



The Best Cloud Storage and File-Sharing Services for 2024

Storing and syncing files in the cloud makes your life easier and keeps your data safer. The best cloud storage services let you easily share and access files from anywhere and restore them if something goes wrong.



By [Michael Muchmore](#), [Jill Duffy](#)

Dec 05, 2024

Overview



Microsoft OneDrive

Best Overall

[Jump To Details](#)

[See It](#)



Proton Drive

Proton Drive

Best Privacy and Security

[Jump To Details](#)

[See It](#)



IDrive

Best Price

[Jump To Details](#)

[See It](#)



Google Drive

Best for Google Workspace Users

[Jump To Details](#) [See It](#)

Sync



Best for Simple, Straightforward Syncing

[Jump To Details](#)

[See It](#)



Apple iCloud Drive

Best for Mac and iPhone Users

[Jump To Details](#)



Box (Personal)

Best Business Integrations

[Jump To Details](#)



Dropbox

Best Integration With Third-Party Services

[Jump To Details](#)

[See It](#)

File syncing and storage services, also called cloud storage services, are a huge convenience. They let you get your data—Word docs, PDFs, spreadsheets, photos, etc.—wherever you are. And they create a backup of all your files by default. Some also let multiple people edit files at the same time. PCMag has been testing and reviewing cloud storage services for more than 15 years. We rate them based on ease of use, reliability, whether they work on all major platforms, extra features, and price. Microsoft OneDrive is our top pick overall, earning our Editors' Choice award and a rare five-star rating. But there are plenty of other compelling choices depending on your needs and budget, so read on for the best cloud storage services we've tested.

You Can Trust Our Reviews

Since 1982, PCMag has tested and rated [thousands of products](#) to help you make better buying decisions. [Read our editorial mission](#) & [see how we test](#).

Deeper Dive: Our Top Tested Picks



Microsoft OneDrive

Best Overall

5.0 Outstanding

Why We Picked It

OneDrive is a great storage and syncing option for just about anybody. It works on all major devices. Its functionality and design have reached a point of slick usability and reliability. The cost is more than reasonable seeing as you can get added OneDrive storage by paying for a Microsoft 365, which includes office apps. Because it provides automatic backup for documents, photos and other files in Windows and syncs documents in Microsoft's office apps, it's a natural choice for Windows or Microsoft 365 users.

Who It's For

If you use Microsoft 365 apps regularly, including the online version of the apps, using OneDrive for storage and syncing offers real benefits. And Windows users will be delighted that their Desktop, Documents, and Pictures are safely backed up to the cloud, and automatically restored when they get a new PC. It's also a great option for anyone looking for value in an online syncing and storage service. Free users can take advantage of the 5GB of storage, which isn't the most generous free version you can find, but it's in line with the competition.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Excellent interface
 - ✓ Clients for Android, iOS, macOS, and Windows
 - ✓ Seamless Microsoft 365 and Windows integration
 - ✓ Strong online photo presentation and management
 - ✓ Powerful file sharing and collaborative editing
- **Cons**
 - × Many new features are available only for organizations

Get It Now

[See It](#)

Learn More [Microsoft OneDrive Review](#)



Proton Drive

Best Privacy and Security

4.0 Excellent

Why We Picked It

Proton Drive offers the best privacy and security of any of the services included here. Your files are fully encrypted at rest and in transit, and only you have the security key to unlock them. Even Proton employees are unable to access your files. You can even pay the company by sending cash through the mail, rather than using a credit card online, to protect your identity.

Who's It For?

The service is clearly for the security-minded user. It's not for those who want speed, as all that encryption exacts a performance hit. Proton Drive also lacks many convenience and productivity features, such as collaborative document editing, and there's no macOS or Linux versions yet.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ All files fully encrypted
 - ✓ Flexible sharing options
 - ✓ Protected by Swiss privacy laws
 - ✓ Free tier available
- **Cons**
 - × Somewhat slow upload speeds
 - × No Linux app

Get It Now

[See It](#)

Learn More [Proton Drive Review](#)



IDrive

Best Price

4.5 Excellent

Why We Picked It

IDrive has long offered the best deal for online syncing and storage, giving you the most space per dollar and no limit on the number of devices you install it on. Beyond that, it's also a solid service, with apps for all major platforms and a bevy of features. For example, you can set IDrive to back up files to an external hard drive or a network drive. There's even support for creating a complete disk image, although it's limited to the Windows version. Its archiving capability means you can always find your files, even if you deleted them on the local computer.

