The new lock screen

When you start up Windows 8 or wake it from sleep, you'll get your first inkling of the changes the new OS brings. The new lock screen sports a big graphic image and displays changing information such as the date and time, the local weather and the number of new emails you have.

The Start screen

The Start screen is the new face of Windows. It's made up of a grid of colorful tiles, one for each app. Click a tile to run its app. You'll see tiles for a slew of new, lightweight apps built into Windows 8 as well as traditional applications like Microsoft Word. Even the Windows Desktop is accessed via a tile.

Some apps grab real-time information (such as upcoming events in your calendar) and display it as notifications on their tiles.

The new Charms bar on the right gives you quick access to search, system settings and more, and you'll use the scroll bar at the bottom to reach tiles that are located off the right edge of the screen.

The Desktop

No longer front and center, the Desktop is reached by clicking the Desktop tile on the Start screen. When you get there, you'll see a visually simpler, flatter interface than in Windows 7. And one major navigational feature, the Start button, has been removed.

Otherwise, it behaves pretty much like the Windows 7 Desktop, with icons for launching your traditional Desktop applications and a taskbar that shows currently running apps. Note, however, that you can't run the new Windows 8 apps from the Desktop.

The Desktop's power tools menu

The lack of a Start button makes the Desktop annoying to use, but it does offer one useful trick: Right-click in the lower-left portion of the screen, and a menu pops up that gives you access to the Control Panel, File Explorer, the Task Manager, the command prompt and a variety of other administrative tools. (You can also bring up this menu from the Start screen using the same method.)
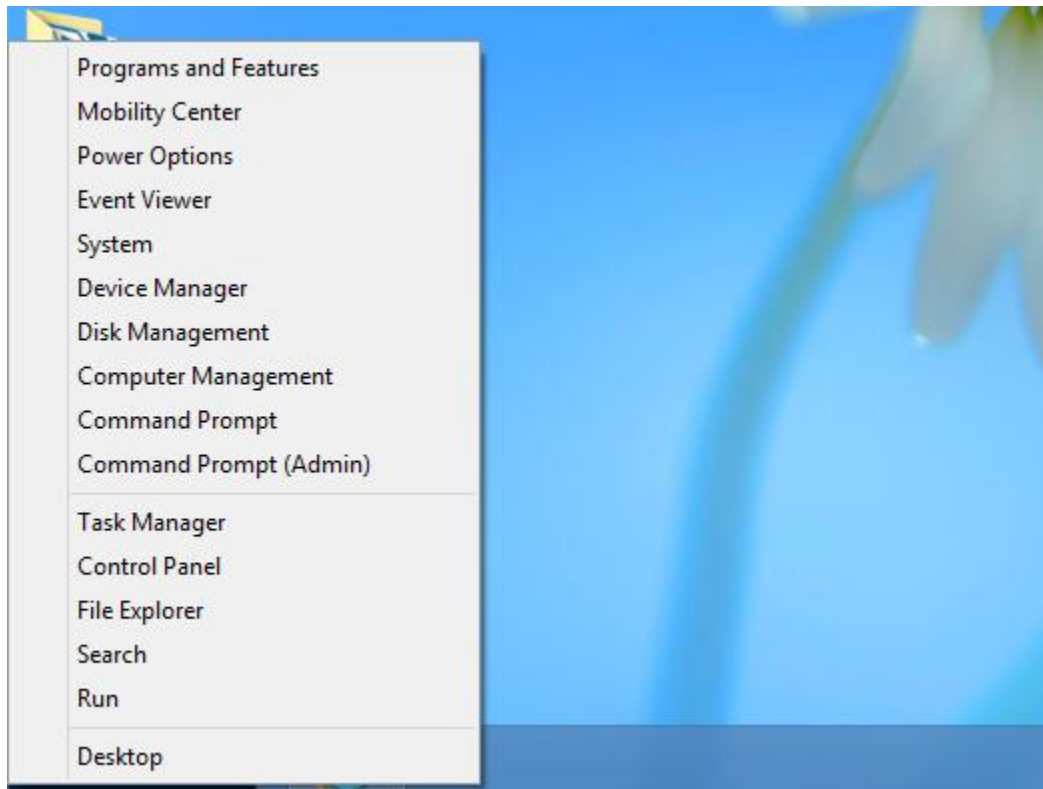
The Charms bar

You can get to the Charms bar no matter where you are in Windows 8: Press the Windows key + C on your keyboard, or swipe from the right edge of the screen toward the center on a touch-screen device. The Charms bar appears with five charms on a black background: Search, Share, Start, Devices and Settings.

