# OpenBSD **5.6**

Bang on schedule, another release of OpenBSD is here.
**Mike Saunders** pits it against the current crop of Linux distros.

O penBSD has a lot in common with Linux. It's Unix-like (actually a descendant of BSD Unix), it's open source, it's reliable, it's secure, and it runs most of the software you're familiar with: Gnome, KDE, *Firefox*, *Apache*, *MySQL* and so forth. But it's a much smaller project, with a comparatively tiny development team, so is it fair to compare it with Linux? We think so, given that it does a very similar job to Linux, and many OpenBSD advocates recommend making the switch. But we understand that it doesn't try to be an all-singing, all-dancing desktop OS like many of the big-name Linux distros.

OpenBSD 5.6 is available for several platforms, including x86, x86-64, PPC, Sparc and various ARM boards. An absolute minimum installation requires just 32MB of RAM and 200MB of hard drive space, so it's great for turning an old box into a router, firewall or small server – tasks at which OpenBSD excels.

### Out with the old, in with the new

As with previous releases, the installer in 5.6 is plain text and to the point, and it's hard to get stuck because the documentation is so good. OpenBSD prides itself on having clear and correct documentation, and although its developers and users are often accused of chanting "RTFM" (read the fine manual) all too often, that's understandable. The installation guide is very thorough, and the "afterboot" manual page provides an excellent introduction to configuring your new OpenBSD setup. Very little is installed by default, but there's a large range of binary packages for desktop, office, server and development jobs just a few **pkg_add** commands away.

OpenBSD is pretty bare out of the box, but point **$PKG_PATH** at a mirror of packages and run **pkg_add xfce** to get this.
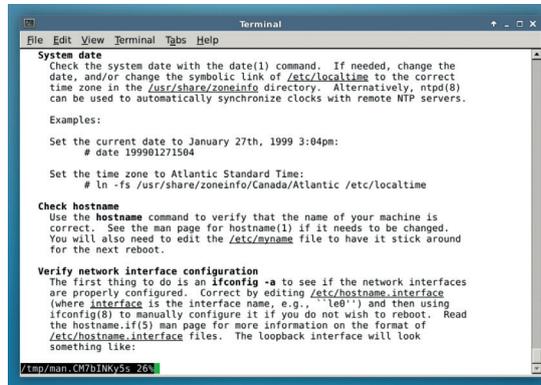


OpenBSD's manual pages are fantastic, and document virtually every aspect of the OS.

The biggest change in this release is the inclusion of LibreSSL, the OpenBSD project's fork of the hack-filled OpenSSL codebase. Some pundits criticised OpenBSD for forking and not simply submitting patches, but as we've seen with OpenSSH (another OpenBSD project that's now used everywhere), the developers know what they're doing. On laptops, the Intel and Radeon DRM drivers now have improved suspend and resume support, while *Sendmail* has been dropped from the base system in favour of *OpenSMTPD*. Other cleanups include the removal of *Kerberos* and the old *Apache*-based web server, with the latter being replaced by a small daemon based on *relayd*. Old-school FTP and tape installations have faced the chop as well in this release.

Now, OpenBSD prides itself on being extremely secure, beyond Linux and the other BSDs. We often see newly discovered exploits that wreak havoc on other OSes, but are more contained or simply don't work on OpenBSD. This is great, but keeping the system up to date is so much more work. OpenBSD doesn't have official binary updates – so when a bug or hole is discovered, you have to manually patch and recompile the kernel and/or userland yourself. There are some third-party providers of binary updates, but when you compare the work involved to **apt-get update && apt-get upgrade**, it's a bit off-putting. We understand that the OpenBSD team is small and very busy, so we won't knock them. It's just worth considering before making the switch. **LV**
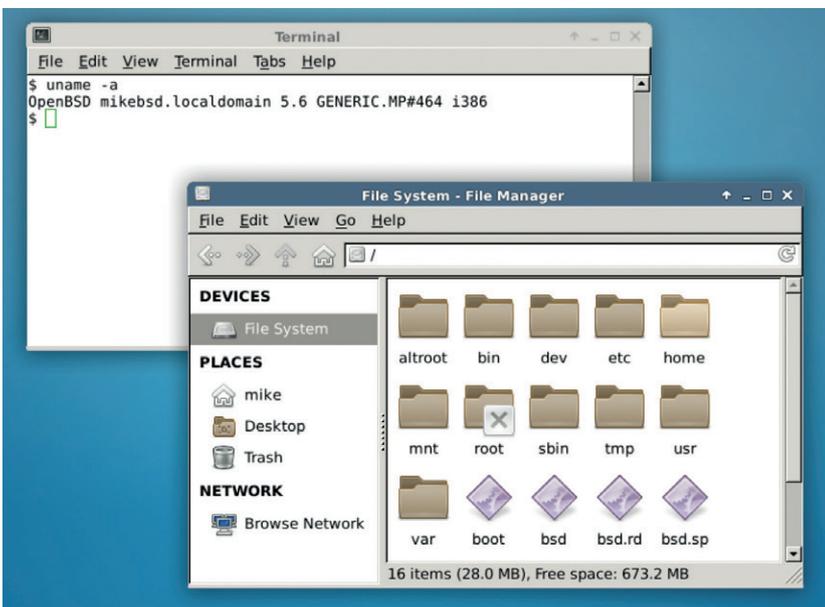


**LINUX VOICE VERDICT**

Plenty of old cruft removed, plus some minor updates. We still hope for binary updates one day though.

★★★★☆