Get Up to Speed on Slowdowns

Any Mac can suffer from slowdowns, but they can be easy to fix if you know where to look...

>>>Five Secrets to Keep Your Mac Running Smoothly

1 CLEAR OUT THE CLUTTER

Leaving lots of data lying around will quickly fill up a hard drive, especially if it consists of thousands of large pictures and music files. You can copy your iTunes and iPhoto libraries to external hard drives from the Pictures and Music folders inside your Home directory. When starting either app, hold down Option and select the library's new location.
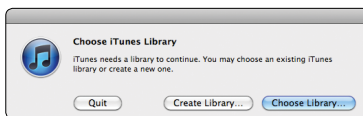
In iTunes and iPhoto, move library folders to external drives.

2 ONLY RUN WHAT YOU NEED

Applications use resources and memory even when they are hidden or in the background. Some, like music or video production apps, use lots of RAM just by being open. It's bad practice to leave lots of apps open if you're not using them, so try to be economical. If you're finished with an app, quit it. This should make your system snappier, and other apps more responsive, especially on older Macs.

3 UPGRADE YOUR OS

Older systems such as Mac OS 10.5 Leopard can be sluggish and if your Mac hasn't been updated, it will feel slow. Most recent Intel Macs can be upgraded as far as Mac OS 10.6, and maybe even to OS X 10.7 or 10.8 if the Mac is newer. A clean install will fix any unexplained problems, but make doubly sure that you have full backups of all your data. If in doubt, do an upgrade rather than a clean install.

4 RESTART PERIODICALLY

OS X is designed to be left running for long periods of time, and will perform maintenance on itself as it runs. Some people rarely restart their Macs, choosing instead to put them in sleep. However, if you find you are having problems with things like peripherals not being recognized or wireless connectivity not working, a restart will very often fix the problem because it forces your Mac to re-load drivers and re-establish connections with external equipment.

5 KEEP AN EYE ON TIME MACHINE

Time Machine is an excellent backup system that can really save your bacon in an emergency. If left on, it will perform backups at hourly intervals. However, this can sometimes interfere with your workflow if you are doing resource-intensive work like video or music creation or gaming. You can choose to back up manually, which is good if you are conscientious about backing up, or use a free app such as TimeMachineScheduler to alter the schedule to something slightly less intensive, like six hours.

Changing Time Machine's schedule can stop it from interfering in disk-intensive work while still backing up.

How to Speed Up, Clean Up, and Revive Your Mac

The weather's turning warmer in our neck of the woods, which means it's time to start thinking about spring cleaning. While you're emptying your closets, decluttering, and getting rid of the bloat in your life, why not do the same for your Mac? Here are some simple, easy to follow tips to give your trusted Mac a little spring cleaning of its own.

Clean It Out

Let's start with the outside of your system. Turn it off, unplug everything, and move it out from where you normally have it set up. Give the area around your Mac, whether it's an iMac on your desk, or a Mac Pro under your desk, a good cleaning—there's probably dust and grime built up around it. Apple has specific guidelines to cleaning your gear, and while each system is a little different, it's always a safe bet to take a microfiber cloth to the surface of your device to wipe away the dust and any smudges or oils that may be lingering on your screen or case. Apple suggests a damp, lint-free cloth to do the job, but even a dry microfiber cloth will get he job done—especially on displays and screens where you absolutely don't want to use harsh chemicals of any kind. *Photo by*

Cheon Fong Liew.

Even though it's not officially recommended by Apple, a little compressed air will go a long way towards getting the dust out of the cracks, crevices, and exhaust vents. If you have a Mac Pro, you can crack the case open and attack the inside with the same cloth and compressed air.

If your case or keyboard are seriously gunky, we highly recommend attacking the filth with a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser, but keep in mind that they —and other melamine sponges—are slightly abrasive, so you may be rubbing away grease and dirt, but if you keep scrubbing you can wear away the top layer of the finish as well.

Tame Your Cable Clutter

Before

you set your Mac back up, go ahead and take some time to tame the cable clutter that may have accumulated under your desk over months of use. Now is a good time to learn how to wrap those cables so they don't take up so much space, or order some velcro cable ties, twist ties, or zip ties to help you keep every-thing coming out of the back of your computer neat and tidy, and maybe even label them with milk jug labels or bread tags. If it's really bad, you can always repurpose a rain gutter, use a flower pot, or find another container to keep the cables and their slack out of sight.
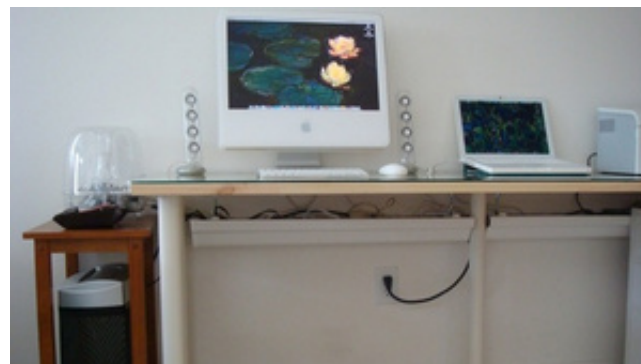
Get Up to Date

If you're setting some time aside to tidy up your Mac for the spring, the first thing you'll

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Software Update

Checking for new software...

