

Guide

**How to properly choose your Linux distro
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Introduction

Since I passed to Linux in 2025, I'm often getting asked which was the best Linux for what I do, PC retrogaming. I'm usually getting vague in my response, because there are nuances to understand before deciding what's gonna be best for you. Personally, I was willing to quit Windows since the Windows XP era as to me Windows 98SE is the last good Windows (while Windows Vista/7 were still better than XP, there were still not for me), but Linux wasn't ready for how I use it until 2025. I don't only mean software wise but also hardware wise, because optimization versus what you do mean everything. And on Linux when you have the best combo for your needs you'll for sure have WAY better performance than on Windows even while using compatibility for Windows software. But optimization doesn't only mean performance, it also means usability aka less workaround so you can be using it at ease without headache.

So as you can see, my path probably differs from why you might be tempted with Linux. Which is why I studied the question and made some tests to help you to direct yourself using the best distro and desktop for your needs.

Let's figure what you will use your Linux for versus what I recommend and why:

GENERAL USE

(with PC retrogaming in mind first)

When we think about PC retrogaming, we usually think about PC emulation software such 86Box, DOSBox and DOSBox-X which are software optimized for X11 server (Xorg and XLibre these two are still Xorg, but XLibre more up to date) that works very badly in a Wayland session (still usable with work around but with a lot annoyance and in some specific case even lesser performance). In a lesser extent sometimes VM software such VirtualBox, but the chance you'll need it is very low since nowadays in Linux we can use Glorious Eggroll Proton (GE-Proton) for software past 2003. (Yes they works fine with almost no need of workaround.)

Beginner (old school)

Recommended distro: Linux Mint MATE

Link: <https://linuxmint.com/>

Avoid: Any distro that uses KDE Plasma as a desktop, that is Wayland-based and uses a global menu system.

Why: The reason why Linux Mint is the most beginner friendly distro is because you never ever need to use the terminal. You can use it, but for almost everything you'll do, update, maintenance, backup, gaming, web navigation, FTP, office works, etc. everything is not only doable without the terminal but it's also more easy to use than Windows. And as for the reason why I recommend Mate over Cinnamon and XFCE in that case, it's because the interface is the most like Windows 98 and also because Mate in single core in all my test was having better results than Cinnamon and XFCE. That however differs for multicore then XFCE is the winner, but in retrogaming MATE almost every time is the winner in single core, so you'll be able to emulate a better machine with almost no latency in MATE than the other two.

Beginner (modern)

Recommended distro: Linux Mint Cinnamon

Link: <https://linuxmint.com/>

Avoid: Any distro that uses KDE Plasma as a desktop, that is Wayland-based and uses a global menu system.

Why: The reasons are essentially the same than the old school one, but since you're a more modern user you'll feel the interface of Cinnamon more like Windows 7, which for many of modern Windows user is often cited as gold. That OS is also more customizable than the other two, but it comes with the con that you might have to search a little bit more to find where the options you are looking for are. Because more customizable things mean options are also more condensed. Of course, you lose a little bit of performance in single core, but still better than any other beginner distro.

Intermediary/Expert

Recommended distro: Artix Linux MATE

Link: <https://artixlinux.org/>

Avoid: Wayland

Why: There's not an ounce of doubt that performance wise in single core MATE is the best desktop available in any Linux distro I tried. I insist that I'm talking about the single core performance, not multicore, there, that's another story, since KDE Plasma in a benchmark I tried was the winner in multicore, but since here we focus on PC Retrogaming, MATE is the clear winner and by far.

As for the choice of Artix Linux because out of the box this distro does use XLibre instead of Xorg, it's a rolling distro that use the most modern (almost) version of kernel and drivers and also is a minimalistic distro aka you don't have the bloatware that you will like in popular distro such Mint, Ubuntu, Debian and Fedora. And it also use OpenRC which is much snappier than SystemD. That being said you can also use Void Linux Mate with the same approach and will have similar performance, but Void Linux Mate is more of a headache to install and you won't have better performance for PC Retrogaming software in any way.

GENERAL USE

(with modern PC gaming in mind first)

When we think about modern PC gaming we think about better CPU scheduling (especially in multicore) and also better GPU latency which give you great framerate 1% low (and 0.1% low) which is even more important than average since your game get snappier and more responsive. But keep in mind here, I'm talking about AMD GPU, since NVIDIA are using proprietary drivers and still have some problem as much as stability wise than performance wise, while AMD's ones are almost flawless (and works way better than in Windows 11 despite being sometimes a bit under in FPS average, but 1% low usually better in Linux).

