

Windows 11 Start (Links, Toolbars)

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The links toolbar of Windows 7 has finally disappeared. I could and did reactivate it on Windows 10, but it is well and truly gone in Windows 11. The capability to add any toolbar to the taskbar has been removed!

Third-party extensions, such as ExplorerPatcher, can give us back removed features. Users report that when Microsoft updates the OS, ExplorerPatcher is likely to break. It does not update automatically; we would need to wait for the author to update it, before we could run a manual update. That is no way to run a computer.

Just in time, Microsoft has made substantial improvements to the Start menu. As usual, Microsoft has dumbed down and cluttered up the area with all kinds of crud, but we can clean it up. Here's how I went about it.

Set Default Browser

Windows 11 sets Edge as the default browser. I returned to Firefox:

Start > Settings > Apps > Default Apps > Firefox

For each file type that has Edge as the default app:

Click  (on the right) > Set Default

Exception: I chose Acrobat for .pdf.

Remove Widgets

I subscribe to the digital *New York Times* and *Boston Globe*; I don't need a news feed from Microsoft. Similarly, I get my weather from NOAA Weather Free on my phone. Widgets are not worth the bother, which can be substantial.

Right-click taskbar > Taskbar settings > Taskbar Items > Widgets off

Taskbar Alignment

In a knee-jerk reaction, I aligned the taskbar to the left, instead of centered:

Right-click taskbar > Taskbar settings > Taskbar behaviors > Taskbar alignment > Left

Application Links to Start and Taskbar

Now that I'm on Windows 11, I cannot reproduce my links toolbar to show here. I had it positioned on the left side of the taskbar, with its most important icons always visible. I could click on the right end of the area, and my stack of about

30 icons would appear above. I had them neatly organized into sections, with separating files named such as “-- --.txt” and “- - -.txt”. (Any file or shortcut could be listed, but no duplicates.) The new Start menu is better in many ways.

Old Links

The upgrade to Windows 11 apparently moved my links from the Links folder to the Favorites Bar folder under:

C:\Users\<username>\Favorites

The shortcuts display in alphabetical order, so my ordering is gone, but the names are still a useful reference.

Start Folders

The Start menu has been reorganized into these areas:

All >

This link, in the upper right, takes us to the alphabetical list that comprised the bulk of the old Start menu. Main features:

- Click on any link that can be run, to run it,
- Click on a folder to expand it, or
- Right-click on a link, and select Pin to Start. We should be able to do this for anything that can be run on our system, not just here.

Pinned

We can operate on these items in important ways, including:

1. Click to run.
2. Right-click and select Unpin from Start or Pin to taskbar.
3. Drag an icon:
 - Into a desired location,
 - Onto another icon to automatically create a folder,
 - Onto an existing folder to move it to the folder, or
 - Out of a folder to return it to the primary list.

Click on a folder to open it; name or rename it at the top.

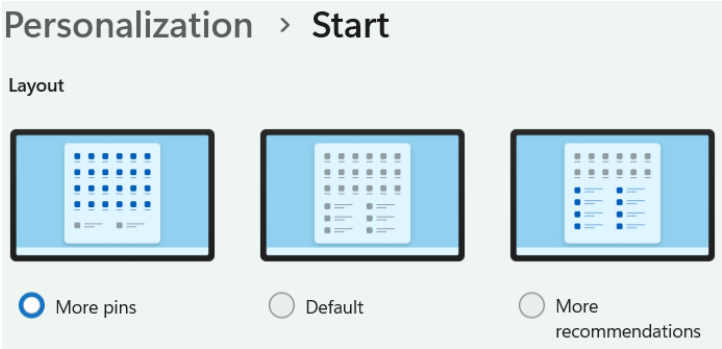
When the last icon leaves a folder, the folder automatically disappears.

(I recognize this architecture from my Android phone. It’s more effective here, with keyboard and mouse.)

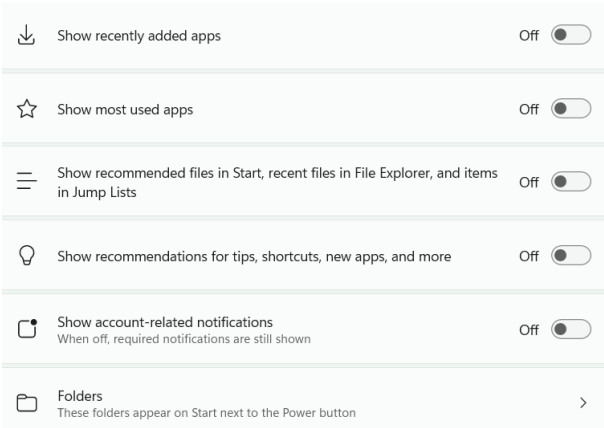
Recommended

This section is mostly a nuisance. It cannot be removed, so I cleaned it up and reduced the space it consumes.