Cancel

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want to do is make sure you have all of the latest patches, security updates, and application updates available via Software Update. If you're running a really old version of Mac OS and you've been thinking about upgrading, there's no time like the present to get on board with OS 10.7 "Lion." OS X 10.8 "Mountain Lion" is coming this summer, but you'll probably have to have Lion in order to upgrade, so unless you don't plan on upgrading past Snow Leopard, it's worth considering. Even if you stick to Snow Leopard, or newer verisons of Mac OS aren't supported on your hardware, it's worth using Software Update to make sure your system is as up to date as it can be.

AppCleaner

Applications   Widgets   Others

15 related files were found (64 MB).

		iTunes	61.7 MB
		/Applications/iTunes.app	
		iTunes.wdgt	172.0 KB
		/Library/Widgets/iTunes.wdgt	
		com.apple.iTunes.eq.plist	16.0 KB
		~/Library/Preferences/com.apple.iTunes.eq.plist	
		com.apple.iTunes.plist	108.0 KB
		~/Library/Preferences/com.apple.iTunes.plist	
		com.apple.iTunes.plist.mUC3Mlk	0 KB
		~/Library/Preferences/com.apple.iTunes.plist.mUC3Mlk	

Cancel   Delete

Uninstall Unnecessary Apps

After you've made sure your system is all up to date, it's time to dig into your Applications folder and start uninstalling programs that you know you no longer need. In most cases, uninstalling a Mac app is as simple as dragging the app to the trash, but doing just that can leave orphaned preferences files from those uninstalled apps on your computer. We'd suggest using an

actual uninstaller, like our current favorite, AppCleaner, which is completely free. If you're willing to spend some coin ($13, to be exact), AppZapper has a prettier UI and a few more options, but in the end they both do the same thing. If you use one of these apps to remove those unwanted programs from your system, you can be sure you're getting rid of all of their associated files as well. Finally, head into System Preferences, click on Accounts, and clean out the Login Items tab of any applications that you don't want to run on startup. Sometimes even uninstalled apps leave entries behind, and it's a good idea to tidy up your startup items anyway.

Reclaim Hard Drive Space
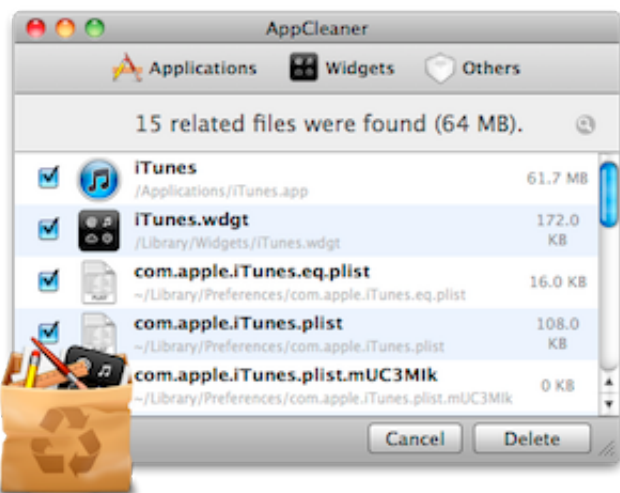
If you've been following along, you've cleaned up your Mac on the outside, your Mac is up to date, and you've uninstalled the programs you no longer use or need on your system. Now it's time to finish cleaning your Mac up on the inside and get back the hard drive space that's probably being wasted by old VirtualBox images, video game screenshots, or other assorted files you didn't know were lurking on your system.

