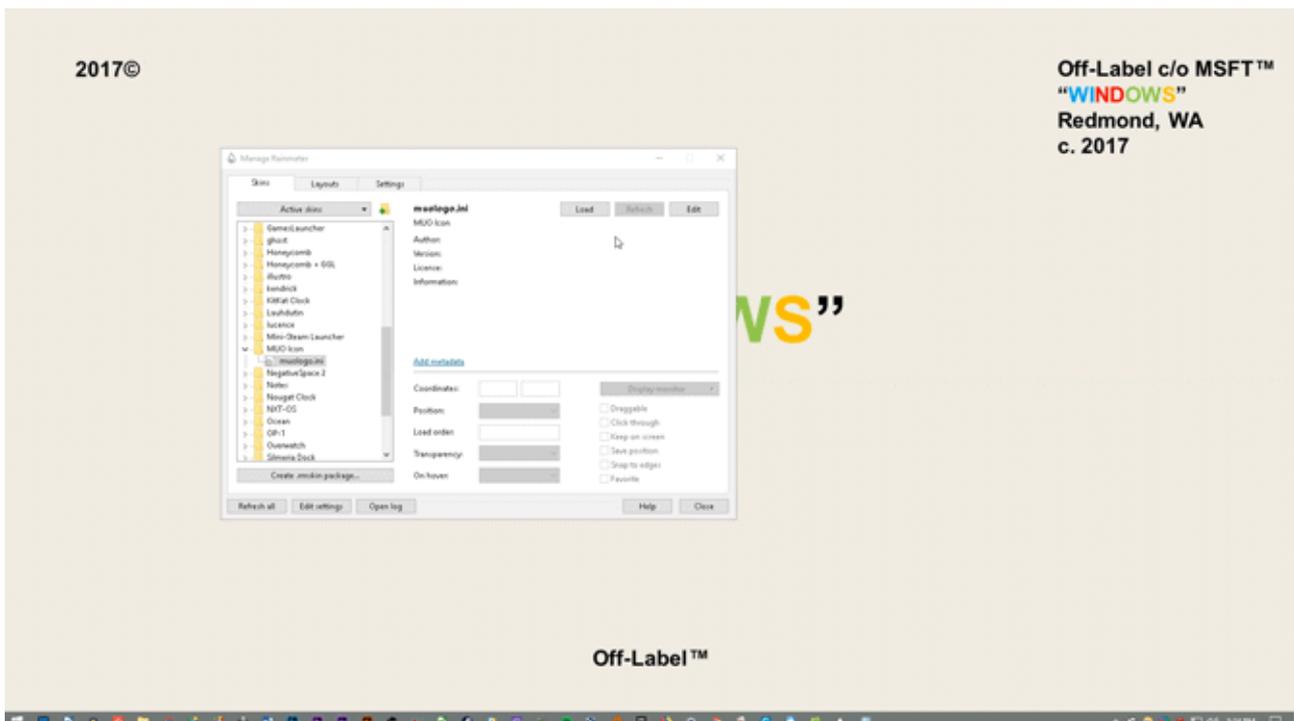
Rainmeter is very simple to use, but will definitely require some getting used to. Rainmeter allows users to load skins and INI files onto their desktops. These files can control music, show time, weather, and the like. Think of them as third-party widgets which allow for far more options than the default Windows widgets.

Download and install the final stable release of Rainmeter. Once installed, head to your Taskbar drawer and **double-click Rainmeter's teardrop logo**. This will show your **Manage Rainmeter** window, which will allow you to load and unload widgets or *skins*.



On the left-hand side are all the Rainmeter skins installed on your PC. Your skins are located in the **C:\Users\Waves\Documents\Rainmeter\Skins** directory by default. New skins are installed to this directory by default.

To activate a skin, locate the folder's INI file and **double-click** or select the **Load** option in the **Manage Rainmeter** window. To unload, **right-click** your skin and select **Unload**. You can also unload your skin using the Manage Rainmeter window by **selecting the skin** in the left-hand dropdown menu and clicking **Unload**.

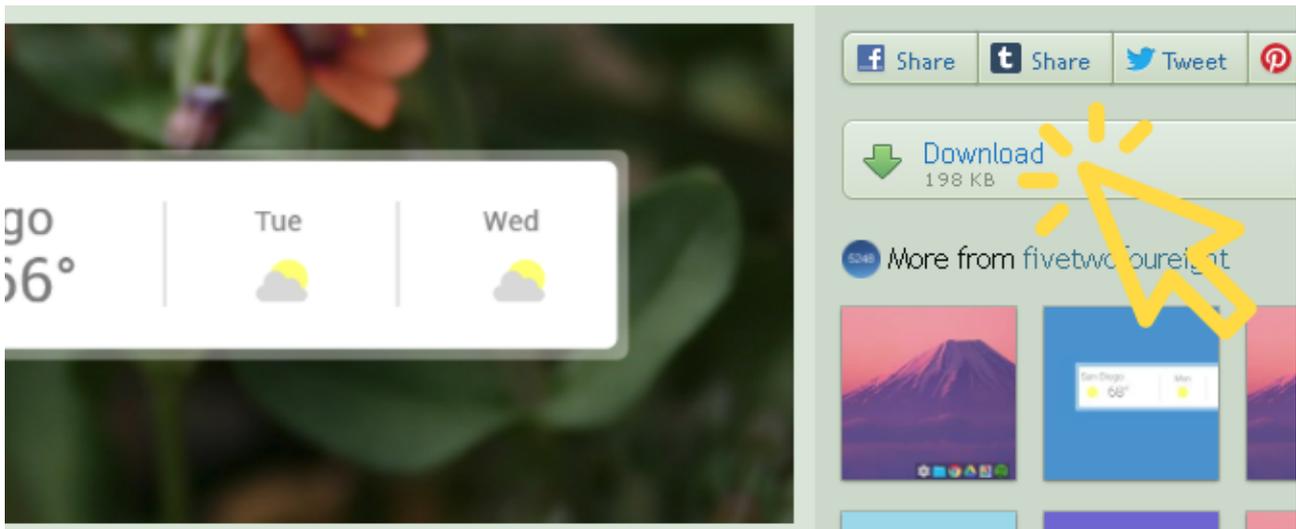


That's the basic mechanics of using Rainmeter.

