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GIMP

The Official Handbook



Comprehensive Learning Tool

Olof S. Kylander
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GIMP: The Official Handbook

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Gimp: The Official Handbook

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CHAPTER

6

Files And Preferences

In this chapter, we will discuss how to save, open and create files, and how to set preferences. We will also cover how to list the file formats supported by Gimp and how to print from Gimp.

THE FILE MENU

In Gimp, you can get to the **File menu** in two different ways: by clicking on the File command at the top of the toolbox, or by clicking the right mouse button in an image window and moving your mouse cursor down to the File command. The menus are slightly different in the two places; in the *toolbox* File menu, you will find the following menu items:

- New
- Open
- About...
- Preferences...
- Tip of the day
- Dialogs
- Quit

And in the *right-click* File menu, you will find:

- New
- Open
- Save
- Save as
- Preferences...
- Close
- Quit
- Mail image
- Onroot
- Print

In the *Xtns* menu (in the toolbox), you will find:

- DB Browser
- Guash
- Screen Shot
- Watersselect
- Script-Fu
- Web Browser

With the exception of the **Dialogs** and **Script-Fu** menu entries, we'll discuss every entry in these three menus. You will find information on the dialogs for Brushes, Gradients, Palettes and Patterns in "Brushes, Gradients, Palettes And Patterns" starting on page 171. Script-Fu will be discussed in "Script-Fu:

Description And Function” starting on page 687 and in “Mike Terry’s Black Belt School Of Script-Fu” starting on page 697.

CREATING IMAGES



Let’s start by creating our first image. Click on the File menu in the toolbox, and select **New**. This will bring up the dialog box shown to the right.

The dialog box allows you to decide the size of your image in pixels, whether your image should be grayscale or RGB and what color it should be filled with, or whether it should be Transparent (alpha-enabled).

As you can see, three solid backgrounds are available: Background, Foreground and White. **White** will produce a white background, and **Background** will produce a colored background based on the background color in the toolbox (more about choosing a color from the toolbox background/foreground swatches can be found in “The Color Selection Dialog” on page 143.) **Foreground** will create a background using the foreground color in the toolbox. **Transparent** results in a checkerboard-like background that signifies transparency, or the presence of an alpha channel (a convenient feature for creating transparent GIFs).



Figure 6.1 The New file dialog

For now, let’s stick to the default values; just click on OK. Now you have a workspace to work in. Close the image by choosing right-click|File|Close. Note that right-click|File|Quit will both close your image and quit Gimp.

You may wonder why you can’t create an *indexed* image (an image with a small, fixed set of specific colors) right away. After all, it would be great for that nice GIF you’re trying to make for your web site. The reason for this is that you haven’t chosen a set of colors, and Gimp can’t predict which colors you’ll use in your image.

It’s almost always a very bad idea to start out with an indexed image. You should create GIFs by converting your completed image from RGB to indexed (see “RGB, Grayscale And Indexed” on page 266). The rule of thumb is: Always work with RGB (or with whatever color model you need) and don’t convert it until you’re finished.



GUASH



One of Gimp’s most useful features is **Guash**. If you have worked on a UNIX system before, you have probably used **xv** and its Visual Schnauzer. **Visual Schnauzer** displays thumbnails of images, and allows you to browse through the thumbnails and load images using a graphical interface. Or if you’re a former Macintosh and Photoshop user, and you’re used to the small thumbnails in an image directory, then you’re going to love Guash. Guash lets you browse your home directory and see all of your images as small thumbnails.

Files And Preferences



To start Guash, select it from the Toolbox menu `Xtns | Guash`. When you first start Guash, it will scan your home directory, looking for image files that Gimp can read. If it finds a **PostScript** file, a dialog box will appear in which you can press **Load** to load the image, or select **Cancel** to skip that file. This is a nice feature, because loading PostScript files can be slow. In addition, because PostScript files are sometimes very large, they can take up a great deal of space in the `gimpswap` file, the temporary file that Gimp creates when it opens a file.

Tip: Load PostScript files only if you need to, and only load the first page in any case.

Guash's directory scanning can take quite some time (five minutes or even more), depending on the number of images in the directory being scanned. Once the scan has completed, simply double-click on a thumbnail to load it (the first click will select it; the second opens it), and the image will open in a regular Gimp window.

Guash only displays a set number of directories or images at a time. To change Guash's default behavior, you need to edit the `gimprc` file in your `.gimp` directory. Look for (or add) the following entries:

- `guash-ncol "5"` changes the number of columns (valid range is 4 to 10)
- `guash-nrow "3"` changes the number of rows (valid range is 2 to 10)
- `guash-keybindings "emacs"` enables Emacs-style key bindings

If you click on a Guash thumbnail, it will become selected and will be highlighted with a red frame. If you click once more on the highlighted image, it will be loaded into Gimp. To select or deselect more images, hold down the Shift key and click on their thumbnails.