The Start charm in the center of the bar acts as a toggle: Click it to go to the Start screen or, if you're already on the Start screen, to go to your previous location. We'll explore the other charms in upcoming slides.

The Search charm

Here's where you search for apps, files and settings. Just click the appropriate item in the pane on the right and type the first few letters of your search term; the results will appear on the left side of the screen. You can also search inside any app (such as searching for emails in Mail) by selecting it in the right pane and typing a few letters.

To start a search from the Start screen, you don't have to manually launch the Search charm. Just start typing, and the Search charm appears with your text in the search box.
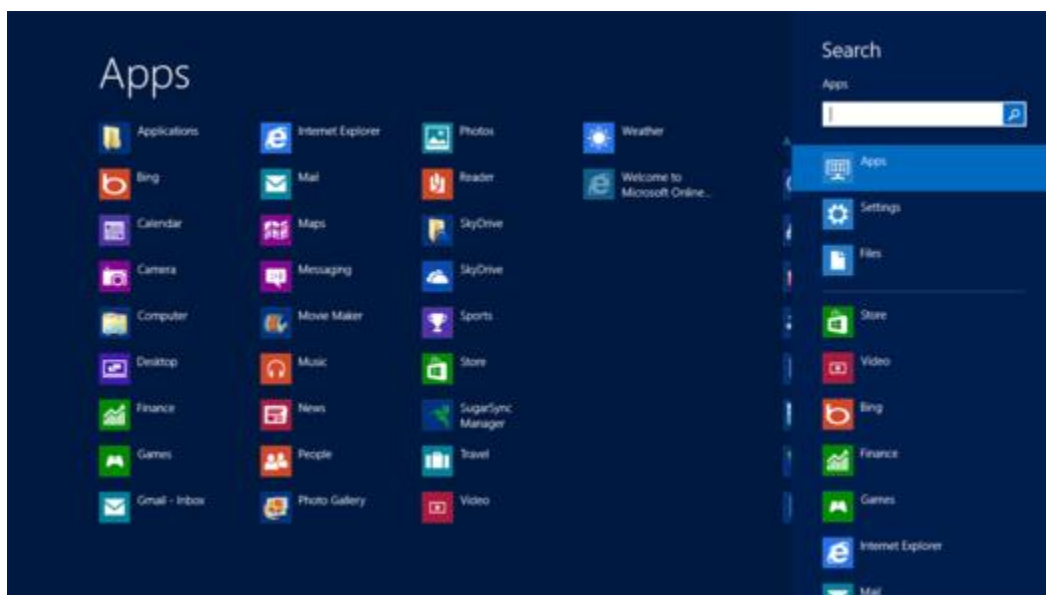
The Share charm

Some of the new Windows 8 apps include a built-in Share feature that lets you share information from the app via email, social media, SkyDrive or messaging. For example, the Photo app can share via Mail and SkyDrive, and the Music app lets you share via Mail and the People app.

At this point, not many apps support the Share feature, and of those that do share, not all can share in all ways -- it's up to the app developer to decide.

The Devices charm

This charm is context-sensitive, so what appears when you click it depends on what you're doing at the time and what kind of devices you've connected to your Windows 8 computer or tablet.

Generally, you use the Devices charm to print from a Windows 8 app and to manage your printers and other connected devices. For instance, if you've got two or more displays connected to your device, Devices lets you control how the screens work.

The Settings charm

This charm gives you access to a wide variety of application-specific and system-wide settings. The top part is context sensitive, showing settings related to what you're currently doing in Windows 8. From the Start screen, for instance, you can change settings related to tiles, such as whether to show tiles for administrative tools.

The bottom part of the Settings charm is the same no matter where you are; it lets you change global Windows 8 settings for your network, sounds, screen, notifications, power and keyboard. Click the "Change PC settings" link at the bottom of the screen to get to the new "PC settings" screen, which we'll look at next.

The "PC settings" screen

This screen lets you customize how the most important features of Windows 8 work, including app notifications, search preferences, privacy options and more. The settings are all straightforward and self-explanatory. Just click the one you want to change and get to work.