Who It's For

IDrive is for anyone looking for the best price per TB for their online storage and syncing service. It's also appealing to those who want to take advantage of its archiving and continuous backup features.

- **Pros**

- ✓ Free local backup
- ✓ Unlimited devices per account
- ✓ Fully encrypted
- ✓ Fast upload speeds
- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ Inexpensive add-on for backups of Microsoft and Google accounts

- **Cons**

- × Storage isn't unlimited
- × Limited Linux support
- × Complete disk image backup only for Windows

Get It Now

[See It](#)

Learn More [IDrive Review](#)



Google Drive

Best for Google Workspace Users

4.5 Excellent

Why We Picked It

Over the years, Google Drive has become easier to use locally, though it's always been a superb place to automatically store files you create using the [Google Docs](#) office apps. Google Drive has strong file sharing capabilities, and you get more free storage space than most competitors—15GB, though that space is shared with Gmail. If you go with Google Drive, look into paying for a [Google One](#) account. It's a subscription plan for a bundle of services, including additional cloud storage (starting at \$1.99 per month for 100GB), photo effects in Google Photos, support by phone or chat, discounts on Google products, and a [VPN service](#). It's rare and convenient to get that package bundled all together at a low price.

Who It's For

Google Drive is the natural choice for anyone who regularly works in Google Docs, Sheets, and other online apps; it integrates with many third-party online apps as a cloud storage option. It's also a great choice for people looking for a generous free online storage and syncing service.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Generous free storage space
 - ✓ Excellent productivity suite collaboration
 - ✓ Includes desktop-to-desktop file syncing
 - ✓ Many third-party integrations
 - ✓ Cross-platform apps
- **Cons**
 - × No password protection for shared files
 - × Anyone with your email can place items in your account
 - × Multiple apps required for all related functions
 - × Some privacy concerns

Get It Now

[See It](#)

Learn More [Google Drive Review](#)



Sync

Best for Simple, Straightforward Syncing

4.0 Excellent

Why We Picked It

Sync is a reliable tool for storing your files online and syncing them among up to five devices. We love how user-friendly it is. Paid individual plans start at \$96 per year for 2TB of storage space, which is a competitive price. It works on Windows, macOS, iOS, Android, and the web, but not Linux.

Who It's For

Sync is a simple and straightforward service for anyone who doesn't want to store their files with one of the big tech giants. It's a great option for people who prefer simplicity over an excess of features. A free account comes with 5GB of storage space, making it competitive with most other major services. Linux users should look elsewhere, as Sync does not offer a Linux app.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Extremely easy to use
 - ✓ Client-side encryption means Sync can't access your files
 - ✓ Multiple sync and download options
 - ✓ No file size limits
- **Cons**
 - × Lacks local area network syncing
 - × Only offers annual plans

Get It Now

[See It](#)

Learn More [Sync Review](#)



Apple iCloud Drive

Best for Mac and iPhone Users

3.5 Good

Why We Picked It

The free Apple iCloud is a must for iPhone and Mac users, since it backs up photos, documents, and settings on their devices. It's among the simplest and most reliable storage and syncing services we've tested. It isn't ideal for people who like to have a lot of control over storage and syncing and the web client lacks some basic tools such as search, but it is a no-brainer solution for people who don't want to futz with it.

Who It's For

Apple iCloud is best for Mac, iPhone, and iPad users who don't want to think too hard about backing up and syncing their files, especially photos. If the free 5GB storage capacity isn't enough space, upgrade to iCloud+ (starting at \$0.99 per month for 50GB of storage).

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Tightly integrated with Apple products
 - ✓ 5GB of free storage
 - ✓ Low cost
 - ✓ Capable Windows client and web access
- **Cons**
 - × Only lets you share files with people who have an Apple ID
 - × Lacks Android and Linux apps

Learn More [Apple iCloud Drive Review](#)



Box (Personal)

Best Business Integrations

3.5 Good

Why We Picked It

Though Box isn't highly competitive in price, it offers dozens upon dozens of integrations with other services and a flexible web app that can open files using desktop software. The free version comes with a generous 10GB of storage space.