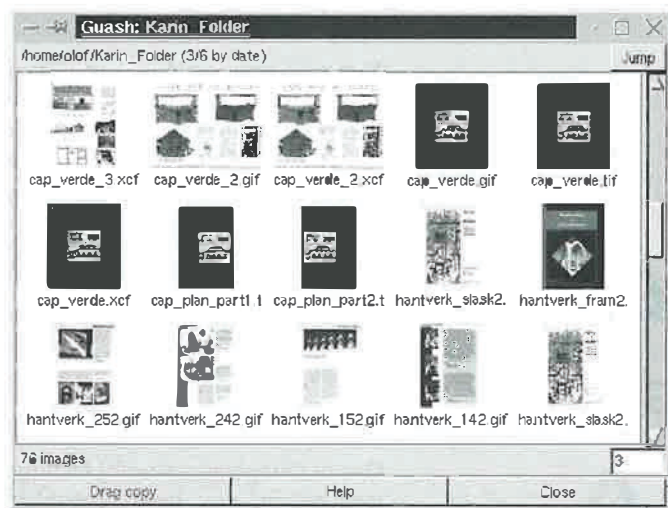


Figure 6.2 The Guash window

If no images are selected, pressing the right mouse button will bring up a **root menu**. If any images are selected, a right-click will produce a **select menu**, which allows you to perform various operations on the selected images.

All of the items on the menus are easy to use and learn. To get the root menu when images are selected, hold down Shift and press the right mouse button.

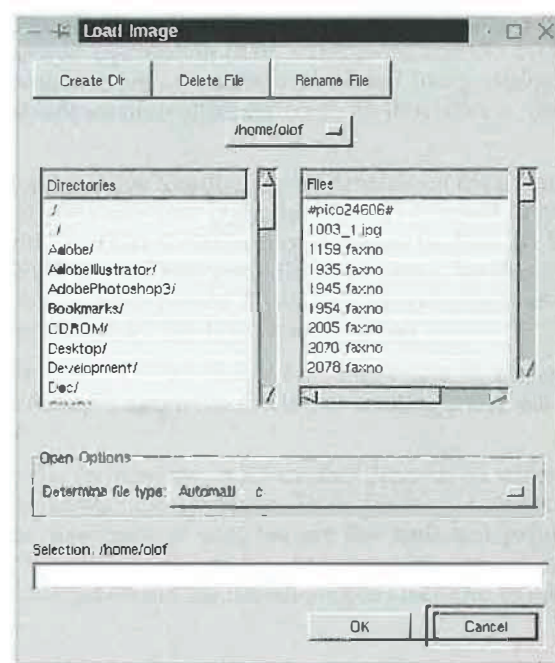
In Guash, you can do all the usual file management sorts of things (moving, copying and deleting images, and creating directories). You can even apply UNIX commands and, more importantly, Script-Fu “commands” to your images from either the root or select menu.

The **Jump** button (at the top-right corner) allows you to quickly change directories. The Jump menu also includes shortcuts to directories you’ve already visited. You can also bring up a file dialog, which makes it simple to move quickly to another directory. We recommend using the Jump menu, because moving around within Guash can be quite slow, because Guash scans each directory you visit for images.

OPENING FILES

Next, we’ll open an image using File!Open. This will pop up the **Load Image** dialog box, which allows you to browse file names so you can select the image you want. In the **Determine file type** pull-down menu, you can choose what kind of file you want to open, or let Gimp do it automatically (by leaving it at Automatic).

Figure 6.3 *The Load Image dialog*



Files And Preferences

In general, it's a good idea to let Gimp figure out the file type. If Gimp is having a hard time with a particular file, then you can step in and lend a hand by manually specifying the file type.

Familiarize yourself with the interface by opening some images in common formats like GIF, JPEG and TIFF). Later in this chapter, we'll discuss what kind of formats Gimp can read and write.



Tip: Gimp can automatically **expand** your file name, so you only have to enter enough of the name to uniquely identify the file. Then, press the Tab key to fill in the rest of the file name, just as you can do in certain UNIX shells.

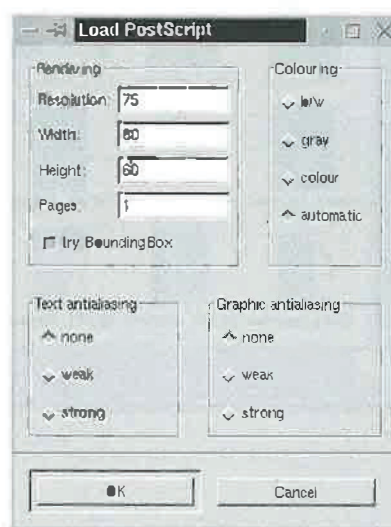
The Load Image dialog box also allows you to delete (**Delete File**) and rename (**Rename File**) files. To do this, simply click on the file to select it and press the corresponding button. This will bring up a **confirmation** dialog box. To create a directory, press the **Create Dir** button and a dialog box will prompt you for the name of the directory.

If you've just created a new directory (or have made any changes to the files in the displayed directory), remember to double-click on the current directory symbol (. /) to update the file listing; otherwise, you won't see the changes. The ability to create directories in the **Load Image** or **Save Image** dialogs is actually quite handy, as you'll often find you'll want to save images for a new project in a new directory.