Go to the Personalize section, for example, to change your account picture and the background images for your lock screen and Start screen, and choose which Windows 8 apps should deliver information to the lock screen.
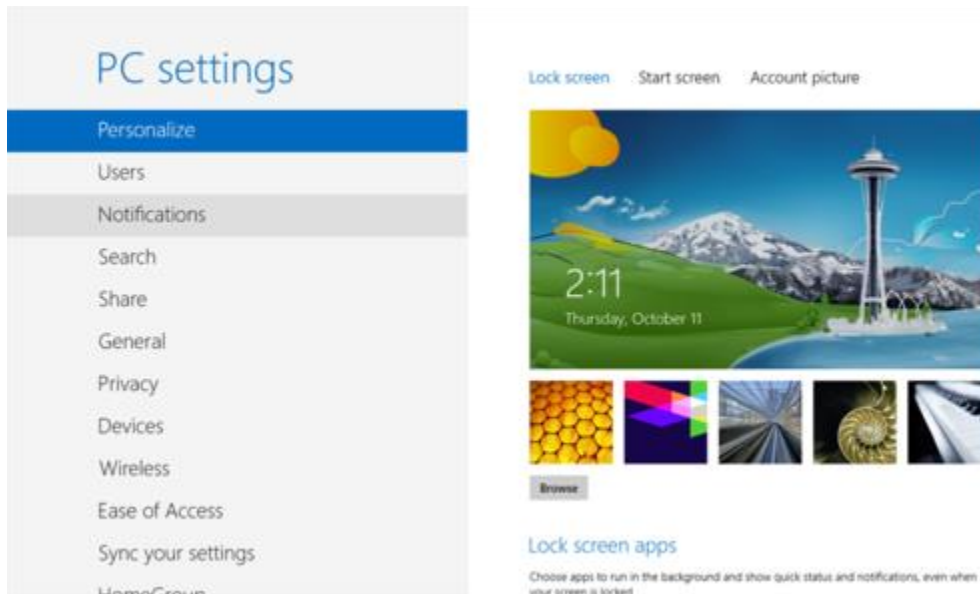
The "Sync your settings" screen

One noteworthy section in the PC settings screen is "Sync your settings." If you have multiple Windows 8 devices, this feature lets you sync some of your settings among them.

You can sync your lock screen; account picture; Desktop personalizations; passwords for apps, websites and networks; app, browser and mouse settings; and so on. Simply turn on or off which items you want to sync or not sync.
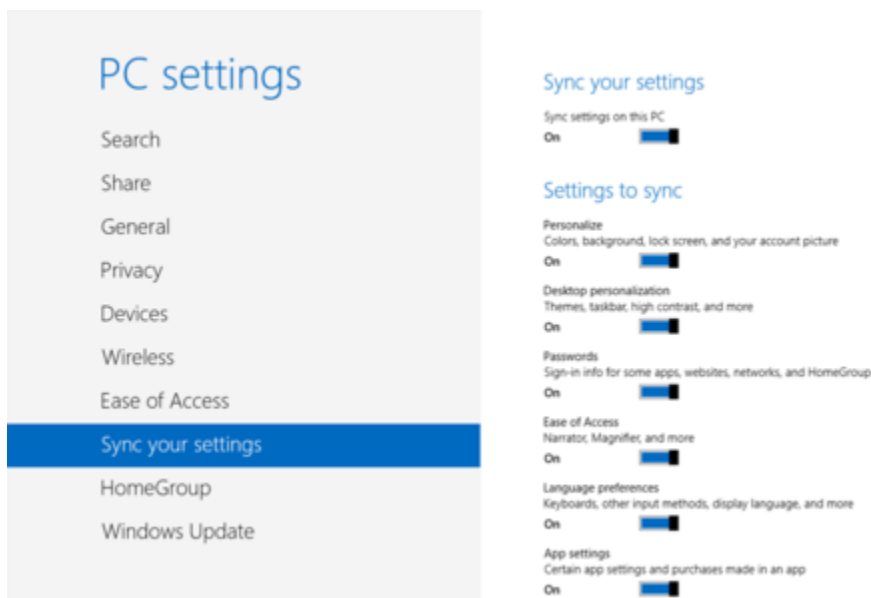
Alt-Tab navigation

Windows 8 has a number of system-wide navigational features that are available wherever you are -- on the Start screen, the Desktop, inside a new Windows 8 app or in a traditional Desktop app. The Charms bar is one of them, and the old Windows standby Alt-Tab is another.