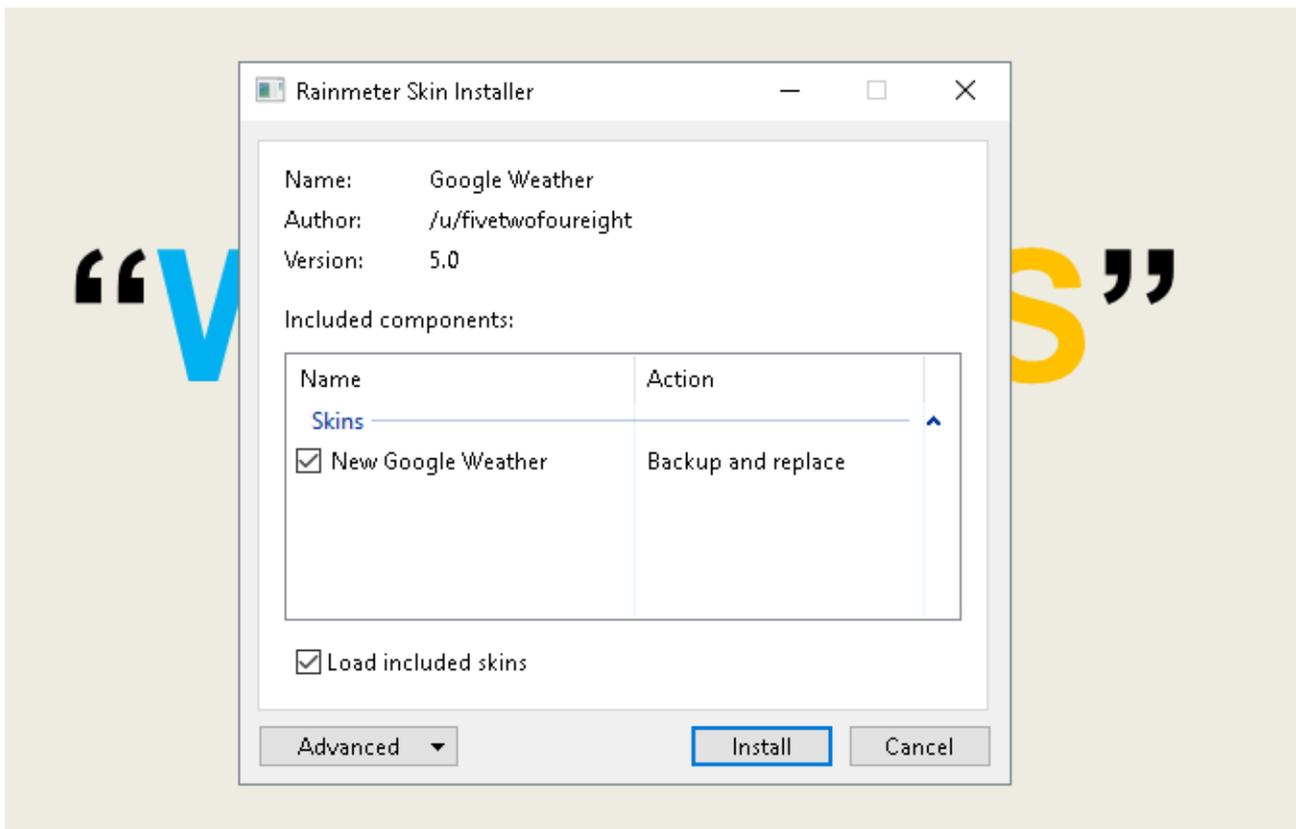
### 3.3 Where Can I Get Custom Skins?

While Rainmeter is a great program, it's only as useful as your skin selection. Rainmeter is very sparse by default. That means you'll have to install third-party skins. Luckily, DeviantArt is a dream repository for Rainmeter skins. Head to the DeviantArt website and type **rainmeter** into the search bar.

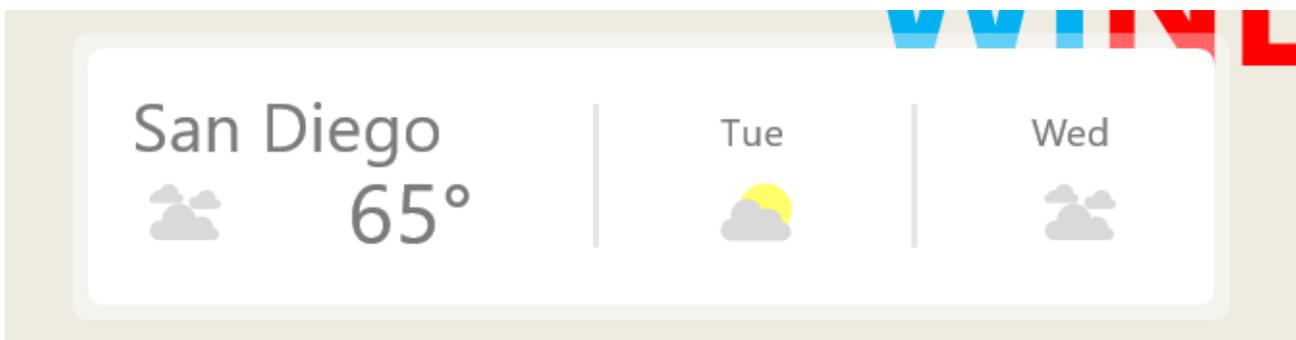
DeviantArt will be your main repository for custom Rainmeter skins. We'll install a very popular Rainmeter skin, **Google Now Weather**, to show the complete download and installation process. First, head to the skin's DeviantArt web page.



Once the file is downloaded, double-click on the file like you would an executable file. In the following Rainmeter Installer window, click **Install**.



That's it! You just installed a Rainmeter skin. Now, head to your **Manage Rainmeter** window by double-clicking its Taskbar icon, locate the INI file in the left-hand selection, and **Load** the skin.

