

8 Mac settings and shortcuts you need to start using right now

Summary

The article describes eight useful Mac settings and shortcuts that can enhance your productivity and efficiency. These include using desktop stacks to organize files, customizing the menu bar for quick access to apps and settings, and utilizing Hot Corners to perform system functions with a simple mouse movement.

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Your Mac can do a lot, and there's plenty of functionality you might not even know about.

By [Alex Blake](#) Contributor DEC 21, 2025 7:04 am PST



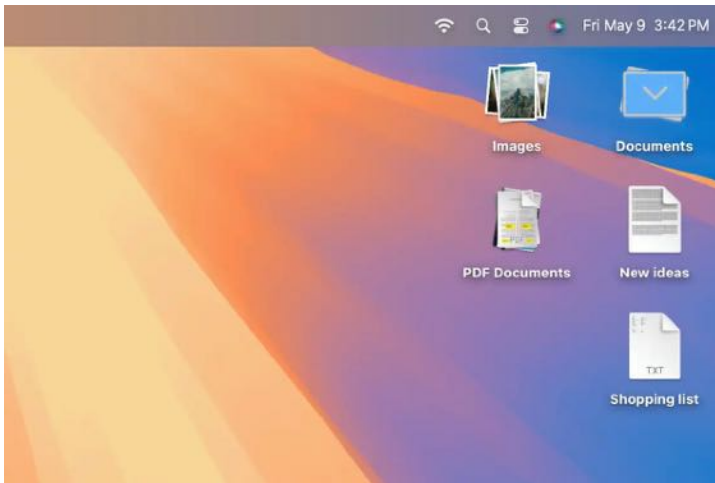
[Image: Yu Kato/Unsplash](#)

Your Mac is full of surprises, and even many years after first owning one, you can still find yourself learning new tips and tricks that you weren't aware of before.

There are many ingenious hidden features stashed away in macOS, and we're here to highlight eight of our favorites. They range from little-known tricks to overlooked gems, and each one should help improve the way you use your Mac.

1.

1. Desktop stacks



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After using your Mac for a while, it's easy to clog up your desktop with files and folders. I get it, I'm no monastic ascetic with a zen-like calm on my Mac desktop either. Thankfully, there's a way to bring order to chaos without having to laboriously stash all those items away one by one.

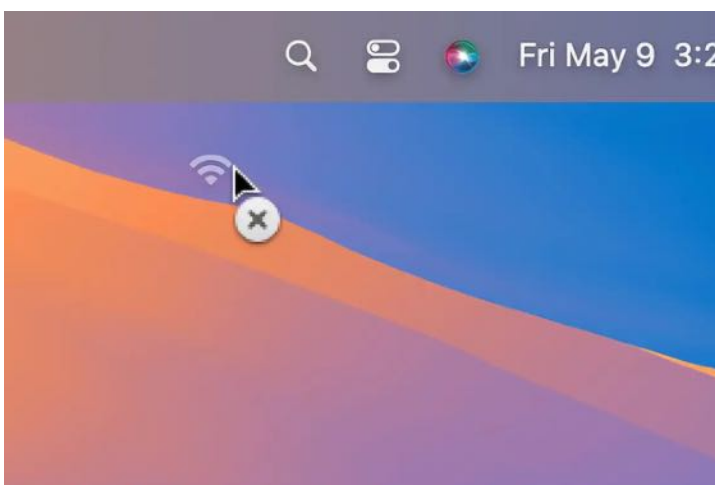
Let me introduce a feature called [desktop stacks](#). With this enabled, macOS will automatically group related files into what are essentially heaps on your desktop.

So, you'll find one pile for images, one

stack for PDF documents, one for presentations, and more. If you want to find an individual file, just click the stack and everything it contains will be revealed. Click again to hide the mess once more. Swipe two fingers across the stack and you can even browse through its files.

To get going with desktop stacks, just right-click your desktop and select the Use Stacks option. To turn it off, simply disable this option. And with that, your Mac brings the illusion of calm and order to your desktop, even if we all know what's lurking beneath the façade.

