Chapter 2: Using the Desktop

BASIC DESKTOP CUSTOMISATION

The desktop can be customised to your preferences and tastes in a variety of ways. Here we will explore some basic customisations. More details can be obtained by running the "Help" application on the Main Menu. After running the Help application choose:

> Desktop --> Basic Preferences

Desktop Background

The background image displayed on the desktop can be changed by running the Background application from the Main Menu (this is in the Preferences sub-menu).

> Main Menu --> Preferences --> Background

To change the background image, click on the square marked "Select picture". An image selector dialog is displayed. Choose an image from the dialog. If you want to choose an image from another directory, click the Browse button. When you have chosen an image, click OK.
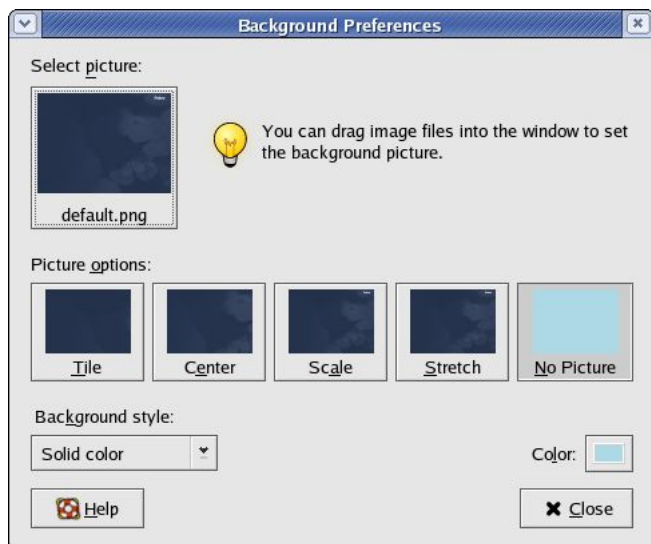

Fig. Selecting a New Background image

Desktop Themes

The desktop theme specifies the visual appearance of the panels, applets, and windows. The desktop theme may also specify the appearance of interface items in applications. For example, the theme affects the appearance of buttons, scrollbars, check boxes, and so on in the applications.

The theme used by the Desktop can be changed by running the Theme application from the Main Menu (this is in the Preferences sub-menu).

> Main Menu --> Preferences --> Theme

An theme selector dialog is displayed. To change the theme, click on a new theme. The screenshot below shows a sample of some of the themes which may be available. Note that the actual themes available can vary from system to system.
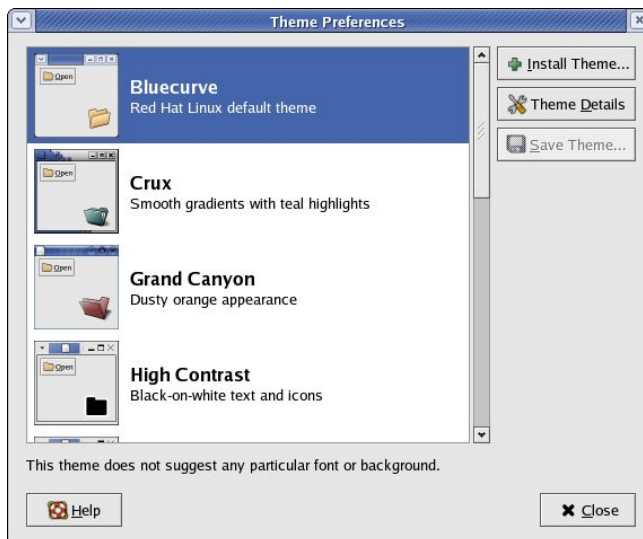

Fig. Selecting a New Theme

Default Fonts

The default fonts used to display applications and the desktop background can be changed by running the Fonts application from the Main Menu (this is in the Preferences sub-menu).