Beginner (console-like)

Recommended distro: Bazzite

Link: <https://bazzite.gg/>

Avoid: Non plug and play distro

Why: Bazzite is plug and play by default once installed and doesn't require you to remove the SecureBoot from the BIOS. Instruction might first look confusing, but actually if you read what's on-screen you won't ever need any online help on how to use it. Everything is plug and play here, it's a Wayland distro based on Fedora so everything is modern, but not too much aka less probability than an update create havoc like it does in Windows or some over the edge Linux rolling distro.

Beginner (desktop user)

Recommended distro: Nobara Linux

Link: <https://nobaraproject.org/>

Avoid: Rolling distros

Why: Some might argue that since Glorious Eggroll (yes same guy behind the GE-Proton) do use several sources of optimization this OS should be seen as intermediary because of probability of breaking and sometimes falsely seen as rolling distro (which is really not) since Nobara do use the most modern optimization. They are all tested first before getting launched inside the distro. So contrary to a popular belief, that distro is very stable and the update is very easy to use. Just be sure that when a new version Nobara arrives to wait before updating because new features might lead to problems, but it's usually fixed inside a day or two. So every problem you'll encounter with this OS self-fixes itself almost immediately by design. That's a very good OS for modern users using modern software who are beginning in the Linux world.

Intermediary

Recommended distro: CachyOS (ideally use KDE Plasma for maximum performance)

Link: <https://cachyos.org/>

Avoid: Red Hat & Debian (if you care about max performance)

Why: Out of the box it's the most performant Linux currently on the market. I know I said in the past, Nobara was the best, but I have since tested this distro and yes, this one is optimized out of the box for max performance. However, compatibility-wise you might sometimes get some problems, especially since it's a rolling distro that not only uses the most modern updates from the repo, but it also uses what is normally reserved for gremlins aka in the test phase. So if you know what you're doing in Linux and your at ease with using the terminal, then I totally recommend this one. But keep in mind being the best

out of the box doesn't mean being the most performant Linux. Because some optimization thingy might be better off and on.

Expert

Recommended distro: Void Linux (with CachyOS kernel and KDE Plasma)

Link: <https://voidlinux.org/>

Avoid: Bloatware distros

Why: A lot of people would say here to use instead Arch, but essentially I would disagree. First Arch forces you to use Systemd and second Arch is managed by people who politized with hate (and sometimes menace see their anti XLibre campaign for more info on that) the right to be or not on the repo and page deletion on their wiki, so you might struggle to receive help if you ever found yourself in a cul-de-sac.

Void is the better choice, first because that's a lightweight distro so no bloatware contrary to beginner distros, it's uberly customisable and despite being a rolling distro, it's very stable because gremlins are separated from normal. Of course, it might be a bit of a headache to get use of Void, but once you're into, there's not even an ounce of doubt that this is the best distro for modern use.

PROFESSIONAL WORK

(Video editing / 3D / VM / AI / DEV)

When we think about professional work, we essentially talk about productivity. So you don't necessarily need the fastest, but you need something that can handle high density so it stays snappy all the time. Of course, the first reflex is usually taking a CPU with a lot of core and a lot of RAM for the motherboard and GPU, but the choice of the distro might help you to maximize how good will be your experience.

It's to be noted that there is no beginner level for that type of OS since it needs some Linux base to be probably at ease with professional work.

Intermediary

Recommended distro: Artix Linux LXQt (X11) or Fedora with Hyprland (Wayland)

Link: <https://artixlinux.org/>

Link: <https://fedoraproject.org/>

Avoid: Gaming-based desktops

Why: The reason why the dual recommendation is because a lot of software especially in infography has like 20 and sometimes more than 30 years of development, so they are of course optimized for X11. But modern development especially for main professional softwares is perfectly aligned with the Red Hat family, which Fedora is their training ground. As for the desktop Hyprland vs LXQt, my recommendation is mainly based on the preinstalled utilities, such as the windows tiling system, their lightweight nature and mostly their snappiest nature. They are not made for gaming they are made for time response. Well, if you want to game on them you still can and it will run well, but it's how these desktop were designed for so they are as optimized for that than MATE, XFCE, KDE Plasma, Cinnamon.