2. Menu customization



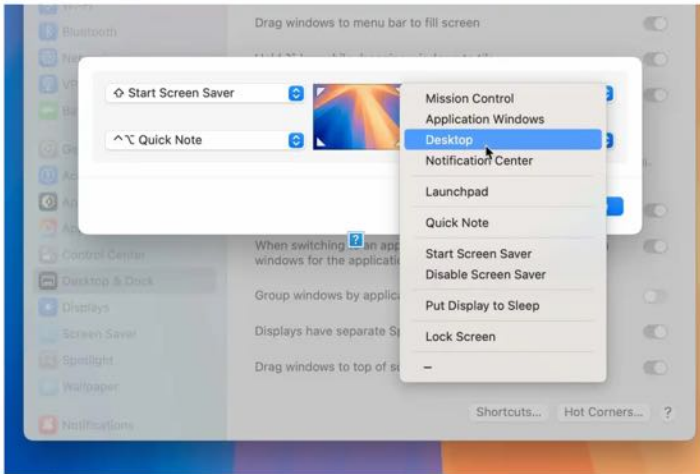
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The menu bar is a go-to place to find helpful controls for your apps and settings, but you don't need to just rely on what Apple decides to put there. Instead, you can dive in and customize it as you see fit.

To get started, open the System Settings app and select *Menu Bar* or *Control Center* (depending on which version of macOS you're running) in the left-hand sidebar. Here, you can browse through a range of options and decide whether to show them in the menu bar at all times, only when the app is active, or to hide them instead.

If you want to remove an icon from the menu bar, you have another option beyond using the Control Center section of the System Settings app. Instead, hold the Command key, then click and drag the item out of the menu bar. When an X appears next to your pointer, release your mouse button, and the icon will be removed.

3. Hot Corners



Need a quick way to access system functions like [Mission Control](#), [start a screen saver](#), or lock your Mac without fiddling with settings and menus? Try Hot Corners on for size. With these set up, you simply move your mouse pointer into a specified corner of your Mac's display and your chosen action will be performed.

Open the System Settings app and click *Desktop & Dock* in the sidebar, then scroll all the way to the bottom and click *Hot Corners*. You'll now see an image of your

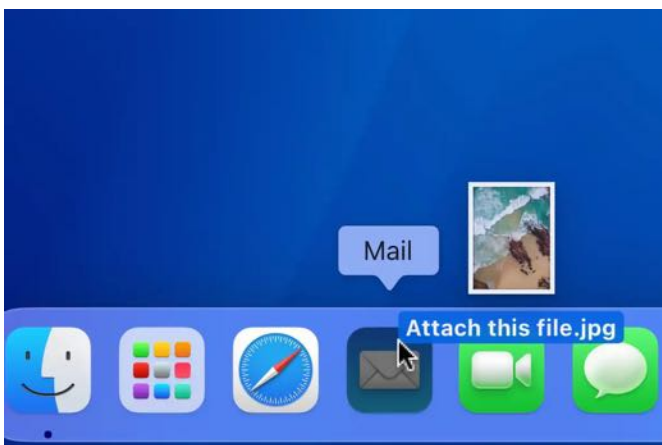
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desktop with four dropdown menus. Pick one, select an option from the menu, then select Done to confirm.

You can use Hot Corners to do a wide range of things, from showing your desktop or opening the Notification Center to launching a Quick Note or putting your screen to sleep. That gives the feature a lot of flexibility to adapt to your needs.

And if you're worried about accidentally setting off one of these actions, you can add a modifier key into the mix. Just open one of the dropdown menus, then hold Shift, Control, Option or Command. You can combine any number of these keys, so you might open Launchpad by holding Option and Command, then moving your mouse to the bottom-left corner of your screen, for example.

4. Drag and Dock



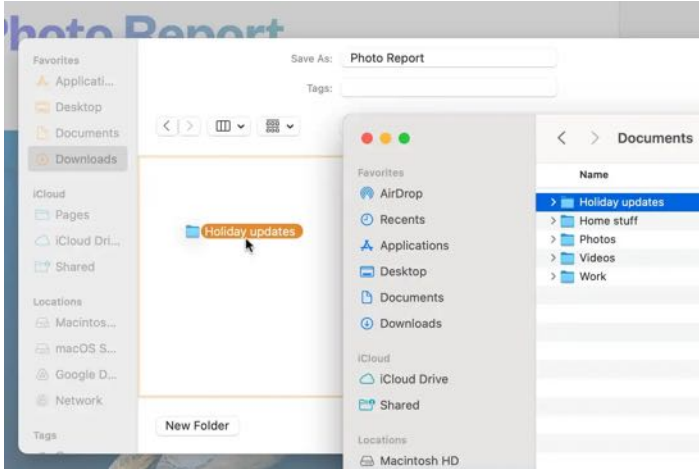
For most of us, the usual way of opening a file inside a specific app is to initially open the app, then load the file from there. But there's a quicker way that doesn't require you to load up the app first.