Start > Settings > Personalization > Start

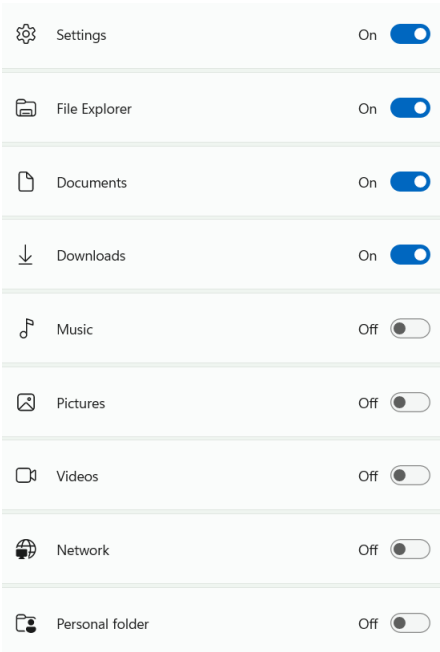


We cannot change the size of the whole start menu, but we can select “more pins” at the top to shift space from Recommended to Pinned.



I turned all five of the switches off.

Recently added apps appear useful, but since I’ll routinely use Start and taskbar, I should not need reminders to pin them where I want them.



Next, click Folders, and turn on those you want.

The first four have value for me, but not the others. I store my music and pictures on my data drive (not Microsoft’s locations), and I don’t use network storage.

Finally, some things like Windows Welcome will still be in the Recommended section:

Right-click icon > Remove from list

With the size of the Recommended section reduced, we may decide to use fewer folders in the Pinned section.

Task Manager

I traced Task Manager from a link already on my taskbar from Windows 10 to

c:\WINDOWS\System32 > right-click Taskmgr.exe > Pin to Start

This was unnecessary. To start it:

Right-click taskbar > Task Manager

Third-Party Editor (gVim)

Right-clicking a file does not offer to open with Vim. Putting it on the Start menu or elsewhere would not help. I use it mostly to edit HTML, but I want those file types to open by default in Firefox.

Running version 8.2, I obtained version 9.1 from vim.org and installed it. This did not help. “Help > About” shows 9.1, proving that the following work:

Right-click on a file > Show more options > Edit with Vim

(Show more options seems to provide the old initial menu.)

Alternatively:

Right-click on a file > Open with > Vi Improved – A Text Editor

First time, if Vi Improved is not offered:

Right-click on a file > Open with > Choose another app > Choose an app on your PC > Browse to C:\Program Files (x86)\Vim\vim91\gvim.exe > Just once

