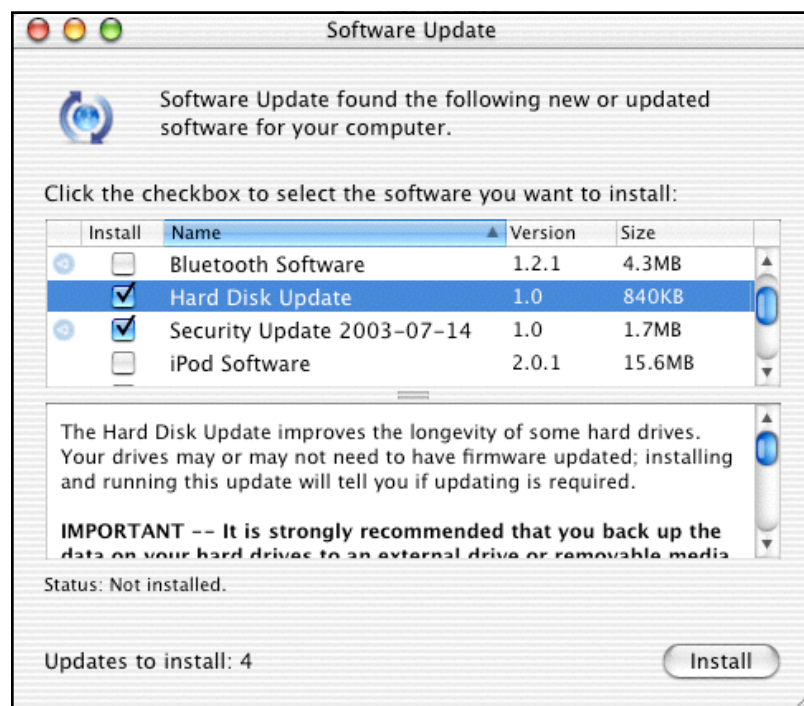


# Software Update

You've got a nasty, little nag in your life. No, not me, always telling you to backup your precious files! I'm a nasty, big nag. Instead, I'm referring to the *Software Update* system preference (control panel).

You've probably seen *Software Update* pop up, unbidden, and suggest that you install some new software that Apple has just released. Look familiar?

An example. Take a look at the *Software Update* window below. Do you see the listing for *Hard Disk Update version 1.0*? This is supposed to increase the usable life of the built-in hard drive on certain Mac models. Yes, it does this, but for about a tenth of the folks who install this update, their hard drive is destroyed! Instantly. Obviously, not something to take lightly.



This is not malicious. The problem is that computers are like us. Each Mac is unique because it has different software and added-on hardware (printers, scanners, Palms, *et cetera*). So, each behaves differently. Software makers cannot possibly test their software on every possible combination (though I wish they'd be a bit more thorough than they are). What are we to do?

*Software Update* is *NOT* your friend! While its heart is in the right place, *Software Update* is a source of very real concern. In the rush to fix problems or add attractive new features, many bugs and errors creep into new software releases. *Software Update* allows these new, buggy versions to be instantly available to everyone. In the past, the leading edge geeks got the new software first. These are the people best equipped to deal with the technical chaos that results. Now, everybody gets bug bitten by innocently following what appear to be benign instructions required by Apple.

You have two choices:

- 1) **Ignore it.** When *Software Update* nags you, just *Quit* it and ignore its messages. Don't worry, if something really important comes up, I'll warn you about it and make sure that you are updated.
- 2) **Prevent it.** You can stop *Software Update* from nagging by opening its System Preference (Mac OS X) or Control Panel (Mac OS 9) and unchecking the box next to: *Automatically check for updates when you have a network connection* (Mac OS X) or *Update software automatically* (Mac OS 9). Once done, *Software Update* will nag you no more.

# Media Players

**A must-have.** The internet is awash with video and audio content. News, movie trailers, music, ads (yuck!) are all over the place! But, to view these files and links, a media player is essential.

**Too many!** While there are over a dozen different video, animation and audio formats (each requiring its own, proprietary player), all but four are rare enough to ignore. The biggies are:

- QuickTime
- RealPlayer
- Windows Media Player
- Flash/Shockwave

**Fortunately, they're free!** Because the folks who make media players are competing with each other to sell the software necessary to make media files (and know that users will not pay to use the created media files), they all give away their players for free. You'll need to download and install them (an easy process if you have high-speed internet access, a chore if you use dial-up).

**My biased opinion of each player:**

**QuickTime:** The *QuickTime* player comes pre-installed on every Mac. *QuickTime* performs the best of all

players, but it is not the most common. If your *QuickTime* player is missing or you want to upgrade, go here: <http://www.apple.com/quicktime>

**RealPlayer:** This is the oldest, most common and popular player. Quality is fair to good. There is a pay-for version as well as a free version. Don't get the pay-for version unless the proprietary content extras are appealing to you. The free player works just as well as the pay-for version. The free version of *RealPlayer* is almost invisible, so be very careful and look closely at their web page to find the tiny link to the free version of *RealPlayer*. <http://www.real.com>

**Windows Media Player:** Despite the name, *Windows Media Player* (or WiMP as it is known), comes in a Mac version. Even though product quality is poor, WiMP is becoming more and more common as Microsoft bribes and bullies web sites into using it. Microsoft has stated that it has the goal of destroying *RealPlayer* and the *Real* company over the next few years (and they'll probably do it, too). So, WiMP will be more important as time goes on. Too bad it stinks! <http://www.microsoft.com/mac/otherproducts/otherproducts.aspx?pid=windowsmedia>

**Flash/Shockwave:** isn't technically a media player at all, but sure acts like one. This product is used to view interactive animations on the internet. Because of its interactive nature, it is often used to create internet games. Many web sites use *Flash* animations on their introductory page (much to the consternation of dial-up users). If this gets too obnoxious, look for a *Skip Intro* link (or some such) on the page.

[http://sdc.shockwave.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi?P5\\_Language=English&P5\\_Language=English](http://sdc.shockwave.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi?P5_Language=English&P5_Language=English)

## July Tip

Wow! Has it been hot! Your Mac doesn't like hot, so be sure that it can breathe easily. Check around your Mac to be sure that the ventilation holes and slots are not blocked by furniture or other objects. If the slots or holes look dusty, use your vacuum cleaner to remove the dust, but only from the outside of the case! Do not open the case and stick the vacuum hose inside (unless you want to see me real soon). If you have a Powerbook or iBook, use it on a hard surface that allows air to circulate underneath.

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