Expert (free)

Recommended distro: Void Linux (without SystemD) or Arch (with SystemD)

Link: <https://voidlinux.org/>

Link: <https://archlinux.org/>

Avoid: Bloatware distro

Why: Because they are the most customizable! The reason why the dual recommendation, it's because some software has dependency on SystemD. But if none of what you use has, I would recommend you Void Linux since you have more freedom in how you will want to build your desktop. I would indeed recommend you to use a snappy desktop. There are a lot of choices possible, depending on if your needs are in X11 or Wayland.

Expert (paying)

Recommended distro: Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Workstations

Link: <https://www.redhat.com/>

Avoid: Taking recommendations

Why: Despite the avoid might seem a bit of a contradiction with the nature of this guide since it's a recommendation, the choice Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Workstation is mainly advisable if you want heavy support from professional that are super focused on their distro since they are paid and use to

help big enterprise. Of course, since you pay for the OS and their subscription you get premium help and I had in the past worked in a big company that was doing things with them and always A1. Keep in mind that you're using here a power user level of Fedora focused for professionals.

F.A.Q.

(Or might potentially be asked!)

Question: What distro do you use?

Answer: Artix Linux Mate

Question: What Linux tech YouTubers do you recommend to ease the introduction to the Linux world?

Answer: Well, I would recommend Gosh-its-Arch for Linux news that matters. Cameron Knauff for more general knowledge. Jack Keifer to see live experience of trying distro hopping while testing software in general to see how well they go. The Lunduke Journal because he is one of the rare who properly cover XLibre news. (Keep in mind that he might be a bit partisan so use your sense of judgment with you while watching. But he still talks about very interesting things none the less!) And Michael Tunnell for mainstream Linux news (what you hear everywhere is concentrated there).

Question: Is there any Linux tech YouTuber that I should avoid?

Answer: Those who are spreading propaganda like an echo. They repeat, but they don't understand what they are talking about. And there are a huge chunk of them. One of the most red flag propaganda you will hear from these channels, it's when the YouTuber says X11 is outdated and unsecure. That's obviously a bullshit propaganda spread by Red Hat that they are repeating. (And I'm not a Red Hat hater far from that, they are doing so many things right, to not say very right. But they are also trying to maliciously kill X11 with a bullying campaign to promote their Wayland. Fortunately XLibre exists to prove them wrong. A reminder that X11 is still currently the best option (in any aspect) for PC retrogaming and is fully secure contrary to what the propaganda said. At least the XLibre fork of the project, since Xorg was artificially abandoned.)

Question: XLibre is not mature enough it cannot be fast and stable, isn't it?

Answer: Bullshit propaganda! XLibre is a fork of Xorg X11, not a restart from scratch. It's X11 modernized for modern needs and modern safety issues aka a continuity. So yes, it's very stable and performance wise like show my Geekbench page it's actually the distro on which I got the best performance: <https://browser.geekbench.com/user/538704> And on daily use as much on modern games and PC retrogaming emulators everything not only run fine, but perfectly like it should. Same thing with my use of infography software and audio editing that I use alongside my programming needs. (Since I'm a game dev who also sometimes does marketing jobs for industrial companies, which means the amount of different kinds of software I have to use is big enough to know what I'm talking about)

Question: Are these distros you are recommending the absolute best?

Answer: They are the best for how I use them and why I have chosen them. But keep in mind there are over 600 publicly maintained Linux distros and to that we must add many private versions (especially in the industrial world) which can easily bring them to several thousand distros. So take the guide as a guide and not as a bible. So when you learn you gradually develop your knowledge and needs you'll maybe guide yourself to another distro, and it's perfect like that, because Linux is plural and for good reasons (plural as well).

Question: For how long will this guide be valid?

Answer: Unsure! Since things are moving fast in the Linux world. But I think the essentials of what the guide is teaching about how to explore your needs versus a distro will stay the test of time.

Question: Any music recommendations while reading this guide?

Answer: The soundtrack of a game, Sometimes Always Monsters, in which I have a cameo in it (at Gator Bay): https://music.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZeVK97IA-Td3Jspasi0r0e4WzS_-0OZr&si=sPHbNq63krhh5RLR