

COMPUTER GURU

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Apple and Microsoft Updates

We've come to expect Apple and Microsoft to update their operating systems every year. Microsoft usually updates Windows in the spring and fall while Apple updates Mac OS only in the fall. Both operating systems are sophisticated, reliable, and feature-laden. And both operating systems are in their tenth incarnation—Microsoft Windows 10 and Apple Mac OS Version 10.x (the latest version is Mac OS 10.15).

Big Sur

Apple also assigns names to its operating system. In 2007, OS X 10.5 was called Leopard. The next year, it was Snow Leopard. Then came California locations: Yosemite, Sierra, High Sierra, Mojave, and now Catalina. This fall, Apple will release Mac OS 11.0, "Big Sur," which is a gorgeous stretch of the California coast south of Monterey. I suppose if Apple were located in New Jersey, its operating system would be named "Bayonne" or "Ho-Ho-Kus." Or maybe "Exit 8A." Or maybe not.

I've been using a "beta" version of Big Sur for a couple of weeks.¹ As with past updates, Big Sur is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Everything works just as it has all along. What's different is that Big Sur more closely resembles the look and feel of the iPad (and iPhone) icons and screen text. The dock at the bottom of Mac OS Big Sur comprises rounded-square icons like the iPad, and the various dialog windows are more iPad-looking. Likewise, the new versions of iPad OS 14 and iOS 14 that Apple is about to release look more like Big Sur. It's subtle, consistent, and lovely.

Safari (the browser that comes with Mac OS) receives performance upgrades and a slick on-screen privacy report that shows if the website is tracking you. It's fast and, like all Apple software, integrates with other apps. I certainly recommend Safari over any other browser (yes, even Chrome). There's just no reason not to use it.

Apple Mail, Reminders, Notes, and Calendar look nicer, and all work the same.

Windows Fall 2020 Update

The latest Windows 10 version is 20H2 (it has nothing to do with the year 2004). It's smooth and familiar and runs tons of applications. The coming fall 2020 update will be minor, which is good because Microsoft has spent time polishing and tuning rather than making big changes.

Should You Update your Computer?

Yes! Big Sur, which should be available in October, has better security features and improved internal file handling gizmos. It will integrate more seamlessly with your iPad and iPhone, and the extensive beta testing this summer should work out the kinks. The fall 2020 Windows 10 update is just as important for its better security and performance tweaks.

Need Help?

If you need help upgrading your Mac or Windows computer, just go to our tech request site at princeton senior.org/psrc-tech-resources/ and tell us what you need. If you want to donate a few bucks, that would be nice. But we'll provide the same expert and friendly service regardless because it keeps us volunteers off the streets.

¹ Apple routinely issues "beta" versions of software that aren't ready for general release so folks like me can test them for bugs and other "issues." When I find something that's not right, I send Apple a note. What they do with that note is anyone's guess, but I assume there's someone at Apple who reads all these things. Bummer.