

Mac OS X Tiger Wizardry

Preferences, Packages, and
getting "under the hood" of Mac OS X

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This is a preliminary version of presentation.
Final version will include graphics and movies.

Some material may also be omitted to keep
the session within its time limits.

Preferences [.plist] File Wizardry

Preferences [.plist] files:
What are they?

- ① They store the change you make in an application's Preferences dialog.
- ① But they also store many settings that you cannot access from Preferences.
- ① They can also get easily corrupted.

Preferences [.plist] files:
Where are they?

- ① The main ones of interest to us are almost all in `~/Library/Preferences`.
- ① They have names like `com.apple.Finder.plist`
- ① Others are in `/Library/Preferences`.
- ① Others are in various other locations, including application packages.

Preferences [.plist] files:
How do you view them?

- 👁 Apple's preferred method is to use Property List Editor.
- 👁 Alternative is similar third party utilities such as PlistEdit Pro.
- 👁 Final alternative is Terminal: `defaults` command.
- 👁 Can't use TextEdit or other text editors.
 - 👁 In Tiger, .plist files now in binary!

Preferences [.plist] files:
How do you edit them?

👁️ Property List Editor:

- 👁️ Open file and click Root disclosure triangle
- 👁️ Edit text in **Key**, **Class** and/or **Value** columns
- 👁️ Can Add new properties via **New Sibling/New Child** button
- 👁️ Can Delete via **Delete** button
- 👁️ Save

Terminal:

- `defaults [command] [plist file]`
`[key] [class][value]`

- Class is optional in most cases

- `defaults write com.apple.Finder`
`AppleShowAllFiles True`

Example: Make invisible files visible

- 👁️ **File:** com.apple.Finder.plist

- 👁️ **Property:**

 - AppleShowAllFiles Boolean Yes

 - 👁️ Instead of Yes/No; Can use:
True/False or
String: 1/0

- 👁️ Relaunch Finder

👁️ “Hidden” properties:

👁️ How do you find out about them?

👁️ Directly from developer

👁️ Then to Web sites

👁️ Why do these properties exist?

👁️ Developer wants them to have limited use; just for developers, power users etc.

- 👁 The automated alternative:

- 👁 One trick ponies:

- 👁 e.g., InVisibles

- 👁 Multi-function utilities:

- 👁 e.g., Cocktail, TinkerTool

👁️ Pros and Cons of automation:

👁️ Pros:

- 👁️ Simpler and easier, less to remember
- 👁️ Supplies all Value options!

👁️ Cons:

- 👁️ Limited to options utility provides
- 👁️ May need multiple utilities that all cost money

Preferences [.plist] files:
Just Do It!

Super-enlarge Dock icons

- 👁 Select "Turn Magnification On" in Dock menu
- 👁 **File:** com.apple.Dock.plist
- 👁 **Property:** largesize Number 512
- 👁 Relaunch Dock

Change Screen Capture Format

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.screencapture.plist
- 👁 **Property:** type String TIFF
- 👁 Logout and Login again

Eliminate the Desktop

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.Finder.plist
- 👁 **Property:** CreateDesktop Boolean No
- 👁 Relaunch Finder

Put a Widget on the Desktop

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.dashboard.plist
- 👁 **Property:** devmode Boolean Yes
- 👁 Logout and Login again.
- 👁 Activate Dashboard.
- 👁 Click-drag widget to Desktop.
- 👁 Press F12 and let go of mouse.

Disable Dashboard

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.dashboard.plist
- 👁 **Property:** mcx-disabled Boolean Yes
- 👁 Force Quit Dock via Activity Monitor

Disable Guest Access

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.AppleFileServer.plist
 - 👁 This file is in /Library/Preferences
- 👁 **Property:** guestAccess Boolean No
- 👁 Need root access to save changes!
 - 👁 Use Pseudo (or sudo in Terminal)
- 👁 Need to Restart Mac for change to take effect

Eliminate need for Password Authorization

- 👁 This file is not even in a Preferences folder:
 - 👁 Use Go to Folder command: Go to `/etc`
 - 👁 **File:** authorization
 - 👁 **Property:** rights>desktopservices
 - 👁 Change **class** key's value from **user** to **allow**
- 👁 Save with root access (using Pseudo).

Troubleshooting .plist files

👁️ Key points:

- 👁️ Relatively speaking, .plist files are easily damaged because of frequent saves.
- 👁️ If symptoms suggest problem with a .plist file: remove or delete it. New file will be created.
- 👁️ Remove is better than delete: Because can return file if it is not culprit.
- 👁️ Can use a separate account as one way to test for likely .plist file trouble.

👁️ Using Preferential Treatment:

- 👁️ Preferential Treatment is one of several utilities that can assess for possible .plist file corruption.
- 👁️ However it only assesses for syntax errors. Some problems may not be syntax-related.
- 👁️ These utilities based on Unix `plutil` command. Can use this via Terminal instead.

👁️ Tiger's Safe Relaunch:

- 👁️ After first crash of an app: Unexpected Quit has a Reopen button.
- 👁️ Click it. If you crash again, Reopen is replaced by Try Again.
- 👁️ If you click Try Again, a Safe Relaunch is initiated.
 - 👁️ This disables .plist file and replaces it with a default copy.
- 👁️ If you quit normally from a Safe Relaunch, you are given choice - via a dialog - to keep default or revert to original.

Modify Unexpected Quit dialog

- 👁 **File:** com.apple.CrashReporter.plist
- 👁 **Property:** DialogType String Developer
- 👁 Will show crash log instead of normal message
- 👁 Can use Apple's CrashReporterPrefs (in Developer folder) instead of PLE or Terminal.

Packages
wizardry

Packages:
What are they?

- 👁️ They are folders disguised as single files.
- 👁️ Most are designated by .pkg extension (such as Installer files) or .app (for applications).
- 👁️ The .app extension is typically not shown in Finder, but it is there.

Packages:
How do you
open them?

- ① Use the Show Package Contents command in Contextual Menus or Finder window Action menus.
- ① Delete the .pkg or .app extension from the file's name.
- ① Use a utility such as Pacifist.
- ① Use Terminal.

Packages:
How do you
search them?

- 👁 Searchlight does not search packages.
- 👁 Can open a package and use Search text box however. Otherwise...
- 👁 Use a utility such as Locator.
- 👁 Use Terminal's locate command.

Packages:
Just do it

Add a Disk Images System Prefs pane

- Go to `/System/Library/PrivateFrameworks/DiskImages.framework/Versions/A/Resources`
- Double-click the `DiskImages.prefPane`.

Change text of dialogs

- 👁 Example: Unexpected quit dialog.
- 👁 Using TextWrangler's Open Hidden command with "All Files":
Go to `/System/Library/CoreServices/Crash Reporter`.
- 👁 Navigate to `Contents/Resources/English.lproj` and open the `Localizable.strings` file.
- 👁 Edit as desired, unlocking file when asked.
- 👁 Save changes.

Modify Spotlight's defaults for Command-F

- ① Type Command-F; Set up search the way you want.
- ① Click to Save. Name file `default_smart.plist` and save it to Desktop. Delete `.savedSearch` extension from name.
- ① Go to `/System/Library/CoreServices` and open `Finder.app` package.
- ① Go to `Contents/Resources`. Replace `default_smart.plist` file with the copy you made. Authenticate when requested.
- ① Relaunch Finder (via Dock).

For more help and info:

Ted Landau's Mac OS X Help Line
www.macosxhelpline.com

MacFixIt:
www.macfixit.com

Mac OS X Hints:
www.macosxhints.com