

Getting Ready For *Snow Leopard*!

Take the time to assess your Mac and make crucial preparations for the upgrade to OSX 10.6 *Snow Leopard*.

As the new Mac OSX 10.6 *Snow Leopard* operating system is becoming available, you need to make a decision regarding whether or not to upgrade, and you need to determine *if* your Mac can be upgraded. There certainly are some compelling reasons to take advantage of the enhancements that *Snow Leopard* will give us. (Go to www.apple.com for more information). If you have been using 10.5 *Leopard*, you are already enjoying many of the new features that were introduced in that version of the Big Cats. *Snow Leopard* will not provide many new features; it's really more about "under-the-hood" improvements like performance enhancements and an optimized system software framework. *Snow Leopard* will be faster. It will also serve to prepare our computers for future enhancements and technologies. Apple calls *Snow Leopard's* enhancements "User Experience Enhancements." Isn't that nice?

Readiness at a glance...

- Hardware Minimums Met?
- Software Compatibility
- Backups

What About the Pricing for *Snow Leopard*? Apple has provided *current Leopard users* with an upgrade option to *Snow Leopard* for the low, low price of \$29. If you are running 10.4.x *Tiger*, you can upgrade to *Snow Leopard* for \$129. For a real bargain, get the *Snow Leopard Box Set* for \$169 – includes *iLife '09* and *iWork '09*. If you recently purchased a current Mac with *Leopard* installed, you can upgrade for a mere \$9.95 (though it's likely that Apple will start including upgrade disks with new computers for free).

What Happens To *Tiger*? While Apple may still provide security updates to *Tiger* users, it's expected that support for *Tiger* will begin to phase out shortly. Therefore, you may consider now - or pretty soon - a good time to upgrade your operating system. Remember that while Apple has provided discounts to current *Leopard* users, if you are running *Tiger* you will not get these discounts and will need to pay the full \$129 price for *Snow Leopard*.

Do You Install Right Away? As always happens with a major new operating system revision, *there will be bugs and problems!* Also, due to some new software technologies, there will be software incompatibilities with current software. Some of you are really "into" this kind of thing and may be eager to upgrade. Go for it! But, please don't stop reading here; you, too, are subject to warnings!

I am an early adopter. I live for this stuff! But, I have the luxury of having an older "test" Mac that I will use for *Snow Leopard*.



My main “production” Mac will have to wait till the inevitable kinks are worked out with the eventual software and system updates.

In general, my recommendation for you non-early adopters is to wait to upgrade until at least the next update (10.6.1 or later) is issued. During that time, check with your software developer sites to determine if your versions of applications are *Snow Leopard* compatible. You may need to download and install upgrades. In some cases, you may need to pay for an upgrade.

If you are interested in monitoring how things are going with *Snow Leopard* once it is released, visit www.MacWorld.com for general news and www.MacFixit.com for the really detailed, geeky stuff.

Let’s dive in deeper and examine some additional issues:

1. Can your Mac take the upgrade to *Snow Leopard*?

As always, a new operating system will have some hefty new requirements in order to run properly and efficiently. First and foremost - and this is a controversial matter - *Snow Leopard* is **Intel-ONLY**. So, right out of the gate, **if you have a G5 or older Mac, you cannot upgrade to Snow Leopard**. OS X 10.5.x *Leopard* will be the last and latest OS version for your more mature Mac. [As of late August 2009, 10.5.8 is the latest version]. Apple **will continue** to support 10.5.x *Leopard* for a few more years and issue updates when appropriate. So, no need to gnash your teeth; your older Macs still have a long life of utility left in them! As for *Tiger*, Apple generally drops official support for an OS two versions back, so watch for this to happen soon.



OpenCL

One of the big advantages that *Snow Leopard* brings is its ability to exploit many more computing resources at once. One of the enhancements is called *OpenCL*, which allows the system to tap into the graphics processor in your Mac for everyday tasks when it’s not in use by other programs. Some Intel models will be able to take advantage of some of the new features in *Snow Leopard*. If you want to know more, I suggest you check Apple’s Technical Specification Page for *Snow Leopard* at www.apple.com/macosx/specs.html.

OpenCL Support: While *Snow Leopard* will run on **any** Intel system, its full speed and computing potential will only happen on the following models released so far:

MacBook Pro: Mid-2007 and later

MacBooks: Late 2008 models and later

MacBook Air: Late 2008 and later

iMacs: Only the 2009 models and later

Mac Mini: Only the 2009 models and later

Mac Pro: All models with upgrades, but only the 2009 models will support it out of the box

How do you check your Mac’s actual model designation?