Who It's For

Box is a good option if you don't want to pay for storage and don't mind the 10GB cap. Ultimately, based on its features, Box is better suited for business use than personal use. The two use cases are different enough that we have a separate review of [Box for Business](#). Check it out for more info.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Flexible web app that can open files using desktop software
 - ✓ Integrations with more than 1,500 applications
 - ✓ Offline file access
 - ✓ Free version
- **Cons**
 - × Pricey for the amount of storage offered
 - × Low file-size limit
 - × Can't configure location of desktop syncing app

Learn More [Box \(Personal\) Review](#)



Dropbox

Best Integration With Third-Party Services

3.5 Good

Why We Picked It

Dropbox is an established player in the online storage and syncing space, and it continues to offer a reliable service that includes good, if sometimes tertiary, features (such as e-signatures).

Who It's For

While Dropbox doesn't offer anywhere close to the best price per TB of storage, it is a great option for people who are long-time users and don't want to switch to another service, and those who need a healthy stable of integration options.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Plenty of additional features
 - ✓ Integrations with thousands of applications
 - ✓ Fast upload speeds
- **Cons**
 - × Expensive
 - × Overly complex

Get It Now

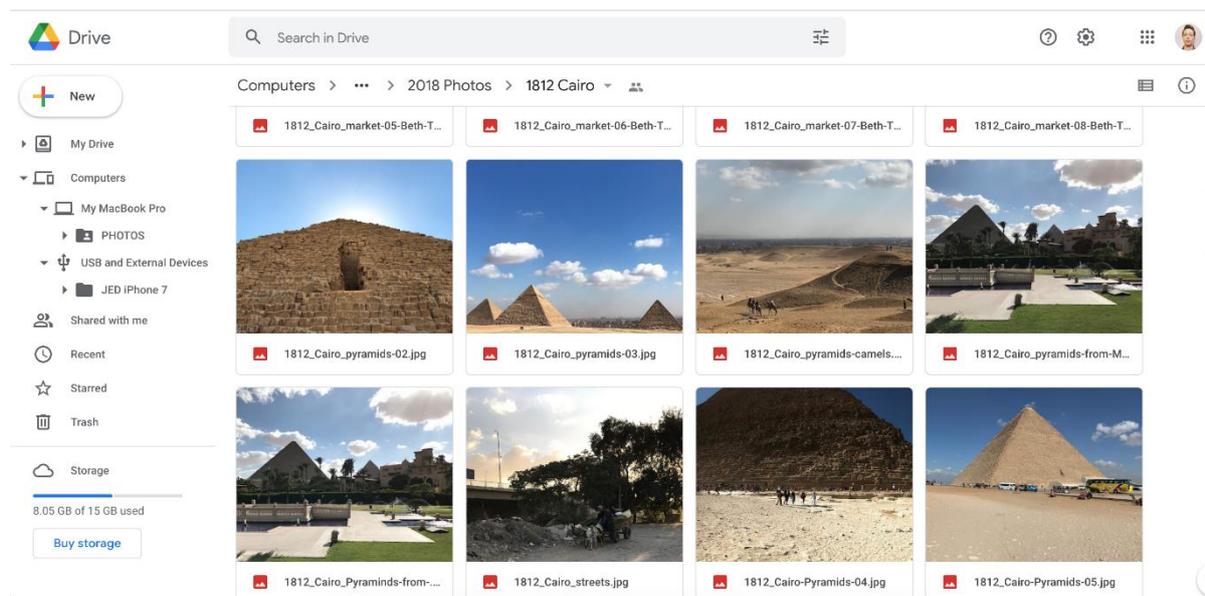
[See It](#)

Learn More [Dropbox Review](#)

Buying Guide: The Best Cloud Storage and File-Sharing Services for 2024

What Can Cloud Storage Do for You?

The best cloud storage services integrate nicely with other apps and online tools, making the experience of viewing and editing files stored online feel natural. You want the other software you use to be able to retrieve or access your content, so it's a big deal to make sure you use a service that easily integrates with your existing tools. Box and Dropbox are particularly strong in this regard.