> Main Menu --> Preferences --> Font

A selector dialog for the application, window title, dialog and terminal fonts are displayed. To change the font for each category of usage, click on the space listing the font.
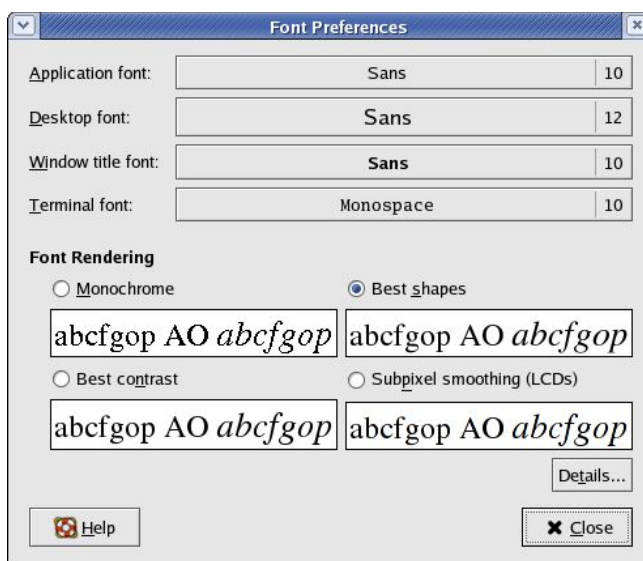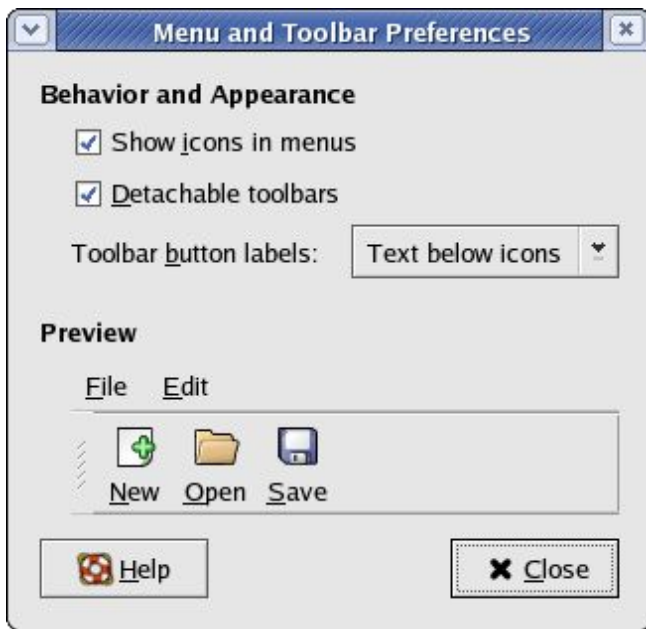

Fig. Selecting New Fonts

Menus and Toolbars

The Menus & Toolbars tool is used to customise the appearance of menus, menubars, and toolbars. Again this can be run from the Preferences sub-menu in the Main Menu.

> Main Menu --> Preferences --> Menus & Toolbars

Experiment on each of the settings to get the ones preferred.

Fig. Customising Menus and Toolbars

EXERCISES

Experiment with each of the following desktop preferences:

- background
- themes
- fonts
- menus and toolbars

USING THE DESKTOP

The Desktop provides a useful metaphor for a modern office work environment. So on the Desktop we find that the applications that we want to run can easily be started or launched and the information and data that we need can easily be located.

RUNNING APPLICATIONS

Applications that we can run from the Desktop are to be found either from the Main Menu (and sub-menus therein), or as icons on the Panel and the Desktop itself.

To run an application from the Main Menu, open up the menu (or sub-menu) and click on the application listed in the menu bar.

To run an application from the Panel, click once on the icon representing the application.

To run an application from the Desktop itself, double-click on the icon representing the application.

Sometimes it is more handy to have the application as an icon on the Panel or Desktop where you can launch it more easily by just clicking on it, rather than in the Main Menu, especially if it is buried deep within several sub-menus. To achieve this open the Main Menu and select the application item listed in it by clicking with the right mouse button. Click on the selection "Add this launcher to panel" and a copy of the application icon will be placed on the Panel.

To make a copy of this on the Desktop, you can drag the icon from the Panel over to the Desktop.

To delete an application icon from the Panel right-click on it and select the "Remove from Panel" option.

To delete an application icon from the Desktop, right-click on it and select the "Move to Trash" option.

THE PANEL

The Panel houses many useful utilities called applets. Applets are small applications that run on the Panel. As discussed in Chapter One, by default, the taskbar and the workspace switcher applets are placed and run on the Panel. Other useful applets that may be placed on the Panel include:

- clock
- sticky notes
- volume control

Placing an Applet on the Panel

To place an applet on the Panel, move the mouse over to an empty space on the Panel and right-click it. Select the item "Add to Panel" and from the sub-menus select the applet to place on the Panel. For example to place the "sticky notes" applet, select:

Add to Panel --> Accessories --> Sticky Notes

To prevent accidental removal of an applet, you can lock it on the Panel by right-clicking on its icon and selecting "Lock".

Removing an Applet from the Panel

To remove an applet, right-click on the applet icon and select "Remove from Panel". If the applet is locked, you will have to unlock it first by right-clicking on the icon and selecting "Unlock".

Configuring the Panel

To change the properties of the Panel, right-click on the Panel and select "Properties".