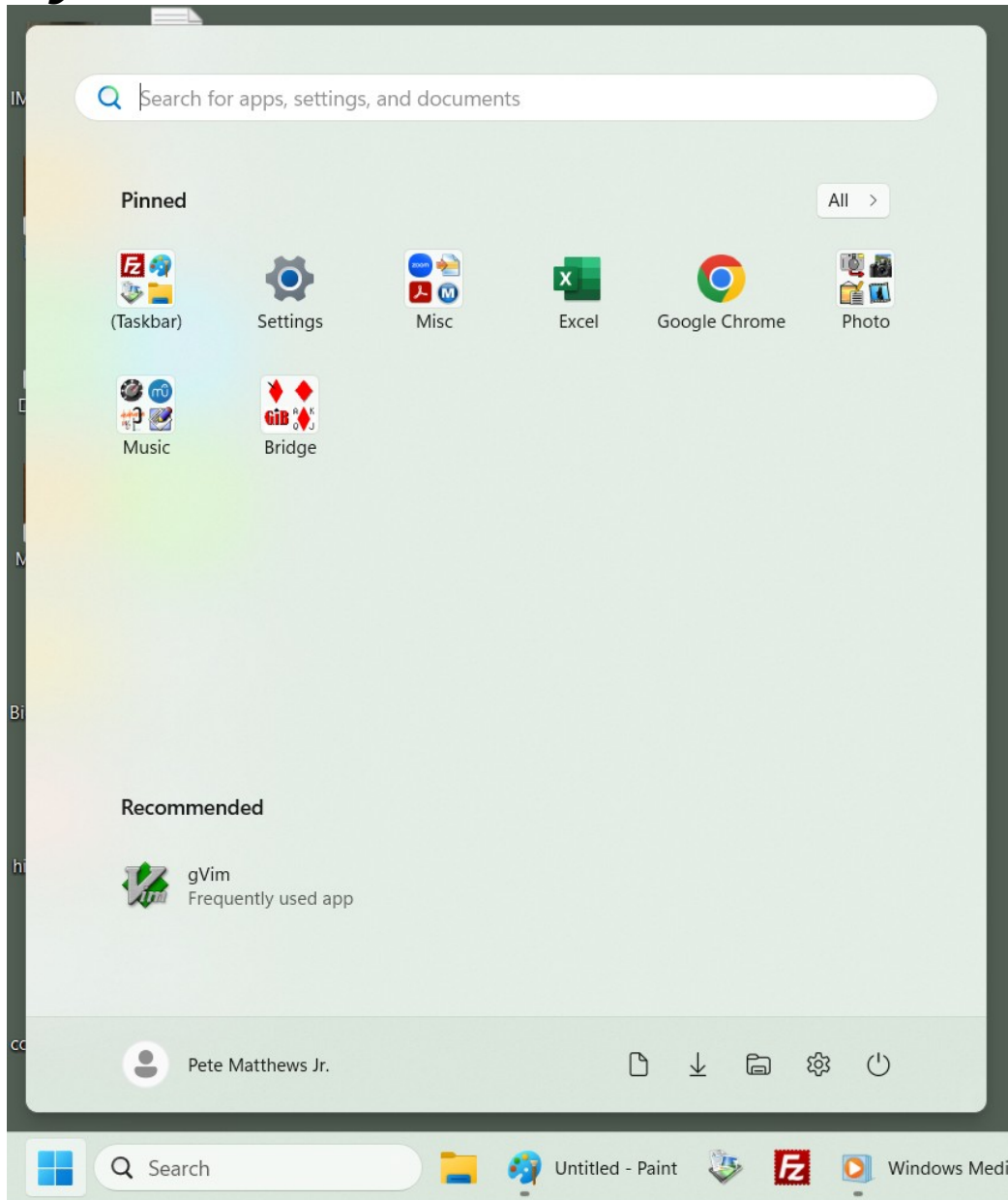
Do not select Always, or double-clicking an HTML file will open with Vim instead of the default web browser.

Taskbar

Windows 11 has been in the wild for four years or more. In addition to research on the web, this article includes my own initial experience and conclusions related to getting what I need.

Simply pinning a few things to the taskbar is all I need, but other people need more. Start with “How to Pin Almost Anything to the Windows 11 Taskbar” at <https://www.makeuseof.com/windows-11-taskbar-pin-almost-anything/>.

My Start and Taskbar



Pinned Items - Start

- The (Taskbar) folder is intended to contain each item pinned to the taskbar, for two reasons: (1) documentation, in case of a problem, and (2) to simplify opening a second copy of an app.
- Settings is redundant, due to the icon next to the power button.
- Misc contains stuff I only use occasionally.
- Excel and Google chrome are used more than occasionally.
- The Photo, Music, and Bridge folders contain apps used for my three main areas of interest.

gVim would seldom, if ever, be opened from the start menu – I’ll remove it from the list. There seems to be no way to turn off recommendations for frequently used apps.

Pinned Items – Taskbar

- File Explorer
- Paint
- MP Navigator (CanoScan 9000F)
- Filezilla
- Windows Media Player
- Notepad (for easy drag and drop)
- Firefox
- Command Prompt (may move to Misc)
- Word Home & Student 2021

Paint. I use Paint all the time. I can take a screenshot of the current window (Ctrl+Alt+PrintScreen) or the whole screen (Ctrl+PrintScreen), or use any graphic I have, paste it into Paint, and crop it. Then I can print it as-is, or paste it into Word, where I can resize it. That’s how I got all the images in this article, right down to . No longer deprecated, the wonderful Paint app has been updated for Windows 11.

However, Microsoft has changed printing for the worse: when Ctrl+P brings up the “Paint-Print” panel, the Device is highlighted, instead of Print. This means we cannot do a complete basic print from the keyboard (just hit Enter); we have to use the mouse. Also, printing from Paint almost always filled the page (in one dimension), but often does not with the new Paint. For more reliable printing, use Ctrl+A, Ctrl+C and paste the image into Word – print from there.