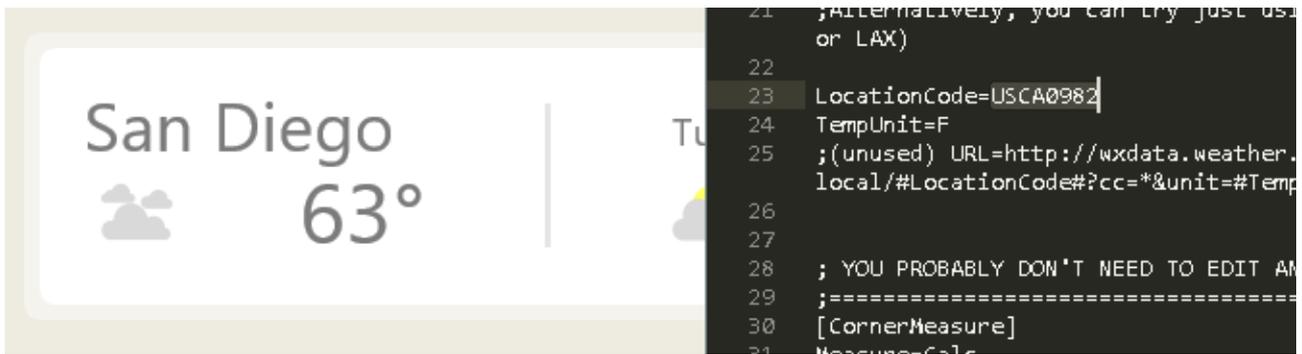


Voila! You've just loaded a live skin.

### 3.4 What If I Want to Modify Something?

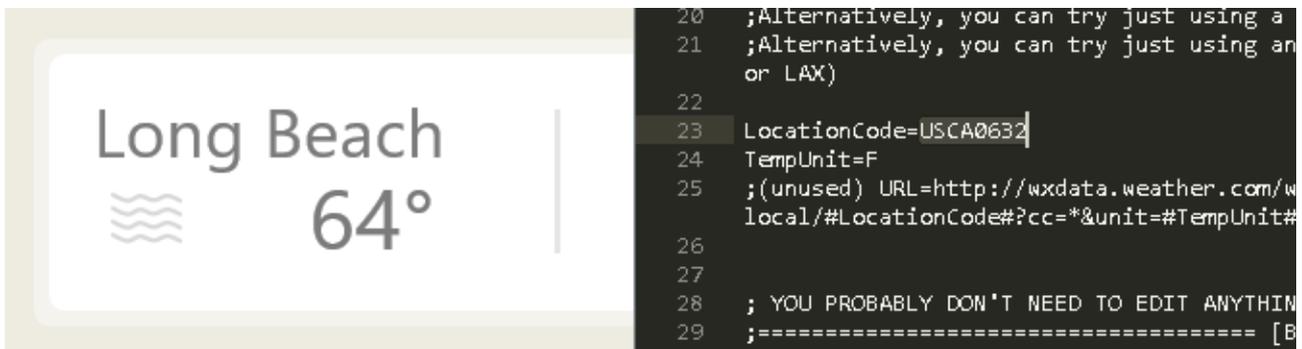
At times, the default Rainmeter skin will not function on your desktop. The skin will either be too small, too big, or lack your particular weather and location information. Luckily, Rainmeter makes editing their skins straightforward.

For example, the Google Now skin presented above gives me the weather for the wrong location. To fix, **right-click** the skin and select **Edit skin**.



With weather applications, in particular, you'll note most of them require a **LocationCode**. This code is based on your whereabouts and will provide the weather using particular websites. I'll need to change mine to my location. Head to a website like [weather.codes](http://weather.codes), look up your location, and copy and paste the code into the **LocationCode** parameter.

Then, press **CTRL + S** on your keyboard to save the document and refresh the skin by **right-clicking** it and selecting **Refresh skin**.

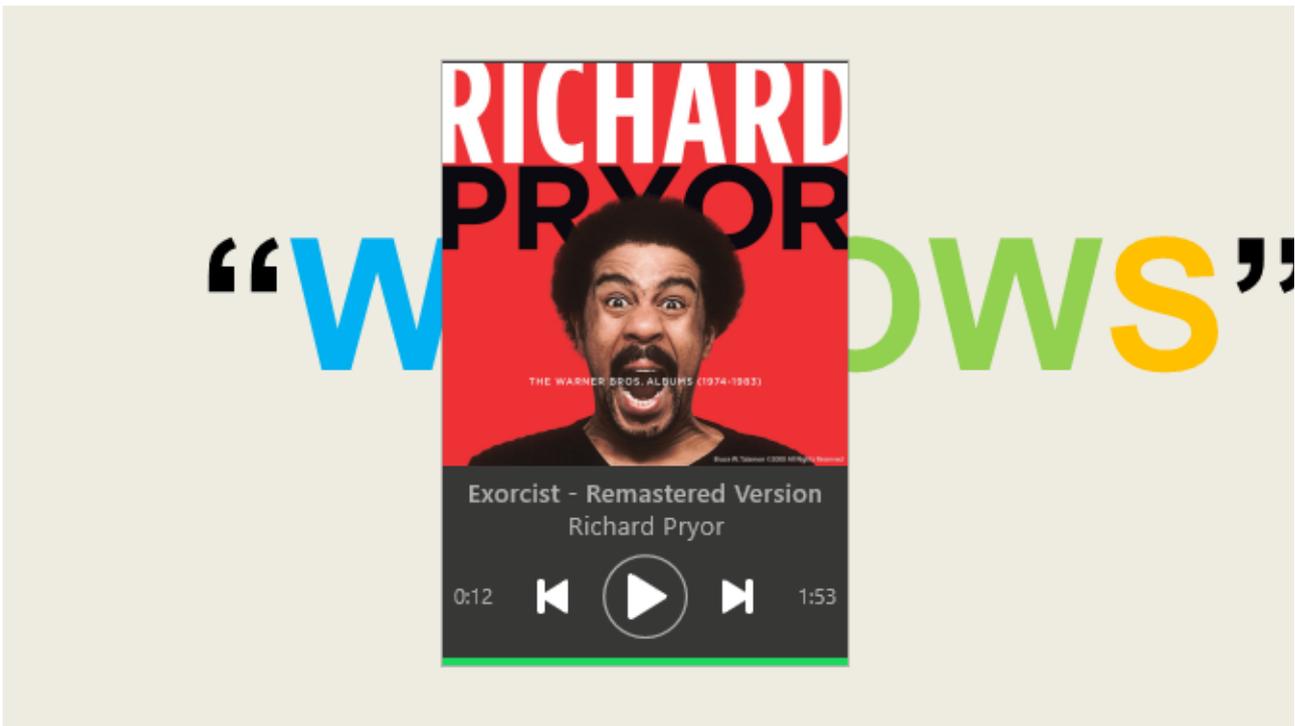


That's it! You just edited a Rainmeter skin.