The venerable Disk Inventory X is a great tool that will scan your drives and show you what's eating up all of your space in an easy to understand view, and it's completely free. Alternatively, $10, if you have it to spend, will buy you a copy of Daisy Disk, an app that many of you preferred because it allows you to not just see the contents of your drive in multiple views, but go ahead and delete, compress, and organize your drive quickly—and automatically, without you having to lift a finger. Just make sure you empty your trash when you're through with everything to really get the space back.
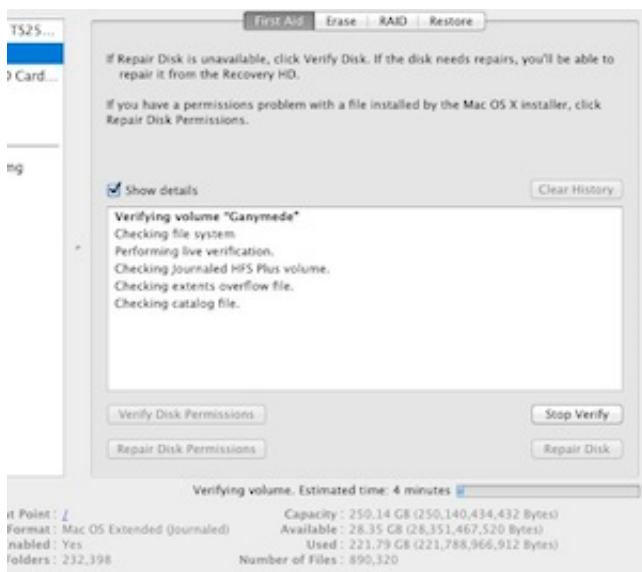
Do Some Maintenance and Optimize Your System

Now that you've cleaned out the mess from your Mac, it's time to give OS X a little TLC. Head into Disk Utility and click "Verify Disk." It shouldn't take too long, and if you see any errors, wait for it to finish and click "Repair Disk." It's always a good idea to verify your disk every few months, just to make sure you're not missing some creeping issue with your hard drive or your OS X installation. You may also notice that you can verify or repair disk permissions. It doesn't hurt if you do it, but whether or not it's actually useful as a troubleshooting step is hotly debated. All-things-Mac writer John Gruber says it's voodoo, and honestly, he's right—it's not very useful for regular troubleshooting. However, Dwight Silverman says it's saved his bacon, although he had to dig deeper to fix his issue. Apple still reccomends

repairing permissions for specific issues and references it in its knowledgebase. Your mileage may vary.

Beyond Disk Utility , you may also want to look into a system optimization utility like Onyx, our favorite system tweaker for Mac. Alternatively, previously mentioned cleaning utility iBoostUp does a great job of tidying up your system, as does the newly released CCleaner for Mac.
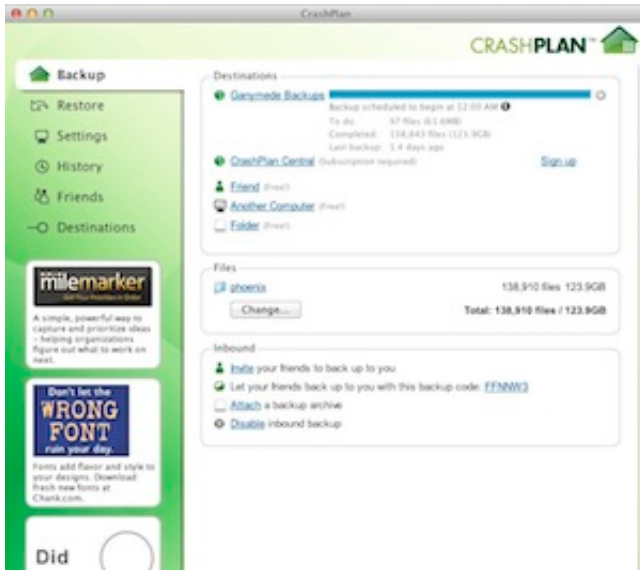
Back Up Your Refreshed Mac

These steps are all well and good to keep your Mac running smoothly, and even for periodic cleanups like these to get everything back in top shape. That said, they're all but wasted if you're not backing up your system. If you need help getting started, here's how to set up a bulletproof backup system using our favorite tool, Crash-Plan. I use it personally to keep both my Mac and Windows systems backed up, and once it's set up, it really is fire and forget—and you get to sleep at night knowing all of your data is safely backed up to another computer, external drives, or—if you have the money to spend—an offsite location.

You may also consider taking a disk image of your freshly tidied Mac in case you need to restore later after a hard drive upgrade or replacement. You can do this in Disk Utility, but our favorite disk cloning tool for Mac is Carbon Copy Cloner, which is a bit more robust and reliable.

That's all there is to it. Macs usually don't need much in the way of maintenance, but they can definitely use some cleanup from time to time, especially after heavy use. Apple doesn't ship too much in the way of tweaking or optimization tools for your Mac, but there are plenty out there for all versions of Mac OS, so don't be shy when it comes to giving your ailing Mac a tune-up. After all, it's spring, and now's the perfect time to declutter and clean up your Mac as well as the rest of your life.