OPENING POSTSCRIPT AND PDF FILES

If you select a PostScript or PDF file in the Load Image dialog box, and then click on OK, Gimp will pop up a **Load PostScript** dialog box, as shown. Our advice is to not change any values here if you're going to print it at home or in the office — the default values are fine when displaying the paper formats that are normally used for PostScript files.

Figure 6.4 *The Load PostScript dialog*



If you lower the **Resolution**, you'll also have to reduce the **Width** and **Height** of the image canvas (and vice versa, if you increase the resolution). Note that if you don't change the width and height when you increase the resolution, only part of your PostScript file will be displayed. On the other hand, if the width or height exceeds the size of your PostScript file, the display will automatically be adjusted.

If you uncheck the **try BoundingBox** checkbox, the pages will be stacked over each other; otherwise, they will be displayed side by side. The **Pages** entry allows you to specify what page or page interval to display; for example, 1–99 specifies pages 1 to 99, and 75 specifies page 75 (if your PostScript file has fewer pages than the numbers you specify, the numbers will be adjusted automatically).

Selecting **b/w** will produce a black-and-white image from a color PostScript file. **Gray** or **color** will produce a grayscale or a colored image, respectively. **Automatic** will produce whatever type of image the PostScript file was created as. Of course, you can't obtain a colored image from a black-and-white PostScript file, even if you select color. Gimp is good, but it's not that good!

You can also specify the level of **antialiasing** for text and graphics. If you only want a quick look at your file, then select **none** or **weak**. On the other hand, if you're done working on the file and you're going to press, then select **strong**.

SAVING IMAGES

Gimp lets you save the images you've created. Isn't that wonderful? A *free* program with save abilities! Compare this to using Photoshop for free in demo mode, where *"save and print are disabled, this is a demo copy."*

You can access the **Save Image dialog** by pressing the right mouse button in the window that contains the image you want to save: `right-click|File|Save As`. The Save Image dialog is exactly the same as the **Load Image** dialog, except that the Determine file type menu is a bit different. In this context, the default is By extension.

By extension means that the format of the resulting image depends on the image file's extension. For example, if you name your image `hello.gif`, it will automatically be saved in GIF format. You can of course choose to save `hello.gif` in TIFF format, by selecting TIFF in the **Determine file type** menu, but this is not a good idea, because it tends to confuse people. If you want to save a file without an extension, then you *must* choose the file type from the menu.

Note: Remember to **flatten** the layers in your image *before you save it*, unless you are saving in **XCF** format (Gimp's native file format) or creating a **GIF** animation.

Gimp supports many different file formats; the exact number depends on which plug-ins you have installed. Yes, as with most things in Gimp, file format support is implemented with **plug-ins**. Examples of plug-ins are the **mail** and **print** plug-ins, and all of the **filters**. We will discuss plug-ins in general later on in this book. Right now, we will concentrate on the file format plug-ins included in the base Gimp distribution.

GIMP

The Official Handbook

The complete reference to GIMP for both new GIMP users and experienced graphic artists

GIMP: The Official Handbook is the authoritative guide to the GNU Image Manipulation Program, which until recently has been available only on the GIMP home page (www.gimp.org) as the GIMP Users Manual. *GIMP: The Official Handbook* is the most comprehensive source of GIMP information and covers nearly all aspects of GIMP, including detailed documentation of current functions and plug-ins. The book is stuffed with in-depth descriptions, tips, techniques, and examples of GIMP key concepts. Together with the accompanying CD, the book provides you with all the tools you need to begin using GIMP—the core GIMP application, additional plug-ins/filters, and printing, scripting, scanning, and Xinput extensions.

This book is written for:

Any UNIX or Linux user, from beginner to the most advanced graphic professional, who wants to know all aspects of GIMP.

This book will help you:

- Explore the full power of GIMP
- Understand and use layers, modes, channels, and masks
- Use pressure-sensitive tablets
- Write your own GIMP Script-Fu or Perl-Fu script
- Paint and draw images and learn to manipulate them
- Understand and utilize all available GIMP filters
- Work with and apply color to images
- Scan images and photographs into GIMP



The CD-ROM for this book is packed with tools you can use right away. Look inside the back cover.



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GIMP: The Official Handbook Is Written For:

- Graphic artists and animators
- Web content developers

What Approach And Skill Levels Does GIMP: The Official Handbook Present?

This book can take you from "square one" with GIMP, all the way through advanced features like filters, scripting, and animation. The presentation is a straightforward, hands-on tutorial, with plenty of examples and a full-color gallery of GIMP graphics to get you thinking creatively.

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- The White Papers series provides Open Source documentation in a readable, well-indexed format.
- The Commentary series gives you cross-indexed source code and annotations for major products.
- Black Books provide immediate solutions to global programming and administrative challenges.
- Little Black Books provide command and syntax summaries and quick explanations of Open Source software.

User Level: Beginner to Advanced