

CachyOS Review

CachyOS, an Arch Linux [https://wiki.archlinux.org/title /Arch Linux](https://wiki.archlinux.org/title/Arch_Linux) distro, jumped to the top of <http://distrowatch.com> about a year ago, with Mint then in second position. This link gives some reasons why https://wiki.cachyos.org/cachyos_basic/why_cachyos/

Installation is done from a live distro <https://cachyos.org/download> , which in keeping with the **Arch Linux philosophy of simplicity, modernity, pragmatism and user centrality**, means only a 4 Gbyte flash drive is needed for installation. The live distro download is updated regularly, as would be expected with the Arch Linux rolling release model. You are warned when your installation distro isn't the latest. (When I downloaded a newer version, I found that the iso checksum hadn't been updated on the download page, but I was able to confirm the installation iso was genuine, by checking it against the .sig file. That file and the associated verification steps are also included on the download page.)

The small size of the installation iso (about 3 GBytes) means there's not much to play with in the live distro – just enough to get a feel for how the distro looks and feels, though it does include the Firefox browser, so you can check out how web based applications work in this default browser. (There's a choice of 9 different browsers after installation if you don't like Firefox – or there's another 2 variants of Firefox; Esr and Pure!)

The usual installation option choices are provided, plus you need an internet connection. Installation took about 25 minutes on a recent model ASUS Zenbook, using a mobile network with a 60Mbps download capacity. It took only 10 minutes on a year old desktop with an Ethernet connection to a 500 Mbps NBN connection. Some of the installation time is used to determine package choices optimised for your hardware. See https://wiki.cachyos.org/installation/installation_on_root for some helpful installation tips, which begins with some important warnings.

The big difference between CachyOS and other Linux distros I've installed, is the massive EFI partition size required, because CachyOS includes /boot in that partition, along with recovery boot files if you use the BTRFS file system for the main installation. With a Mint installation, typically only a couple of hundred megabytes is needed and that can support several different Linux distros as well as Windows, but CachyOS requires an EFI partition size of at least 4,096 megabytes or the installation won't proceed. (Using gparted, on my laptop, I shrank my Mint partition to create room for both CachyOS as well as an extra EFI partition, rather than attempting to expand the existing EFI partition on a new, shared laptop. The extra EFI partition can be created anywhere on the drive, as long as the boot flag is set for that partition. I successfully expanded the previous EFI partition on my desktop without a problem.) After the laptop installation, which included the default kernels to which I added a hardened kernel (see below), 475 megabytes of the new EFI boot partition was used. My desktop installation with the default standard and LTS kernels only required 471 megabytes. The CachyOS installation needed less than 10 gigabytes of disk space on my desktop! Depending on your intended use of CachyOS, you could get by with a main partition size of as small as 50 Gbytes, though a minimum of 100 Gbytes should suffice for general usage. RAM usage was just under 3 gigabytes.

BTRFS is the default file system used by CachyOS, but other file system options are available including the venerable EXT4 file system. I opted for BTRFS for my desktop after

opting for the more familiar EXT4 file system on my laptop. BTRFS natively includes recovery support, which slightly slows performance, but there are good arguments for using it in preference to EXT4 if you use a solid state drive (SSD). Your boot options increase to include booting via recovery files as they are created.

During the installation prompt for your name and hence a suggested username, in the associated password prompt, you are asked whether the same password should be used for your root administration account or whether you'd prefer a different password. The CachyOS filesystem is given the default label of 'root', so you can change that to something else using your favourite partition management tool, as 'root' isn't used in the /etc/fstab file.

Interestingly, both the desktop and laptop installations didn't prompt for a swap partition assignment, even when it was available. If your computer contains an older spinning hard disk drive (HDD) you could include some dedicated swap space on that drive. On systems with SSDs, the modern preference is to use a swap file in the root partition, supported by Zswap or Zram to minimise writes of the compressed swap file to the SSD. CachyOS doesn't automatically set that up for you.

The CachyOS boot menu is by default generated by limine, but Grub, rEFInd and SystemD boot loaders can also be used. (I experimented with all but SystemD and I think my preference might be for rEFInd, which dynamically determines the bootable operation systems at startup.) During installation, the CachyOS boot menu didn't pick up my previously installed operating systems on either machine. Running `sudo limine-scan` picked up the older boot loader menu in the established EFI system partition on my laptop and added the option to choose it from the boot menu. Regaining easy access to earlier installed distros on my desktop hasn't proved as straightforward.

```
bash
sudo limine-update
sudo limine-snapper-sync # If you are refreshing Btrfs system
snapshot
```

The default Cachy OS window manager is KDE-Plasma using Wayland. Cinnamon Mint users will find menu usage familiar and many other window managers can be subsequently installed for those wishing to explore alternatives. (My primary reason for trying CachyOS, was that Cinnamon Mint on my new laptop, randomly and annoyingly loses the ability to capture mouse and keyboard input. It's caused by an X11 bug and unfortunately Cinnamon Mint needs to run on X11 for a stable experience. Frustratingly, Mint is unlikely to transition to Wayland until the end of the year. Of note, when I chose the Cinnamon Mint desktop environment for a CachyOS installation, the same bug occurred.)