Press the Alt and Tab keys on your keyboard simultaneously, and a strip of thumbnails of your running programs appears. While holding down the Alt key, keep pressing the Tab key until you come to the thumbnail of the program you want to run. Release the keys, and you'll switch to that program.
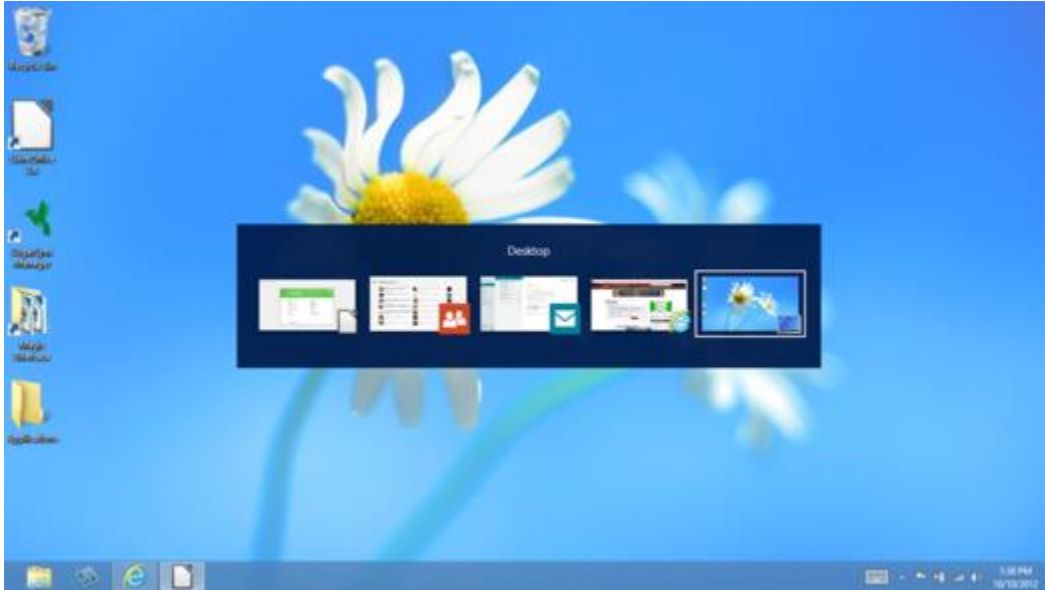
Thumbnails of running apps

Another way to switch among your running apps is to move your mouse pointer to the hot corner in the upper-left portion of the screen. When you see a thumbnail of your previous location, move the mouse pointer down. A black bar appears on the left showing thumbnails of your running apps. Click any to switch to it.

Note, however, that even if you've got multiple Desktop apps running, this bar displays only one Desktop-related thumbnail at a time -- the last app that was opened full screen or the Desktop itself.

You can also use the lower-left hot corner to toggle between the Start screen and the place you last were before going there.

The App bar in Windows 8 apps

A hallmark of the new apps that ship with Windows 8 -- including Mail, People, Weather, Music, Bing, Photos, Maps and others -- is that they're designed to run in full-screen mode, and they don't display menus or toolbars. But if you right-click anywhere in the app, an App bar appears at either the top or the bottom of the screen, or both.