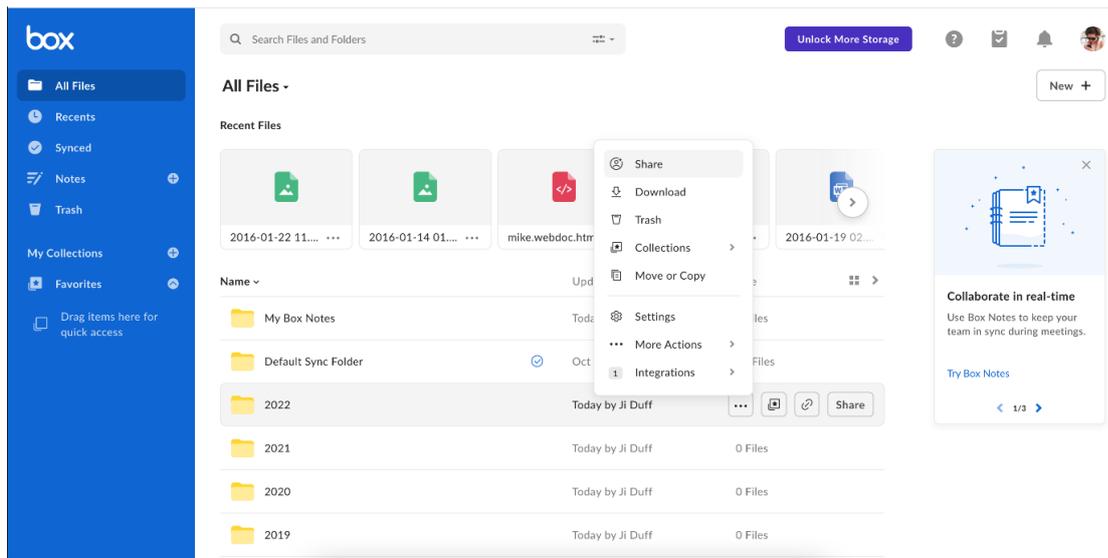


(Credit: Google/PCMag)

The range of capabilities of cloud-based storage services is wider than you may realize. Many of them specialize in a specific area. For example, Dropbox focuses on keeping a synced folder accessible everywhere and sharing folders with colleagues outside your company. Proton Drive emphasizes *secure* cloud storage. If you mostly store images, you might want a [storage service that specializes in hosting photos](#) (two top options are Google Photos with a [Google One](#) account and [Adobe Lightroom](#)). Some cloud storage providers, such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft, are generalists, giving you folder and file syncing, media playing, device syncing, and backup. These products double as [collaboration software](#) because they let multiple people edit the same file in real time.

Distinct from but overlapping in some cases with cloud storage are [backup services](#), particularly ones that create online backups. Some of them, such as Acronis Cyber Protect, specialize in data protection and recovery, while others, like IDrive, combine data protection with syncing and sharing capabilities.

Most cloud services offer some form of backup due to their intended function. Basically, any files uploaded to a cloud service are also protected from disk failures, since there are copies of them in the cloud. But dedicated backup services sometimes can create a full disk image of your machine so you can restore not just your files, but everything, including system settings and programs. Syncing, by contrast, is about backing up and managing selected files only.



Box/PCMag)

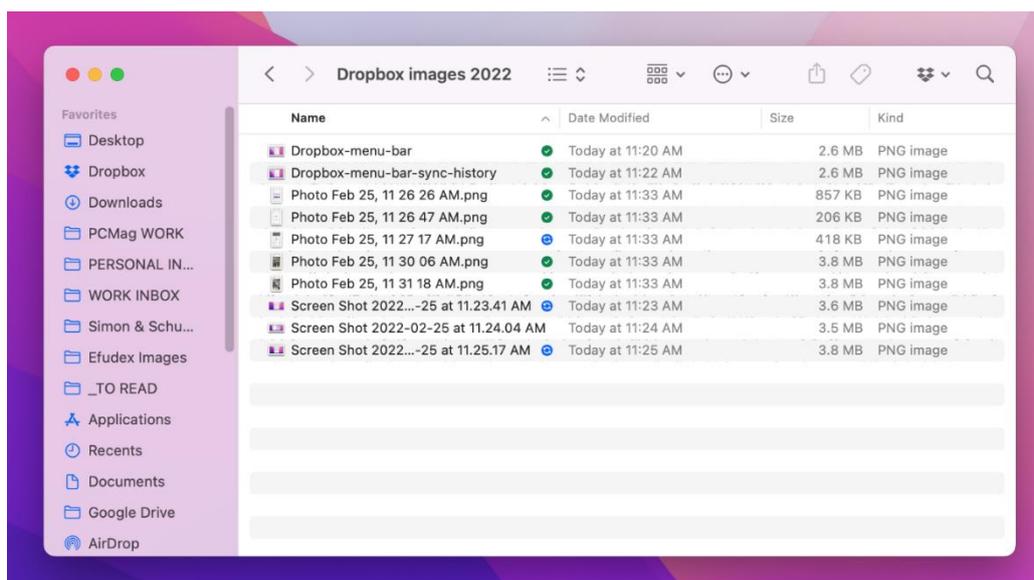
(Credit:

