

Fedora 21

This “game changer” of a release is provided in three new versions.
Mike Saunders checks them out.

DATA

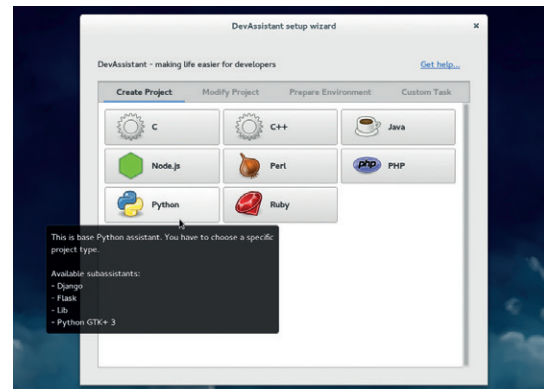
Web
www.fedoraproject.org
Developer
Red Hat and community
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The Fedora Project is no stranger to reinvention. It started off as a community-supported successor to Red Hat Linux, as that particular distribution started to focus on the enterprise market, and most recently has been gaining ground as a bleeding-edge test-bed for upcoming Red Hat Enterprise Linux products.

With Fedora 21, the distribution has been split into three sub-projects: Cloud, Server and Workstation. These are flavours of the same distribution, with different focuses, but all based on the same core components: kernel 3.16, *glibc* 2.20, *Yum* 3.4.3 and *Systemd* 216. The Cloud version provides a minimal environment that's designed to run Docker containers, and includes work from Project Atomic, making it easy to roll back updates should they cause problems. The Server flavour, meanwhile, includes the *Cockpit* management interface, *Rolekit* for specifying server roles, and the *FreeIPA* identity management tools.

We spent most of our time with the Workstation variant, which runs Gnome 3.14 on top of X.org server 1.16.1. Wayland is available, but only as a technology preview; we're still a while away from seeing it replace X by default. So without big changes like Wayland, what's in here to make it worth the upgrade from Fedora 20, or just trying the distro if you use something else? Well, the installation process has been simplified, bringing it down to a handful of clicks. After choosing your language, *Anaconda* (the Fedora installer) will try to auto-detect as much as possible, and present a recommended disk layout, so you can get the distro onto your hard drive with very little effort. After installation, the Software package

Gnome 3.14 is the default desktop, but there are 'spins' with alternatives such as KDE and Xfce.



The *DevAssistant* is a great little addition for this release, making it easy to set up new coding projects.

manager is also worth checking out, as it has seen GUI refinements too.

Gnome Terminal sees the reintroduction of transparent backgrounds, after plenty of rage from users when this feature was removed in an earlier release. Much work has been put into making the distro look better on HiDPI displays (like on the MacBook Pro and some Chromebooks), although once you start running non-Gnome apps, the results are a mixed bag.

Identity crisis

But while the Workstation flavour continues Fedora's reputation as a cutting-edge desktop distro, we're left wondering about the long-term goals of the Server and Cloud flavours. Why would you run Fedora on a server? If you don't mind major upgrades every year that could break things and require re-learning new tools, Fedora Server might make a decent server OS. Or if you just want to see what's coming in future CentOS and RHEL releases, it's a great way to try out new technologies. However, its support lifecycle is a paltry 13 months – we suspect most Fedora users would rather use CentOS (CentOS 7, for instance, will receive security updates until 2024!).

Still, on the desktop it's still one of our favourite distributions, bringing new ideas to the table without being too bleeding-edge to be usable. The next few releases are likely to be more ambitious though, especially with Wayland.



LINUX VOICE VERDICT

A solid, if not especially exciting, release from the Fedora team with lots of welcome refinements.