### 3.5 How Can I Connect Rainmeter to Other Applications?

Some Rainmeter skins require other programs to control functionality. When this is the case, you'll need to download and install some sort of Rainmeter plugin. For example, the highly popular [Win10Widgets](#) suite requires a Spotify plugin so you can control the program via a Rainmeter widget.

The following link will lead to a [Reddit post](#) wherein you can download the plugin we need, aptly called SpotifyPlugin, automatically.



That's it! You just connected Rainmeter to an application.

### 3.6 I Want to Get More In-Depth.

If you'd like to go wandering through Rainmeter yourself, you'll find plenty of useful documentation on [Rainmeter's official website](#).

 **Rainmeter**  
desktop customization tool

[Home](#)   [Documentation](#)   [Discover](#)   [Community](#)

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## Rainmeter Documentation

### 4.1 Manual

Reference and tutorial material for the current final version of Rainmeter.

### 4.2 Beta Manual

Reference and tutorial material for the next version of Rainmeter in development.

### Tips & Tricks

Suggested methods and solutions for using Rainmeter in the field.

### Snippets

Useful code fragments for running Lua scripts in Rainmeter.

## Info

### Help

Help is available on [the forum](#). Members of the development team and the Rainmeter community offer support and advice on a volunteer basis.

For shorter questions, join the discussion in our IRC chat room. Click [here](#) to chat in your browser, or use your own IRC client to connect to `#rainmeter` at `irc.freenode.net`.

### Contact

For press inquiries or technical problems with the site or forums, email the development team at [team@rainmeter.net](mailto:team@rainmeter.net). Please do not send Rainmeter or skin support requests to this address; use the forum or chat room instead. Support requests sent to this address will not be answered.



There are pages upon pages of official documentation dedicated to explaining Rainmeter parameters and tricks.

You can be the Rainmeter developer all other users look to for favorite skins, so feel free to read up as much as you'd like on Rainmeter. There's no limit to what you can do using this free piece of software. **3D desktop hologram** anyone?

## 4. More Apps

There are plenty of apps online which allow users to customize their desktops. We've selected the very top of the batch and here they are!

### 4.1 How to Customize Your Favorite Media Player

The great thing about Rainmeter is it allows you to control **most music and media controls** on your PC. That makes it a great media skin program, along with being a great desktop widget software.

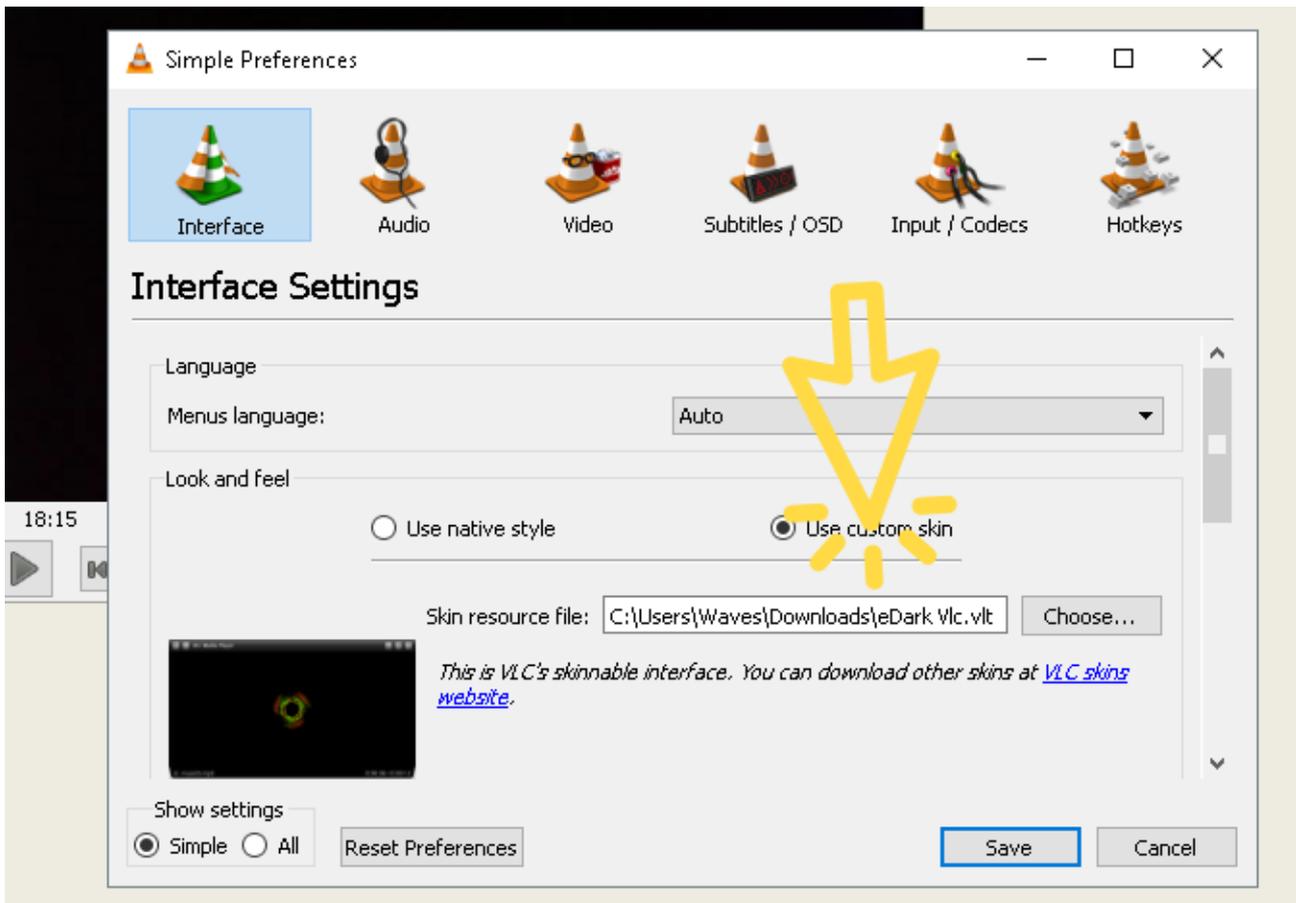
That said, there are a few widely used media players you can re-skin directly within the program as well.

