

How To Install the KDE Desktop Environment as an Option -- (Keeping Gnome as the Default)

Ubuntu, as we use it in SLUG (Sunland Linux Users Group), uses the *Gnome* desktop environment. Kubuntu is Ubuntu's distro of GNU/Linux that comes with the *KDE* desktop environment. The difference may be a bit confusing, so I'll try to explain it on a fairly superficial level.

Linux is actually *only* the kernel of what is commonly called the Linux operating system. The Linux kernel makes up about 5-10 percent of what we call the Linux operating system. On top of the kernel is the rest of the operating system, called GNU. GNU consists of the many pieces that are added atop of a kernel to make the two together a complete operating system. GNU is perhaps another 40-50 percent of the total. Then, atop GNU/Linux sits the shell or user interfaces. (There can be multiple instances of the shell.)

Shells come in two types: text based, and graphical (windowing). These shells make up the rest of what we commonly, if imprecisely, think of as a Linux operating system. If we were really anal retentive, we'd refer to our operating system as GNU-Linux-Ubuntu-Gnome. But, referring to all four parts as Linux is sufficient so long as you understand that your operating system has layered components, the top two of which you get to choose, in the form of which distribution you pick -- Fedora, SuSE, Mandriva, Slackware, Ubuntu -- and the desktop manager you pick -- KDE, Gnome, Xubuntu, or even XPde.

If we choose to use the Gnome desktop or the KDE desktop, we are changing the human-to-machine user interface; the underlying portions of the operating system are practically the same. You are still using the same operating system, you've just changed how you interface with it. This explanation is not intended to trivialize the differences, because the human-to-machine user interface can really make a difference in one's computing experience and happiness quotient.

The Ubuntu distro selected Gnome as their default desktop environment, undoubtedly because it is a friendly interface for beginners, having few configuration options. It is quite easy for beginners to get their minds around the options it offers, because it doesn't offer a huge array of them.

KDE, on the other hand, is the desktop favored by most experienced Linux users (at least amongst those who use a windowing environment), for exactly the opposite reason; it has seemingly endless configuration options, so you can make your desktop just as custom as you desire. You could spend days configuring your KDE desktop just the way you want it. And your configuration would be unique.

The ability to configure your desktop any way you desire is seen as a strong advantage by Linus Torvalds and other Linux gurus who strongly endorse KDE and deprecate Gnome. But they have spent their whole lives using Linux. They are power users, not us beginners.

Here are my thoughts, for what they are worth, about Gnome and KDE, as they relate to novice Linux users like those of us in SLUG:

1. Gnome has a much bigger installed user base amongst folks who use the Ubuntu distro, so there are more Ubuntu experts to seek out when you need help.

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2. KDE has a much bigger user base in the Linux community as a whole, so many real experts out there will be unfamiliar with the Gnome desktop when you seek their help.
3. Gnome has a much different desktop environment than Windows. KDE's environment tends to be more like the Windows user interface.
4. In the past, a user was mostly stuck with using the utilities and applications that came with their desktop. Interchangeability was quite limited. Now, however, both Gnome and KDE have worked very hard to make their utilities and applications work in both of these desktop environments. The interoperability problems have mostly gone away.
5. KDE's huge array of configuration options has the potential to be a real point of weakness for novices trying to help each other. But on the other hand, a group such as ours could standardize on the same configuration options, so this problem would go away.
6. When I think about all the folks I help here in Sunland Village East who have not even cleaned their desktop of the icons advertising a 30-day free trial of AOL -- and their computer is 3 years old -- I doubt that configuration options are even a consideration for these folks. We as a club could preconfigure, and even lock these configurations.

Well, enough of my opinions. Lets get on with talking about installing the KDE desktop as an option.

You have at least four installation options:

1. Use Synaptic Package Manager to install the KDE desktop environment onto your existing Ubuntu installation as an optional session choice at login.
2. Abandon Ubuntu and do a full install of Kubuntu.
3. Install Kubuntu on your Windows XP machine using the Wubi installer, and play with it there.
4. Get VMWare or another Virtual Machine operating and install Kubuntu as a virtual machine.

I've done only one of these options so far. I installed the KDE desktop environment onto my existing Ubuntu install. This approach has some advantages and some disadvantages.

- First, you can only use one desktop environment or the other serially. This makes comparisons more difficult. (D)
- Second, all your files, folders, pictures, etc., are readily available to both desktops. (A)
- Third, whatever you install in the way of new applications are available to both desktops. (A & D)
- Fourth, if you uninstall KDE, all the packages it downloaded as "standard fare" for itself remain on your Gnome desktop. Not particularly cool. In fact, I am reporting this as a bug. (D)

The install of the KDE desktop as an optional desktop is incredibly simple, if you know a couple of secrets about how to do it. I'll tell you the secrets when necessary.

1. Open Synaptic Package Manager and log in.
2. Search for "Kubuntu-desktop". (This is secret one. If you search on "KDE" you'll probably not find the right selection amongst the blizzard of KDE programs.)

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3. Mark for installation, and install.
4. Reboot. But at the login screen, do not log in -- yet.
5. See the "Options" icon in the lower left hand corner of the login screen.
6. Select "Options", and then select Session, then the Kubuntu desktop. (This is secret two.)
7. You'll be asked if you want to make Kubuntu your default desktop. Select "No".
8. Log in. At first it will look like Ubuntu is loading, but you will end up in Kubuntu.

Now, you are in the KDE desktop environment. Lets explore some of its features:

1. Check out the two desktops. I changed mine to four. And configured each to look differently.
2. Right click on the K-menu and sort the menu entries alphabetically, using drag and drop.
3. Check out the pop-up information balloons when you hover over a desktop icon. Big ones!
4. Note that the K-menu is quite similar to the Windows XP Start menu.
5. Right click on a K-menu item and edit it.
6. Right click on a K-menu item and add it to your bottom panel (quick launch).
7. Open Add/Remove Programs and take a look at the Adept Package Manager. Install File Backup Manager. Install K-MyMoney.
8. Check out K-menu>System>File Backup Manager.
9. Check out K-menu>Office>K-MyMoney.
10. Take a look at Help.
11. Check out System Settings.
12. Right click on desktop and configure the desktop screen saver to be a slide show. Don't forget to customize the "Settings."

Well, it was a very brief introduction to KDE, but it should get you going. Enjoy.

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