What Is the 'Cloud' in Cloud Storage?

There's a half-joke in the tech world: "There is no cloud. It's just someone else's computer." To clear up any confusion, the *cloud* part of cloud-based storage refers to storing files somewhere other than your computer's hard drive. Usually, it means the service provider's servers.

Having data in the cloud allows you to access your files online. Your data is usually encrypted before making the journey over the internet to the provider's servers, and it remains encrypted while it lives on those servers.

Well-designed services don't upload a brand-new copy of your files whenever you change one little thing. Instead, the file syncing service looks for *changes* to your files and uploads only them, saving your connection bandwidth.



Dropbox/PCMag)

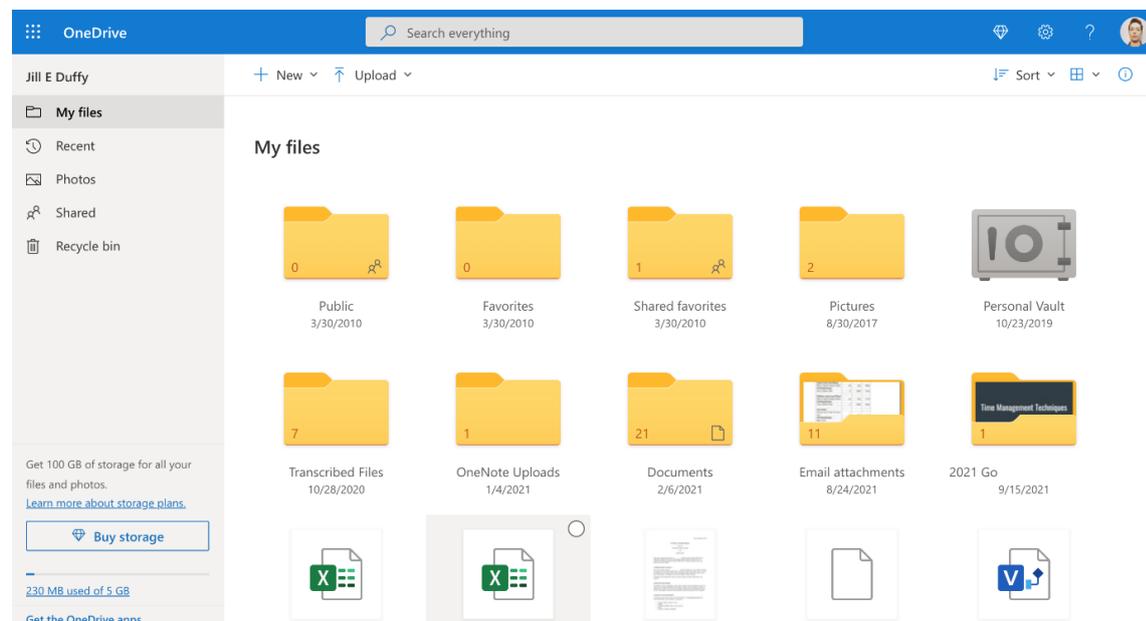
(Credit:

You can access your cloud files through an app or utility software installed on your computer. Once it's installed, it usually shows a small notification icon and creates your synced folder structure that fits into Windows Explorer or the macOS Finder. You can also get to the files via your web browser. Of course, you need an internet connection for it to work, but if you are temporarily without a connection, that's okay. The service waits until the next time you do have a connection and takes care of business then.

For a deeper explanation, see our [explainer on cloud computing](#).