#### 4.1.1 VLC Media Player

Did you know you can re-skin the highly popular VLC application? A personal favorite of mine, and one of the best Windows programs ever, VLC allows users to install custom skins for VLC. It even hosts skins on its **official website**.

Download a skin and keep it in a place you'll remember. Your file should be in the VLT format.

To install, open VLC. Then, head to **Tools > Preferences**. In the following window, click on the **Use custom skin** radio button. Next, click the **Choose** option and select the location of your VLT file.



Finally, select **Save** and exit VLC. Open VLC again and it should open with your theme installed. Here's VLC before.



Here's VLC after.



It's that simple.

## 4.2 What Is RocketDock?

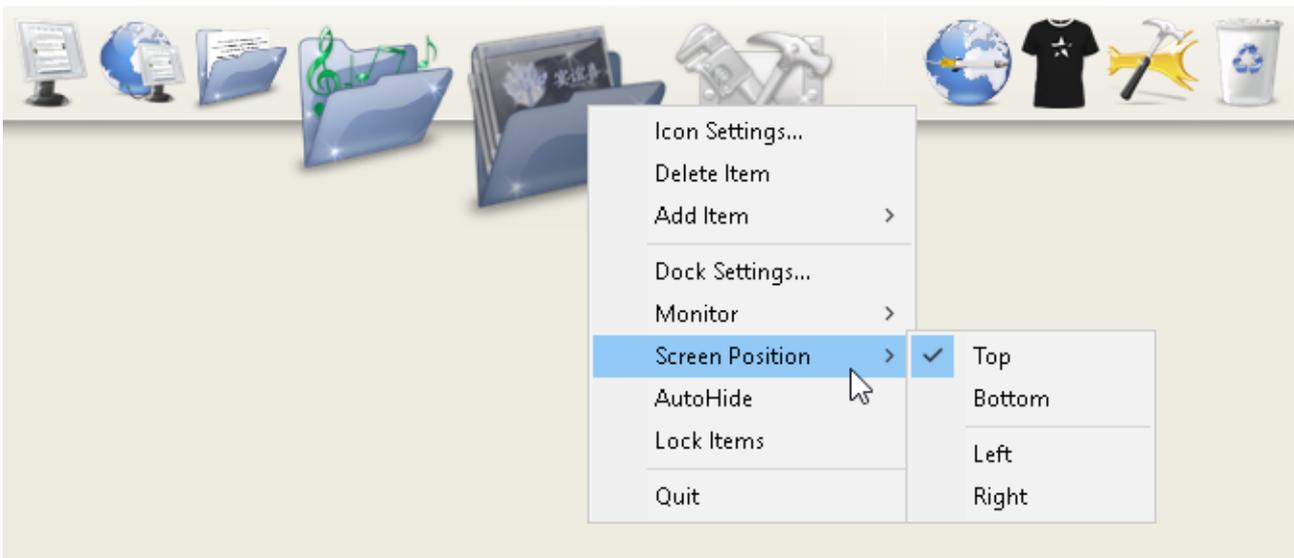
RocketDock is a **tiny docking application** that presents and launches programs from a dock. Everything about the dock, from the size to the icons, is customizable. All in all, it's the single best docking software available online.

### 4.2.1 Getting Started With RocketDock

You can download and install RocketDock from the official website. Install as you would any other program. Once installed, click on your Start Menu and type in **rocketdock**. Select the **RocketDock** option. Your default dock should now pop up.



RocketDock hosts plenty of features and options for users immediately after installation. Simply **right-click** your RocketDock to view your options.