The options available in the App bar vary according to the app you're running and what you're currently doing in that app. In the Weather app, for instance, the App bar lets you refresh the page, change between Fahrenheit and Celsius, navigate to other places you've chosen to display weather, and so on.
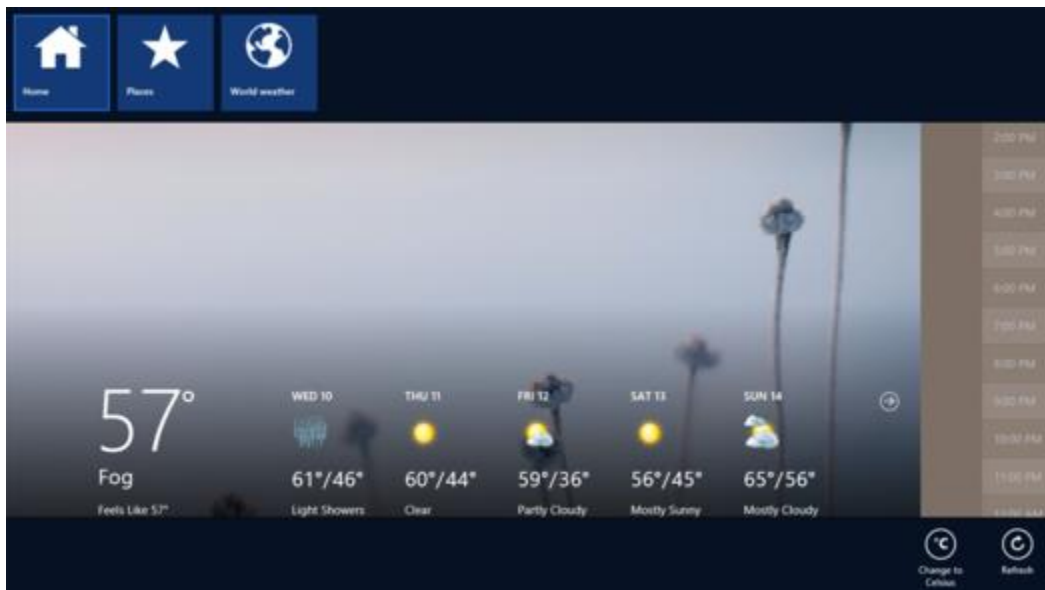
IE10: Launching a new tab

To launch a new tab in the Windows 8 version of IE10, click the **+** button at the far right of the upper App bar. A blank page appears with an empty address bar at the bottom, a list of sites you've visited frequently, and any sites you've pinned to the Start screen. Click a frequently visited site or pinned site to go there, or type an address into the Address bar.

Called Windows Explorer in previous versions of Windows, File Explorer has been redesigned with a Ribbon interface, similiar to the one found in Word 2010 and other current Microsoft Office apps.

The Ribbon is divided into several tabs that provide quick access to various file-management commands. The Home tab lets you copy, paste, move, rename and open files, among other things. The Share tab lets you share files and folders via email, by burning to disc and so on. The View tab lets you customize how you display files and folders in File Explorer. And the File tab on the far left offers features such as quick navigation to frequently visited locations.
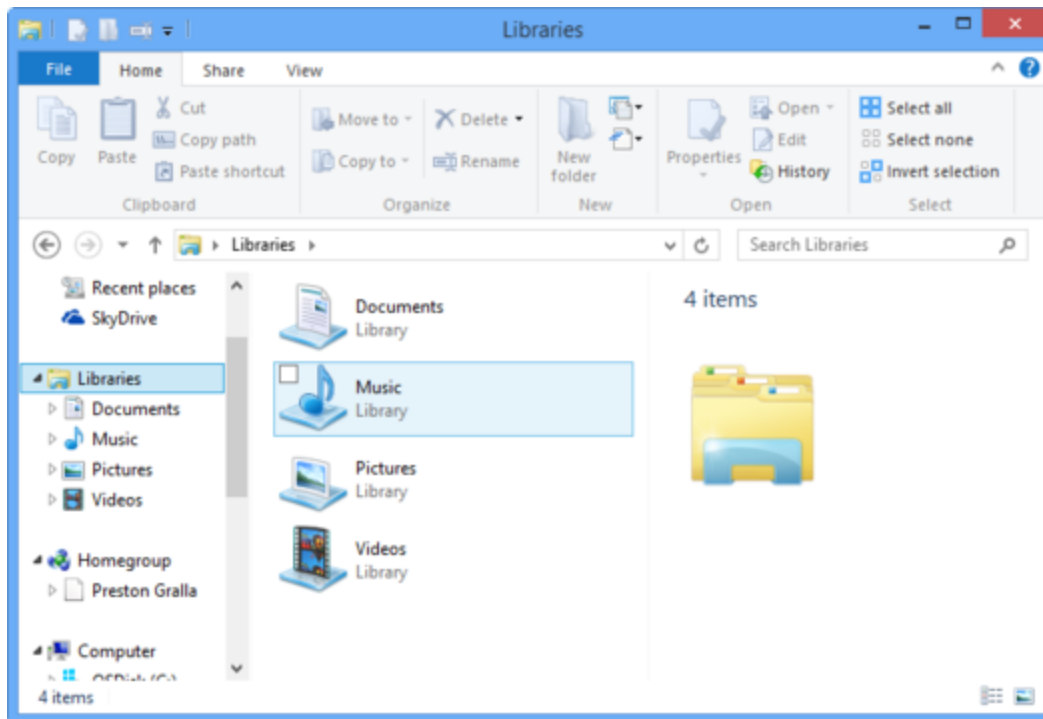
File History

This new feature backs up files stored in your Libraries, Favorites, Contacts, Desktop and other locations you want backed up. It also keeps interim versions of files so that you can retrieve previous versions of a file. You'll need storage media such as a USB drive to back up your files to, or you can back up to local network storage.