Free vs. Paid Cloud Storage

Many services give you free cloud storage as part of their entry-level account. They usually come with limitations, such as the amount of storage you get or a tight cap on the size of the files you can upload. We encourage you to sign up for the free tier of service first and try out the cloud service for several weeks before you commit to upgrading. This way, you can fully integrate the cloud service into your life for real-world testing. You get a feel for how it works and determine what might go wrong with your setup.



(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

What could possibly go wrong? Human error accounts for many cloud storage tragedies, but the dropped internet connection is another common troublemaker. Not to mention that every internet service suffers the occasional [outage](#). Ask around (or just look through our review comments), and you'll hear sad stories of how cloud storage can go wrong. One of the benefits of paying for an account is that it usually comes with additional support from the provider, so if anything goes wrong, someone from the company can help you resolve the issue.

There are many other reasons to pay for cloud storage, from getting a lot more space (a terabyte doesn't cost all that much anymore) to being able to upload huge files. That last benefit is relevant to graphic designers, video editors, and other visual artists who often host enormous files. Other perks of paying for your cloud storage often include increased access to file-version history (meaning you can restore an important business proposal to the version you had before your colleague made a bunch of erroneous changes), more security, and more features for collaboration and teamwork.

Microsoft OneDrive

The most capable online storage and syncing service we've tested



5.0 Outstanding

Bottom Line

Much more than the default online storage and syncing option for Microsoft 365 and Windows, OneDrive provides a wealth of powerful features and polished apps for all major platforms.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Excellent interface
 - ✓ Clients for Android, iOS, macOS, and Windows
 - ✓ Seamless Microsoft 365 and Windows integration
 - ✓ Strong online photo presentation and management
 - ✓ Powerful file sharing and collaborative editing
- **Cons**
 - × Many new features are available only for organizations

Microsoft OneDrive Specs

Android App	✓
Emphasis	Office Apps
File Size Limit	15GB
File Versioning	✓
Free Storage	5GB
iOS App	✓

Online Editing



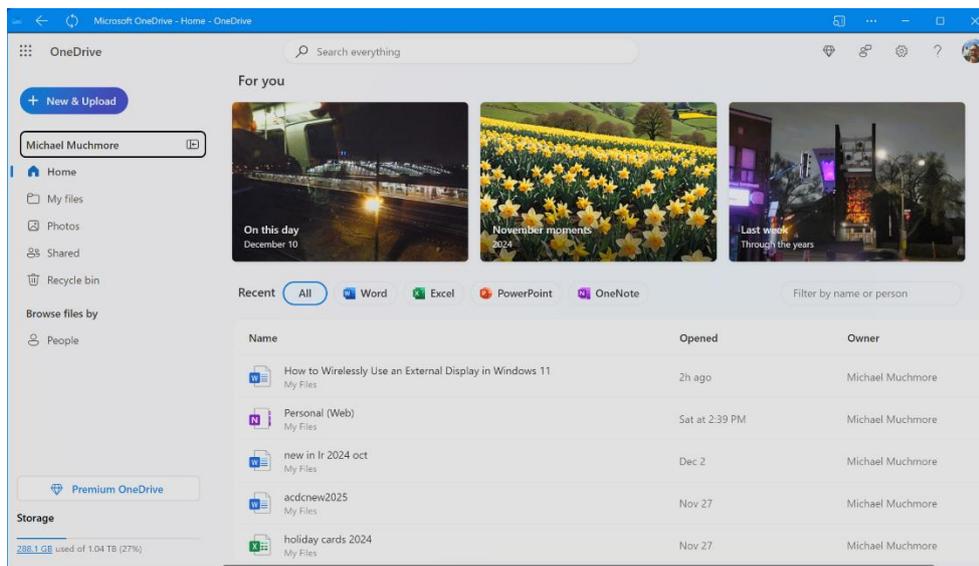
Windows App



OneDrive is Microsoft's answer to Google Drive and iCloud. Well, that's not entirely accurate since it preceded those [cloud storage and syncing services](#) by at least five years. Over its development, OneDrive's functionality and design have become nearly flawless. We especially like its rich feature set, sleek apps for all major platforms, and top-notch sharing and collaboration abilities. OneDrive's deep integration with [Microsoft 365](#) and Windows, along with its completeness, reliability, and polish, earn it our Editors' Choice award and a rare five-star rating.

What Can OneDrive Do and What's New?