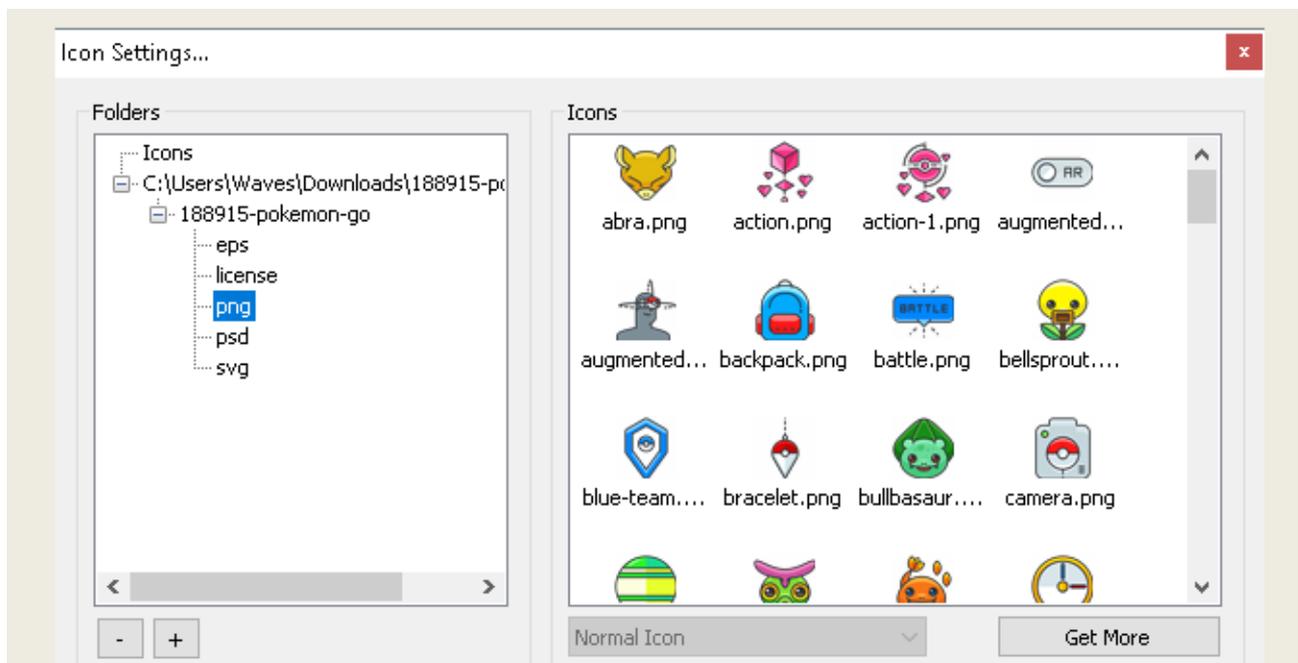


If you want to take remove icons from your dock, **click** and drag the icon out of your dock. To add icons into your dock, **drag the program shortcut** into the dock like you would the desktop.

#### 4.2.2 RocketDock Theme & Icon Changes

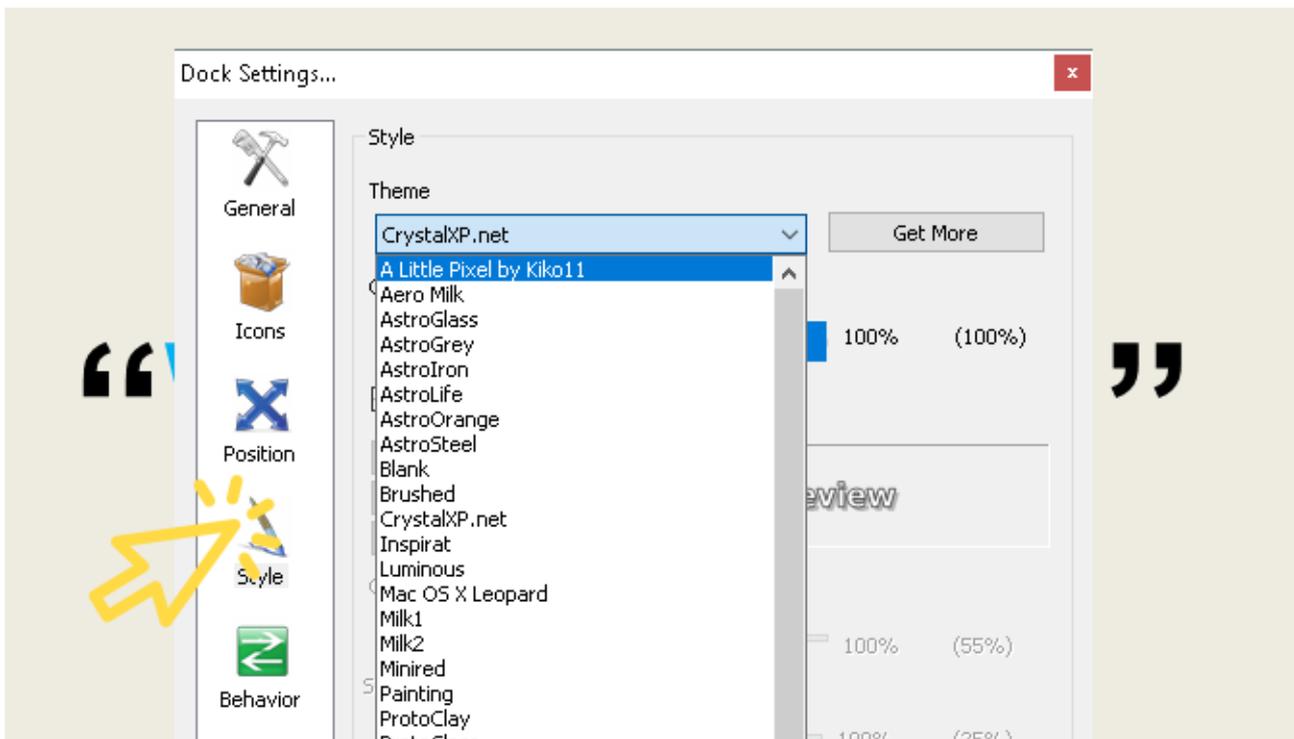
Another great aspect of RocketDock is the possible customization options. **Right-click** your dock and select **Icon Settings**. From this window, you can install various icons installed on your PC. If you're **looking for icons**, we've got you covered. It suffices to say if you want to download free icons, head over to **Flaticon** and search for your favorites.

Download the icon or icon pack, and unzip if necessary. Then, click on the **+** sign on the left-hand side of the window and locate your icon folder. From here, **click** on the dropdown buttons until you find your **icon images**. They'll appear on the right-hand side of the window.

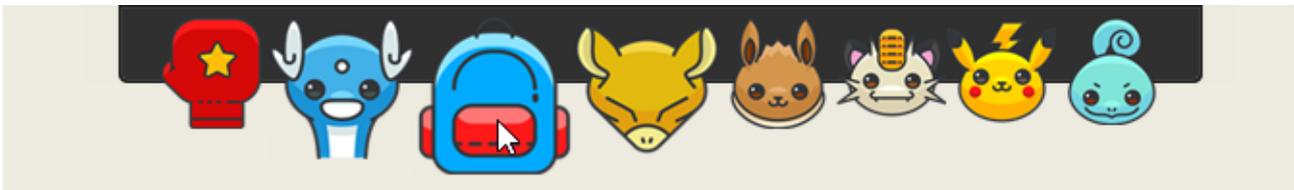


Select whatever icon you wish and click **OK**. Repeat this with every icon.

Furthermore, you can customize the dock itself. **Right-click** your dock and select **Dock Settings**. Select the **Style** option and click on the dropdown menu below Theme. Select an option from this menu, and your dock should change immediately.