On reboot, by default, CachyOS remembers the last used operating system and if you were using CachyOS, the last used kernel and the open applications when you last shut down.

System updates are managed in a similar way to Mint, through a red dot appearing in the taskbar Cachy-Update icon, but with the addition of a warning pop-up, prompting you to initiate updates when they become available. You are first asked if you want to read any new

Arch News updates in the resulting terminal session, prior to continuing with system updates. CachyOS updates were more frequently provided than Mint updates in my 2 months of experience. Unfortunately, unlike with the Mint update process, there's no easy way to check release notes for updates. As with Mint, you are prompted to reboot after kernel updates, but unlike Mint, after updates, you are prompted to start some or all of the services which were stopped for updating.

Terminal sessions are provided by Alacritty, *'a fast, cross platform OpenGL terminal emulator'* which uses fish (**f**riendly **i**nteractive **s**hell). Fish uses fastfetch (similar to neofetch) to provide a system report on start up, which can be disabled if you wish.

The CachyOS Kernel Manager included in the default installation, enables you to install multiple kernels in addition to the default installed standard and Long Term Support (LTS) kernels. This includes security hardened kernels, which are a better option for servers, but can break features supportive of desktop computing. In addition to the default installation kernels 6.18.33-2 LTS and 7.0.10-2 (subsequently automatically upgraded to 7.0.11-1 and then the new 7.1 kernel within days of its release, with 7.2.rc1-2 (release candidate) available early in July), I installed Linux 7.0.11-1-cachyos-hardened to see how it would effect desktop use and so far, it seems to provide better support than the LTS kernel.

While a default Mint installation includes typically used applications for personal use, with CachyOS you need to install further applications depending upon your intended purpose, for which you use the CachyOS Hello app or Shelley. Only 1,235 packages are installed from Pacman in the base installation, which included the optional standard printer support I selected. This didn't work as seamlessly as Mint. For those with a HP printer, there's a further optional choice of support packages.

CachyOS is obviously intended for the experienced Linux user, not someone migrating from Microsoft Windows or an Apple Mac. There's no included emulator such as WINE to support Microsoft applications. This, plus the lack of commonly used desktop apps, along with the requirement to create a large EFI partition, are the primary reasons I would not recommend CachyOS for a beginner. However for situations where there is only a small amount of disk storage room, CachyOS would make an excellent distro choice and it also looks to be a very good distro for further exploration of Linux.

Some Niggles

After laptop installation, I couldn't install LibreOffice, receiving an error about missing download files. However, it was easy to fix the problem through an online search which recommend that prior to installation, **Run a full system update to ensure all libraries are matching:** `sudo pacman -Syu`

The LibreOffice installation done a few weeks later on my desktop was straight-forward, which may reflect what appears to be excellent update support.

Attempting to run applications from a launching application seemingly didn't launch the requested applications - but that was because they had opened behind the launching app.

CachyOS seems to be fairly well documented, both within the installed system and online, but some of the documentation is dated. With the rolling release approach used, I'd say there

will always be opportunities for those who particularly like CachyOS, to contribute to this open source offering, by volunteering to improve the distro's documentation.

Conclusions

CachyOS is a stable, highly customisable distro which can be easily set up for different types of usage through the CachyOS Package Installer. It seems to be well supported both within the installed distro and through on line documentation. The Systems Settings app comprehensively covers a wide range of systems settings, allowing for detailed customisation of the user interface. My ASUS Zenbook laptop hardware seems to have good support, so I'm keeping CachyOS installed on both my laptop and desktop.

For those interested in exploring this topic of the best Linux distro for people looking at switching to Linux, the May 2026 APC #558, has a 14 page article **“Linux Distro – Which to Choose & Why”**. (See the appendix for instructions on how to freely access electronic versions of APC.) This article assesses 8 common distros including Mint, which is one of the highly recommended distros, but not CachyOS, though it does assess the KDE Neon desktop on Ubuntu. Their Labs Winner is Ubuntu 25.10, though Manjaro Linux, an Arch Linux distro, is also highly recommended. There's more on this topic in that same APC issue **“Running on Empty - Is Time up for Windows”**. That seven page article starts on page 58 and works through *“whether you really need Microsoft's once omnipresent OS at all”*.

Appendix: How to Access APC Online through the SA Public Library Network

You can use the Libby app to freely access the electronic versions of APC magazine issues, going back 3 years. Start Libby, then just above the bottom menu section, select the three dots '...' towards the bottom right. In the Series field, bottom left, type 'APC' and tap that text. Scroll through to select the relevant magazine issue. You can set up tags to give you a reminder of when a new issue is available, titles you've saved and much more. Ask a public librarian for further assistance if needed.