To turn on File History, type "Control Panel" at the Start screen, click the Control Panel icon that appears, search for "file history" and click the File History link that appears. Click the "Turn on" button and make any selections necessary, such as which drive you want to back up your data to.
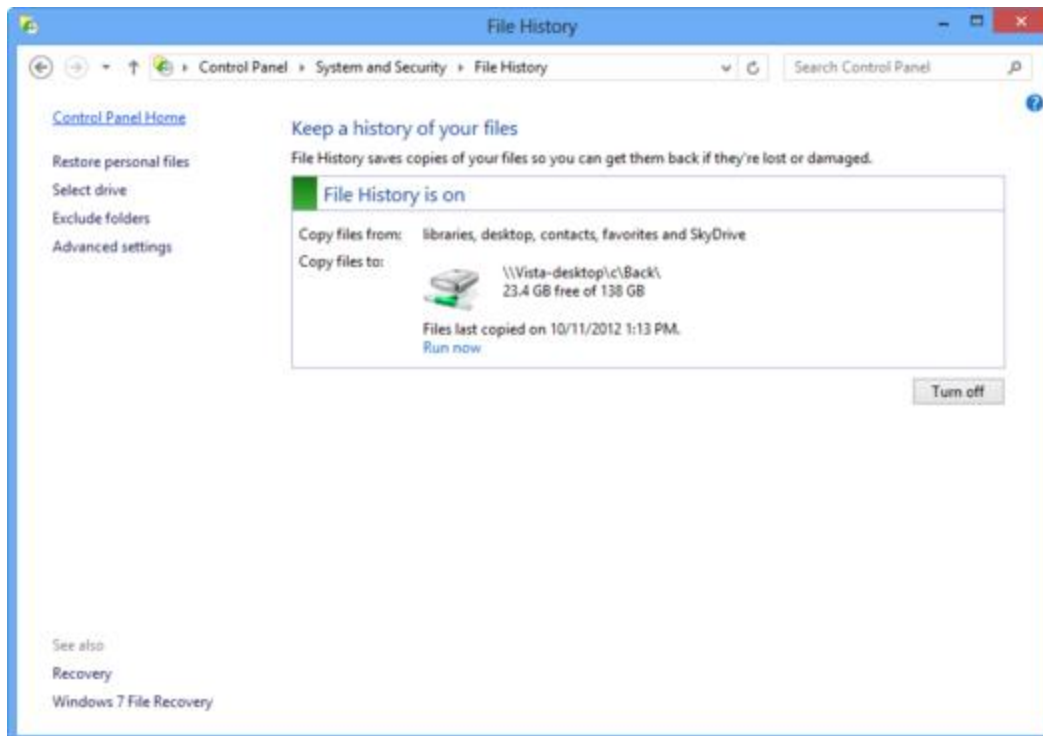
Customizing the Start screen

By default, the tiles on the Start screen seem to be randomly placed into groups, but you can group them however you like. To move a tile to a different group, just drag and drop it. To create a new group, drag a tile away from existing groups until you see a vertical bar, then drop the tile.

To move a group to a different location on the Start screen, mouse over the bottom-right corner of the screen and click the − (minus) icon. All of your groups and tiles will minimize to small thumbnails. Right-click a group, then drag and drop it wherever you want it to be.

Windows 8 Snap

Windows 8 apps normally run full screen, but you can run two of them side by side using a feature that Microsoft calls Snap. With both apps running, mouse over the upper-left hot corne and move your pointer down. Click and hold the thumbnail of the app you want to run beside the current one, drag the thumbnail to the right and drop it.

The two apps will now be running side by side, with the one you just dragged appearing in a sidebar on the left. To resize the two app panes, drag the border with three dots on it to the left or right.