To install third-party custom themes, head to the [following link](#) and download a theme for RocketDock. Unzip the file, and then copy and paste the unzipped folder in **C:\Program Files (x86)\RocketDock\Skins** (or whatever disk drive letter you've installed RocketDock on). **Restart** RocketDock and head to your **Theme** settings to change your dock's theme to the newly downloaded one.



Just like that, you have a completely custom RocketDock with a custom theme and custom icons! For reference, I used [Pokemon Go](#) for the icon set and [A Little Pixel](#) as the theme.

### 4.2.3 RocketDock Alternatives

If you don't wish to use RocketDock for whatever reason, there is a paid alternative called [ObjectDock](#). It has the same abilities as RocketDock, though it is a bit newer and is also customizable. MakeUseOf goes into the settings and [advanced settings of ObjectDock](#).

### 4.3 Fences

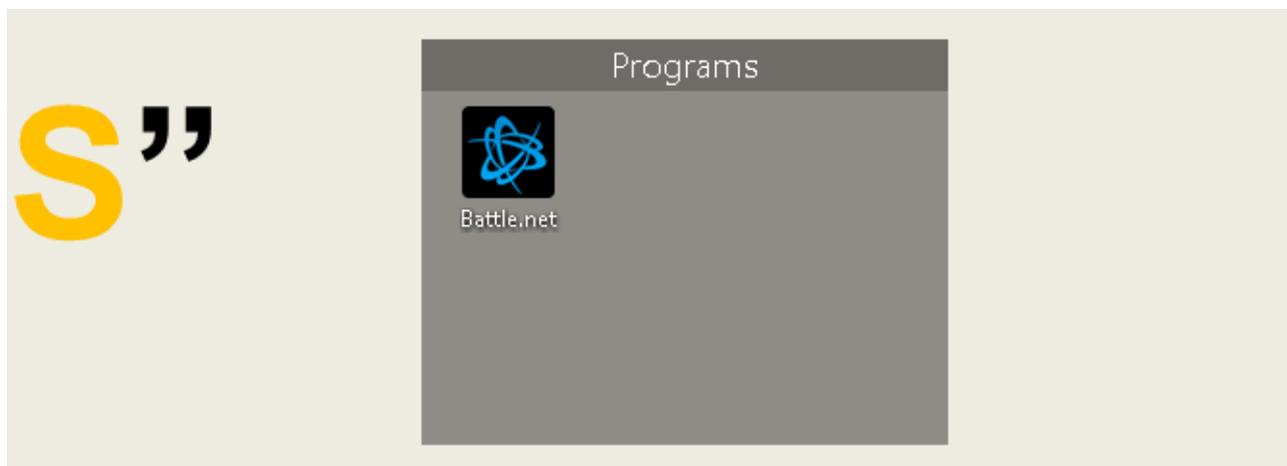
Fences, a program created by [Stardock](#), is an application that allows you to [create small fences on the desktop](#), which can help you sort the clutter on your desktop. Try it out using the 30-day trial, if you're curious.

Download and install the program. It will require that you enter your email and activate the trial via email link.

### 4.3.1 Getting Started

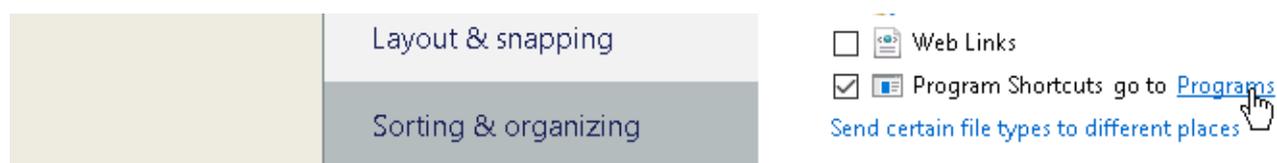
Once you've downloaded Fences, it's surprising how intuitive the program is. For one, your desktop programs should organize immediately.

To create a fence, **left-click** your desktop and drag. An option will open which reads **Create Fence here**. Name the fence whatever you'd like – I named mine **Programs** for my program files. Drag and drop a program into this fence, and you will now be able to access this program via your fence.



That's the basics of it, but that's not all you can do. You can also enact rules in Fences, which not only automatically organizes your files but downloads particular files into your fence automatically.

To do so, **right-click** your desktop and select **Configure Fences**. Click on the **Sorting & organizing** option to open the **Type-based rules** selection. Since I'm making a programs-based fence, I'll check the **Program Shortcuts** option. A small additional option will open asking that you **choose a Fence** for your files. Click on the link and select an option, in my case the **Programs** fence.



Scroll down and click on the **Apply rules now** link.