Go to Apple’s warranty service page and have your serial number handy...
www.apple.com/support/serviceassistant/overview.html

The following models will run the Snow Leopard, but will not benefit from the enhanced power available from the GPU:

MacBook Pro: Prior to 2007
MacBook: Prior to 2008
MacBook Air: Early 2008 models
iMacs: Prior to 2009
Mac Mini: All except the 2009 models



64-bit Computing and Grand Central Support: Bottom line, The term “64-bit” computing has to do with faster processing, being able to access more RAM memory and work with larger files. New to *Snow Leopard* is something called *Grand Central*. Basically, it’s a feature that allows full use of multi-core processors (the Core-2 Duo is the typical dual-core processor, but there are higher-end models with 4 and 8 cores). However, applications must also support this feature. This means that applications updates are also on their way to your machines.



Grand Central Dispatch

A few early Intel models were **not** dual-core (ie; not *Core-2 Duo*), but rather single-core (ie; *Core Solo* and *Core Duo*). So, the following models **do not** support *Grand Central* and 64-bit computing:

MacBook Pro: Before late 2006
MacBook: Before late 2006
iMac: Before late 2006
Mac Mini: Before mid 2007

RAM Memory Requirements: The minimum requirement is 1 GB, so all models are covered.

How To Determine Which Model You Have: If you are not certain what hardware you are running on your system, go to the Apple Menu and select “About This Mac.” A pane will open showing you some basic specifications, such as OS Version number running, processor type, and RAM memory installed. Next, click on the “More Info ...” button. This launches a utility called *System Profiler* - an application that sits in your Utilities folder. Within *System Profiler*, highlight the “Hardware” category (not any subcategory). This will show you a “Hardware Overview” list which will display information about the processor type and the number of processors available to the system, and should say whether or not the processor is a “Core Solo”, “Core Duo”, or “Core 2 Duo”. To then find out what graphics processor you have,



click on the "Graphics/Displays" subsection, the graphics chipset model should be listed at the top in bold. If the processor and graphics card models match the requirements detailed previously, then you should be good to go for all that *Snow Leopard* has to offer.

Do you want to find out the actual Apple official designation of your Mac - like "MacBook [13-inch, Late 2006]? You need to go to Apple's Warranty information page, and have your Mac's serial number ready to plug in. Go to www.apple.com/support/serviceassistant/overview.html

2. Will your software programs be *Snow Leopard*-compatible?.

Two caveats about this: Some current applications may either break under *Snow Leopard* or they will work but not be able to take advantage of some new underlying technologies built into *Snow Leopard*. It is rather likely, however, that most applications will work fine, but it is important that you verify this - especially for your must-work, "mission-critical" applications! Check your software's support website and, if necessary, download and install any updates. In most cases, unless you have very old versions, the updates will be free. Additionally, I recommend going to www.versiontracker.com as a clearinghouse for quality Mac software and updates.

3. Verify that your backups are current.

You *are* making regular backups of your document and picture files, right? This becomes even more critical when you are about to make such a major change to your system. Aside from whatever form of backups you make, I suggest that you "clone" your Macs internal drive to an external Firewire drive - making an identical startup drive with all your data, programs and operating system. My favorite cloning program is *SuperDuper!* by Shirt Pocket Software.

(www.shirt-pocket.com). You should clone your drive right before upgrading to *Snow Leopard* just in case it doesn't work out for you and you need to revert back to the way things were just before you launched the *Snow Leopard* installer. Also, if you have been using Apple's *Time Machine* with your *Leopard* System, be sure to force a final *Time Machine* refresh before the actual upgrade.



One more thing; do you have an extra external drive? Make a second clone. During the OS upgrade process, there will be a period of time when you only have one backup ... but guess what, you actually *don't have a backup* during that period – just one copy of your data! Paranoid? Maybe. But I never take chances with my precious data!

Want to Learn More?

As *Snow Leopard* is making its way out into the world of Mac users, there is plenty of information out on the interwebs, and it gets confusing; not to mention that there is a lot of bad information out there as well.

Here's a list of resources that I follow:

www.Apple.com/macosx - This is Apple's own area that discusses all things *Snow Leopard*. Don't forget to go to Apple Support Center (**Support.Apple.com**) for searches to specific questions and issues.

support.apple.com/kb/HT3258 - This takes you directly to an Apple Knowledge Base article that lists known *Snow-Leopard* incompatible software that will be disabled during the installation process.

www.MacWorld.com - This is a great site for plenty of up-to-the-minute, reliable technical information about everything Mac. Recently, they have posted a number of excellent articles about the *Snow Leopard* upgrade.

www.MacFixIt.com - This is one of my principal resources for the really technical stuff. It used a subscription model, but starting in early September 2009, it will be free. Geek-Alert on this one!

www.TakeControlBooks.com - Finally, I consistently recommend the *Take Control* series of Mac technical books. I can't recommend these PDF-based e-books highly enough! They are written by well-established technical experts, and are constantly updated, and inexpensive (typically \$10 for a download edition). The updates are free, by the way. On *Snow Leopard* release day, August 28, two *Take Control* books were made available: *Take Control of Upgrading to Snow Leopard*, and *Take Control of Exploring & Customizing Snow Leopard*.

**WHETHER YOU UPGRADE OR NOT ...
... DON'T FORGET TO BACKUP YOUR DATA!!**