DIE HARD Users:

Windows 8 Start: Taskbar pinning

The legacy Start menu is gone for keeps. In its place is the full-page Metro-powered Start screen. Because the new Start menu takes up the whole screen, it's bound to be jarring. One way to get around this is to move the Start screen to a secondary monitor; another way is to use the taskbar that much more. Apps can be pinned to the taskbar and accessed with a single click, just as in Windows 7. Right-click on legacy Windows items on the Metro Start screen to pin them to the taskbar as a way to avoid having to traverse the Start screen to launch them. The taskbar should have enough space on most systems for several commonly used applications.

Windows 8 Start: Type-to-search

It may look like it has vanished, but type-to-search remains another useful way to avoid getting hung up on the Windows 8 Start screen. Type-to-search behaves roughly the same way as it does in Windows Vista and Windows 7: Begin typing, and you see results. (You do need a physical keyboard, so this technique won't work on a tablet with just an onscreen keyboard. Instead, open the Search charm by swiping from the right edge of the screen.) Note that the context of the search is determined by the highlighted item directly below the search box

Windows 8 Start: Type-to-search

A major difference with Windows 8 is that results from type-to-search are visible only one category at a time, instead of showing the first three choices from each category, as is the case with Vista and Windows 7. In Windows 8, categories are listed beneath the search box. Just use the arrow keys or mouse to navigate between categories to reveal relevant results. Triggering a search from within a Metro app by pressing Win-Q will automatically have the current app used as the context for the search.

Windows 8 Start: Third-party options

Another way to keep from getting hung up on the new Start screen is to use a third-party program to re-create the behavior of the legacy Start menu. Stardock, makers of a number of desktop-enhancement utilities for Windows, has released Start8, an application that moves the Start menu back onto the legacy desktop and makes it behave more like the old Start menu. It even re-creates the original Start button on the taskbar. And now that Stardock has succeeded in working around Microsoft's latest attempt to block Start menu alternatives, expect other options to arise soon.

Windows 8 Start: PortableApps

To circumvent the Windows 8 Start screen, you can always go with the likes of PortableApps to access popular apps from a menu on the legacy desktop. PortableApps offers a curated collection of free and open-source apps that run in a self-contained way, without touching the Registry or other system settings. It might prove a useful way to organize and update many apps you might already work with, such as Skype, Chrome and Firefox.

Knowing when to go Metro

You're best off not trying to replace existing desktop apps with Metro apps, except for ones primarily designed for consumption. Don't expect every single app to turn up in a Metro incarnation -- at least not until Windows users are comfortable enough with Metro to attempt working with more sophisticated apps. One example of a good replacement app would be the Metro Kindle app. It's slightly easier to deal with via a touchscreen device than the legacy/desktop Kindle app, and its power consumption optimization will stand you in better stead if you're taking your Windows 8 machine with you.

Managing windows in Metro mode

Metro is only meant to run one app at a time, which stands in stark contrast to most users' typical way of working on Windows, with multiple windows open side by side or on top of each other. To ameliorate this shortcoming, you can

"snap" a Metro app to run in the margins of the screen, while another Metro app -- or the legacy desktop -- runs in the remaining space. The screenshot at left shows the Metro Weather app snapped to the right side of the display and running side by side with the legacy desktop. The draggable bar lets you reposition the snap to the other side of the screen or close it entirely.

Snapping the desktop into a sidebar

The desktop can also be snapped into a sidebar with Metro apps, as shown at left.

Snapping limitations

Snapping apps isn't a cure-all for the one-app-at-a-time restriction. For one, snapping only works if your display resolution is higher than 1,366 by 768; it simply doesn't work with anything smaller. Also, not all apps run properly when snapped into a narrow amount of screen space. For instance, when snapped, the Metro app store only shows the store icon against a green background, not the store itself.

What the new-look Aero gives back

Much has been made about the scaling back of Aero, both for aesthetics and power consumption on portable devices. The Aero subsystem, which was introduced with Windows Vista, hasn't been completely removed; the underlying window-compositing functionality remains. But some of the fancier effects, like rounded corners and blurred glass effects, are dialed down or absent completely. The Release Preview of Windows 8 offered an Enable Transparency option in the Personalization control panel's Window Color and Appearance pane, but it has been removed in the final RTM code. Turning off transparency reduces battery consumption, offers visual consistency between the classic desktop and Metro, and translates to fewer UI elements to keep track of and render properly, making your system that much more responsive

Browsing the Web on Windows 8

Windows 8 ships with Internet Explorer 10, albeit in two editions: desktop and Metro. The differences are more than cosmetic; they're incarnations of Microsoft's philosophy of how Web browsers should behave in Windows from now on. When the first test releases of Windows 8 became public, the Metro version of IE 10 (the default version bundled with Win8) didn't support Flash. Microsoft has backtracked slightly by using a workaround familiar to users of Chrome. Flash's functionality is now baked directly into Metro IE, rather than included as an add-on. Windows 8 users who work with IE can stick with the desktop version for the full gamut of functionality, but can still load a page in the Metro version without worrying about losing Flash.