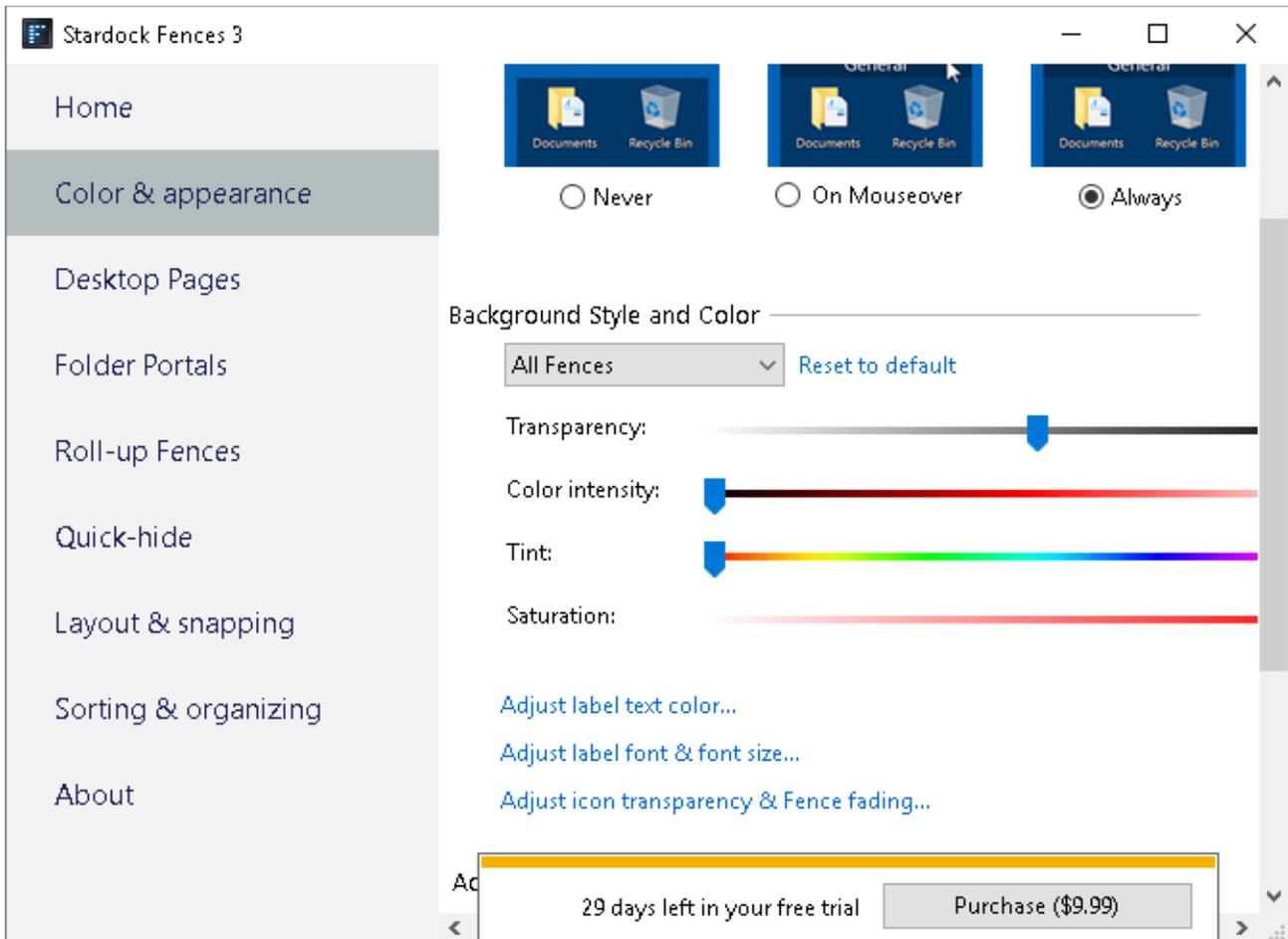
Voilà! All of your program shortcuts should now have automatically merged into your Program fence. You can also check the **Keep rules applied at all times** option to send program shortcuts to this fence every time you've downloaded one onto your desktop.



### 4.3.2 More Customization

As with most programs presented in this list, you can customize the look of Fences very easily. **Right-click** your desktop and select **Configure Fences**. Then, select **Color & appearances**. Under **Background Style** and Color, **click** on the drop-down menu and select a particular Fence (or keep the option at All Fences).

Using the color sliders, adjust the color and saturation of your fences. Your changes should take effect automatically.



So, here's an example of what my desktop looked like before.



Here's my desktop after organizing files with Fences and adjusting their color.



Not only are my icons organized, the Fences aesthetic can't be any more satisfying.

## 5. Best-Of: Instant Customization

### 5.1 Best-Of List

While you may want to go for a system that really fits you, I understand that sometimes you just want it to look a bit better than the default themes and skins that Windows 10 has to offer. Here is a list of tools you'll want to use if you want a custom-to-order desktop. They're reliable, largely free, and will create fantastic results.

1. **UltraUXThemePatcher**: Without this, you'd be hard-pressed to find a custom theme for Windows 10 that actually works.
2. **Rainmeter**: This is the widget king. The extent to which you can modify this is astounding, and there is no end to the tutorials and **guides that can help you make Rainmeter fit**.
3. **Fences**: Fences is beyond helpful in organizing clutter and making your desktop a bit more pretty. You can change the colors of the fences how you wish, label them, and drop in all the files that we know are cluttering your desktop. Section 5.2 can tell you how to use it.
4. **VLC Player**: There's always going to be a debate on what's the best media player, and for here I've decided that VLC will take the pedestal. Along with the **vast customization options**, it offers a wealth of other abilities, from playing some videos to actually **streaming YouTube videos and playlists** within the VLC application.
5. **F.lux**: It's very unhealthy to stare at a screen at night. The blues in the light simulate sunlight, and it means that getting to sleep can be a lot harder. Flux solves this problem, by **reducing the blue hues as day turns to night**. It takes a while to get used to it, but you'll sleep better, and it reduces strain on the eyes.
6. **Classic Shell**: Many who switched to Windows 8 instantly disliked it for a lot of reasons, but especially the death of the start menu. This problem is (partially) solved with the 8.1 update, but this application should let you get back that beloved windows button – and its menu.

With these pieces of software, you'll be able to turn Windows 10 (and most other modern Windows versions) into a personalized command console.

## 6. Wrapping Up

### 6.1 Making It All Come Together

Your desktop is just that – *your* desktop. You can turn it into anything. Change colors, change icons, change themes – within only a few minutes, you can create a desktop environment that will have friends and coworkers giving your screen a second look.



For example, the desktop presented above only requires a GIF and a few Rainmeter skins to create. Just like that, you have a desktop with a distinct color palette and looping movement using free software and a little know-how.

Keep in mind that your desktop will only be as good as the time you put into it. While a proper, beautiful desktop may take minutes to set up, it may take hours of skin scavenging and option changing to configure your desktop exactly.

## 6.2 Best Practices

There are a few things I absolutely have to mention before you go crazy customizing every aspect of your Windows 10 UI.

Always **create a system restore point** before editing your desktop and UI. **Always**. Whether you've been customizing Windows since XP, or just started, you can still run into problems at every step. In fact, developers will often make this fact as clear as possible.

Additionally, **less is more** when it comes to Windows customization. Most seek to stack as much functionality as humanly possible into their desktop, only to see it once a day. That is, before shutdown. Even if you only install Fences onto your desktop, you've shed the load of a cluttered desktop. Stick with one or two desktop customization programs at a time.

**Do you have any other customization options for Windows 10 you'd like us to go over? Feel free to let us know in [the comments section](#)!**

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