All you have to do is drag the file onto the app icon—*voilà*, the app starts up with the file ready to go. The easiest way to do this is to

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drop the file onto an app in your Dock, but you can do this wherever an app is stored; it works with apps housed in your Applications folder, for example. It could save you a little time if you're working with a folder of files and want to get started quickly.

5. Speedy saving



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There's another useful drag-and-drop feature that you might not know about, and this time it relates to saving files. Instead of having to click through folder after folder to get to the save location you need, there's a much faster way to save your files.

The next time you have a save dialog box open in an app, drag the destination folder directly onto the save window. Doing so will set the save location as the folder you just dragged into place. You can drag a folder from anywhere: from your desktop, from inside a Finder window, even from the path bar at the bottom of a Finder window.

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I'm something of a neurotic organizer on my Mac, with endlessly nested folders storing my neatly sorted files. Normally, it would be a pain to save something in the right place, but using this trick saves me a bunch of time every day. Now it can do the same for you, too.

6. Find my pointer



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You know you're having one of those days when even locating your mouse pointer on your Mac's screen can feel like a chore. The problem is exacerbated if you're using multiple monitors, where finding the pointer can seem akin to a wild goose chase.

Thankfully, Apple has come up with a brilliantly elegant solution to the problem: just shake your mouse. As you rapidly wiggle it side to side, your mouse pointer is blown up to gargantuan proportions, helping you locate it in a quick second.

Once you stop the movement, your pointer returns to normal, safely held under your watchful eye from now on.

7. Quick Look



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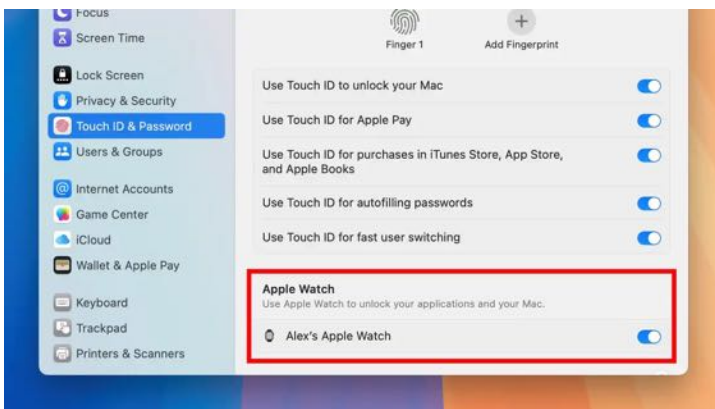
You might already be familiar with Quick Look, which allows you to click a file and press the Space bar to get a handy preview of the file in question. But did you know that Quick Look can do much more than just provide a peek at the file?

The next time you open an image with Quick Look, head over to the top-right corner of the preview window, where you'll see some useful editing tools, including a rotate button and a share option. You can open the file in the Preview app, or detect and highlight any

text that might be present using the button in the bottom-right corner.

But the more useful option is the markup button. Click this and you'll be able to draw on your image, add text, drop in a saved signature, crop it, add a comment, send it to your iPhone, and much more., without having to open the image in an app. If you just want to make a few simple changes, Quick Look could be all you need.

8. Unlock with Apple Watch



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Apple devices are great on their own, but just like the advice your high school coach probably once gave you, they work even better as a team. One of the best examples of this is what happens when you pair up your Mac with an Apple Watch.

When these two devices are linked, you can **automatically unlock your Mac** and compatible apps simply by wearing your Watch. As long as your Apple Watch is

unlocked, you'll be able to log into your Mac when it wakes without raising a finger (note that this won't work the first time you switch on your Mac; you need to have logged in once already).

Despite the obvious utility of this feature, it's not enabled by default. To turn it on, you need to open the System Settings app on your Mac and head to *Touch ID & Password* (or *Login Password*, depending on your Mac). There, under the "Use Apple Watch to unlock your applications and your Mac" text, enable the toggle next to the name of your Watch.

Author: Alex Blake, Contributor

Alex has been dabbling in Apple tech since he first got an iPhone 3GS and promptly jailbroke it for reasons he can't quite remember. Since then, he's interviewed Apple executives, scoured the internet for the most interesting apps and games, written countless features and how-to guides, and begrudgingly convinced himself that building a Hackintosh is probably more effort than it's worth. Based in the UK, he enjoys hiking, gaming, soccer, and the occasional spot of cidermaking.