Browsing the Web on Windows 8

Things get sticky if you want to use a browser other than IE in Metro. Microsoft has restrictions about Metro apps that perform Web browsing. By default, those apps are encouraged to use the IE engine to keep performance and security consistent. An app that is primarily a legacy-desktop app can implement a Metro "facet" for that app, as long as the app in question is installed as the system default browser. Google Chrome supports this behavior, although the Metro edition of Chrome is little more than the desktop version running full-screen. Expect future editions of Chrome to have closer Metro integration. Firefox users will have to wait, as Mozilla is planning a full Metro-themed UX overhaul. Opera is rumored to be doing something similar.

Stripped-down Task Manager

Don't panic if you fire up Task Manager and see what looks like a nearly empty window. By default the program just lists what apps (desktop and Metro) are open and running, and lets you perform the most basic operations on them: switch between them, kill them, bring them to the fore and so on. Click More Details at the bottom of the window if you want to see the more full-blown version of Task Manager we all know.

Task Manager: An eye on consumption

Another Task Manager change, more potentially useful, is that the App History tab in the expanded view of Task Manager lists Network and Metered network columns. If your Windows 8 device has both conventional broadband

and cellular connectivity, those two columns let you see at a glance which types of network media are being consumed. This comes in handy if you have a Windows 8 device with a data plan and want to keep an eye on it.

Windows 8 keyboard shortcuts

Key combination	What it does
Windows key shortcuts	
Windows key	Go to the Start screen or toggle between the Start screen and your previous location
Windows-C	Open the Charms bar
Windows-D	Show the Desktop
Windows-E	Open File Explorer
Windows-F	Go to Files in the Search charm
Windows-H	Go to the Share charm
Windows-I	Go to the Settings charm
Windows-K	Go to the Devices charm
Windows-L	Lock the device
Windows-M	Minimize all windows (only on the Desktop)
Windows-O	Lock the screen orientation
Windows-Q	Go to Apps in the Search charm
Windows-R	Launch the Run box
Windows-T	Put the focus on the taskbar and cycle through your running Desktop apps
Windows-V	Cycle through your notifications
Windows-W	Go to Settings in the Search charm
Windows-X	Open a menu of tools for power users
Windows-Z	Launch the App bar (or make it disappear if it's already showing)
Windows-1 through 9	Go to the app in the corresponding position on the taskbar (Desktop only)
Windows-, (comma)	[Peek at the Desktop](#) (on Desktop only)
Windows-spacebar	Switch the input language and keyboard layout
Windows-Home	Minimize non-active Desktop apps
Windows-Page Up	Move Start screen to left monitor
Windows-Page Down	Move Start screen to right monitor
Windows-up arrow	Maximize a Desktop app
Windows-down arrow	Restore/minimize a Desktop app

Key combination	What it does
Windows-F1	Run Windows Help and Support
Other keyboard shortcuts	
Alt-Tab	Cycle through thumbnails of open apps
Alt-F4	Close a Windows 8 Store app
Ctrl-A	Select all
Ctrl-C	Copy
Ctrl-E	Select the Search box in the Windows 8 Internet Explorer app; select the Address bar in Desktop version of IE
Ctrl-N	Open a new window in Internet Explorer (Desktop version only)
Ctrl-R	Refresh
Ctrl-V	Paste
Ctrl-X	Cut
Ctrl-Y	Redo
Ctrl-Z	Undo
Ctrl-F4	Close the active document in Desktop apps
Ctrl-mouse click	Select multiple items in File Explorer
Ctrl-Shift	Select a group of contiguous items in File Explorer
Ctrl-W	Close the current window in Internet Explorer (Desktop version)
Ctrl-Shift-Esc	Run the Task Manager
Ctrl-Shift-N	Create a new folder in File Explorer
PrtScrn	Take a screenshot and place it on the Clipboard