

Slackware 13.0



Which distro was forged in the mists of time and still manages to stay relevant today? **Nick Veitch** and Slackware find their common ground.

In brief...

» Mainstream, no-frills distro. It's the contemporary of Debian.

Core Software

- Kernel 2.6.29.6
- KDE 4.2.4
- Xfce 4.6.1
- Firefox 3.5.2
- Thunderbird 2.0.0.23
- X.org 1.6.3

Slackware may be the longest-running Linux distro – it started the month before Debian back in 1993 – but it's not the oldest. Early versions were based on SLS, which has a strong claim to the title of 'original' Linux distro, and Slackware soon gained a following because of the meticulous way it was constructed. Little has changed in the underlying ethos since then, and the project's lead developer Patrick Volkerding is still painstakingly making each release at the rate of about one a year.

You can tell whether or not Slackware will suit you from the install script. You see, if it asks you questions you can't answer or you can't partition a drive from the command line, you're woefully unprepared to do anything with the distro once you get it installed.

This isn't a case of text-based machismo, though, and the distro doesn't go out of its way to make things hard for you. It just doesn't have 25 layers of dumbed-down user interface to mollycoddle you.

Once you've got the distro running, there's plenty of new stuff to see in Slackware 13.0. Well, new to Slackware

“The most radical change is the new package format.”

anyway. Just as the other distros are moving to KDE 4.3, Slackware has updated to 4.2.4. The last release came with LDE 3, so this is a huge change, and we're looking forward to the reaction it will get from the more conservative Slackware users. And if you don't like KDE 4, you can always switch to Xfce or Fluxbox. Gnome isn't part of the standard Slackware package tree, but it's usually packaged by third parties such as Gware (www.gware.org) and the excellent Dropline (www.droplinegnome.org).

In addition to the switch to KDE, dealing with X server is now easier thanks to the inclusion of the latest X.org server, which can almost always



» Behold – the future! Well, the last version of the future that was stable. Yup, KDE 4.2.4 is now the default desktop, but other flavours are available.

conjure up a config file for itself on the fly when it runs. Be warned that getting it to work with proprietary drivers can require a certain amount of computing voodoo, though.

Not slacking off

The most radical change, however, is the new package format. For the last 16 years, Slackware has relied on tarballs as its chief method of distribution. Tarballs still work, but the slackware distro will now be based on packages with the TXZ extension. In essence, these are the same beast by a different name – it's just that the packaging tools now support different compression methods, including the new default, LZMA (as used by the open source 7-Zip archiver). The reason behind the change is simple – space. LZMA files are about 5% smaller than their zip counterparts, which means even more can be squeezed on a DVD (but there's still no room for *OpenOffice.org*).

In everyday use, Slackware is pleasing for those who know how to configure it, but it isn't suitable for newbies. In some ways, it may seem like Slackware requires you to be anything but slack, but there's a point behind this. It's arguably the most 'Unix-y'

version of Linux and tries to stick to all the best conventions. Think about it – how many times have you hand-crafted a config file or an **fstab** only to have it mangled by the likes of **Yast** because the OS thinks it knows better than you? That's not going to happen with Slackware. Configuring systems with *Vim* rather than a GUI app may not be fast, but it is more transparent and obvious in the long run.

Slackware enjoys plenty of desktop and server fans, and this release gives us no reason to think that popularity won't endure until Slackware 14.0. **LXF**

LINUX FORMAT Verdict

Slackware 13.0

Developer: Patrick J Volkerding
Web: www.slackware.org
Price: Free under GPL

Features	6/10
Performance	9/10
Ease of use	5/10
Documentation	7/10

» Stable, secure and simple. If you have the time and skill to set it up properly, you'll love this.

Rating 7/10