Fig. General Properties of the Panel

From the general properties menu you can change the orientation, size and (un)hide the Panel.
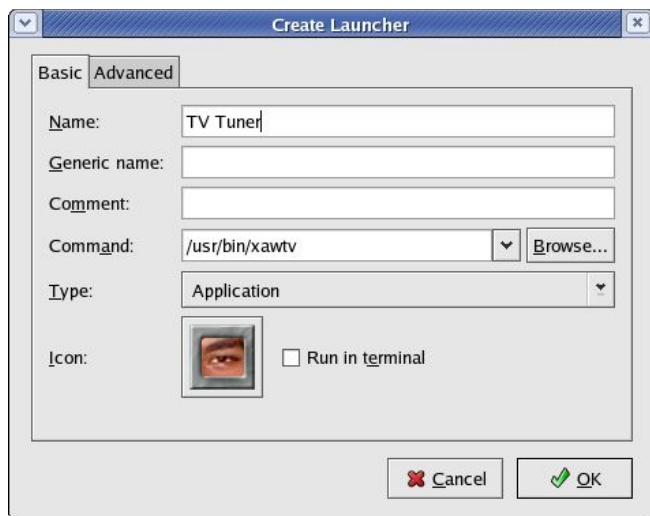
From the background properties menu, you can change the colour of the Panel as well as its visual appearance.

LAUNCHERS

Launchers allow the user a quick way to access specific resources on the system. For example if a user needs to access a specific file in one of the folders often, he can create a launcher to run an application to open the file and this launcher can be placed it on the Desktop. In this way
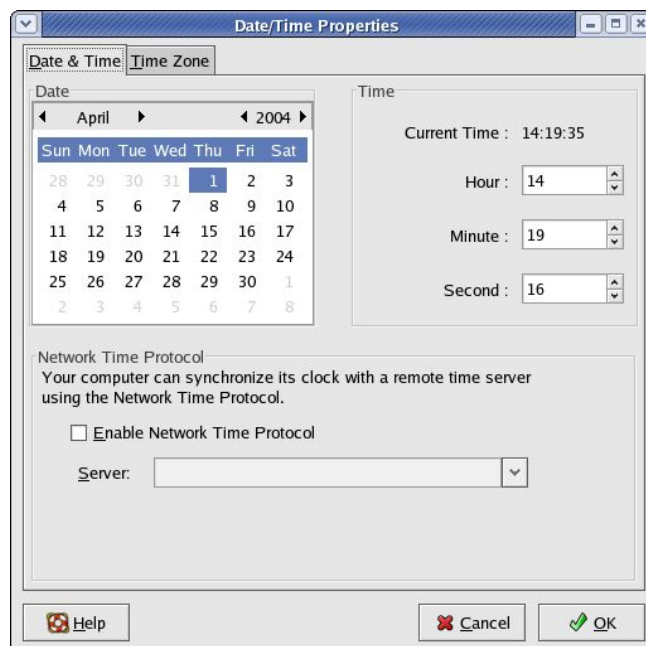
the resource (the file) can be accessed very quickly by just double-clicking on it.

To create a launcher on the Desktop, right-click on an empty area on the Desktop and select the item "Create Launcher". Enter the Name and the Command to run and if you want you can select an icon for it by clicking on the icon button.

Fig. Creating a Launcher

EXERCISES

1. The Mozilla web browser is a popular web browser application for Linux systems. It has an easily recognisable icon – a red dinosaur head.

•   Locate the Mozilla application in the Main Menu and place it on the Panel as well as the Desktop.

•   Launch the Mozilla application from:

    •   the Desktop
    •   the Main Menu
    •   the Panel

2. Configure the Panel so that it has the following properties:

•   a background colour of solid blue
•   contains the Geyes and Screenshot (locked) applets

3. Create a launcher to run the text editor command "gedit" on the Desktop. Use an appropriate icon for the text editor.

SETTING THE DATE AND TIME

It is important that the date and time are set correctly in your system. This will make it easier to manage the system resources and files and also aid in troubleshooting any problems. To set the date and time, run the Date & Time application tool from the System Settings sub-menu under the Main Menu.

        Main Menu --> System Settings --> Date & Time

Alternatively you can right-click on the clock (time) applet display on the Panel and choose "Adjust Date & Time".

A dialog box asking for the root password will appear if you are not logged in as root. This is because the system date and time are important system parameters and so only the system administrator or root is allowed to do it. After entering the correct root password, you can change the date using the displayed calender and the time in the boxes provided. Select the Time Zone tab and check to see that the timezone selected is correct. If not, correct it

by selecting the appropriate timezone region. Usually the system uses the local time, so do not select the "System clock uses UTC" checkbox.

Fig. Setting the Date and Time

Click on the OK button after all is done to enable the new date and time. You can check for the new date and time by resting your mouse over the clock (time) applet display on the Panel at the bottom of the screen.

EXERCISES

1. Practice setting the date and time.

2. Practice changing the appearance of the desktop clock