Like [Google Drive](#) and [iCloud](#), OneDrive serves a lot of functions. If you just want access to documents or media files, it gives you simple online storage that's accessible from the web. If you want to replicate the same set of files on multiple PCs, it provides folder syncing. [Windows 11](#) users can even back up device settings, installed apps, personalization options, and more via Windows Backup. If you sign in to a new PC with your Microsoft account, OneDrive can add all the desktop icons from your old one, too. Finally, OneDrive syncs Microsoft 365 documents and enables live coauthoring within that [office suite](#)'s apps.

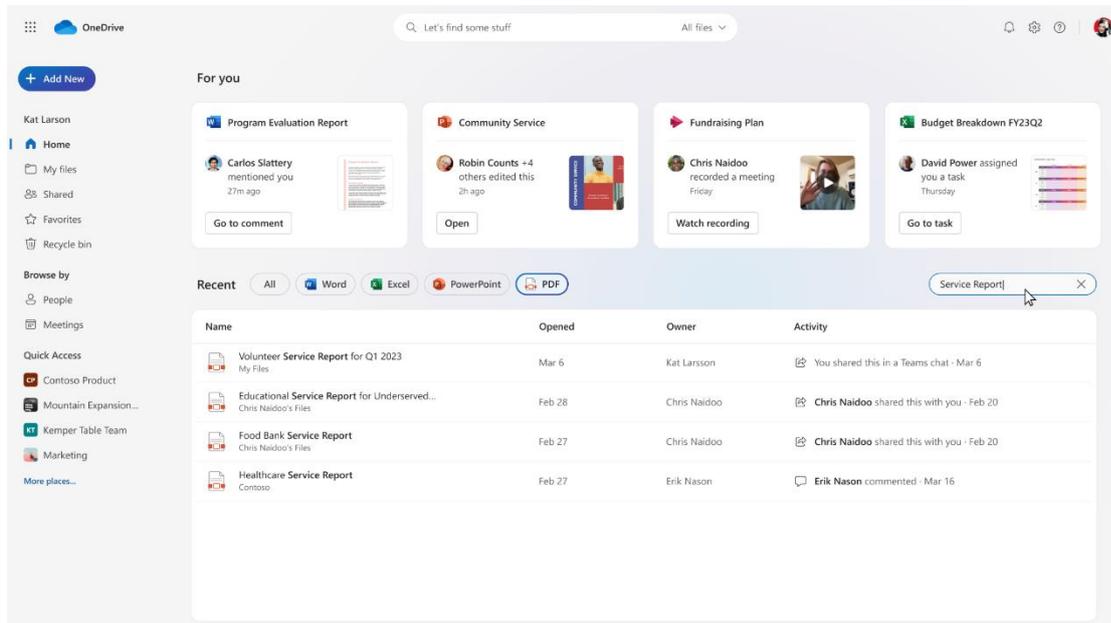


(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

Microsoft continues to add capabilities to OneDrive, including [Copilot generative AI](#) tools. Unfortunately, for most users, nearly all of the new features require a business or education version of Microsoft 365. Among those features are an AI-powered home screen, color-coded folders, extra sharing and collaboration options, and offline syncing in the web app.

The redesigned home screen has filtering options, a For You section with personalized suggestions, and a People view that organizes files based on who you have shared them with (you can specify a folder color for these). Microsoft has demoed a Copilot sidebar (like that in the [Edge browser](#)) that uses AI to find, summarize, and suggest edits for work documents—but again, that's just for

organizations. I expect more AI features in the future and hope to see many of these features become available for the consumer version.



The new OneDrive interface for OneDrive for Business, OneDrive for School, and SharePoint accounts(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

How Much Does OneDrive Cost?

If you have a Microsoft account, you already have access to OneDrive (along with the web versions of Excel, Outlook, [OneNote](#), PowerPoint, and Word). The same goes for if you ever signed up for a Hotmail, Live, or Outlook.com email account. You can also sign up with an email from any other provider.

Free users get 5GB of storage space, though [students](#) can get 5TB free. A web iCloud account gets you just 1GB free, but Apple upgrades that to 5GB if you buy an eligible Apple device. Dropbox gives you just 2GB for free. [iDrive](#) (which offers full backup capabilities) gives you 10GB. [Google Drive](#) gives you 15GB, though Gmail attachments count toward that allotment. Disappointingly, Microsoft followed Google in this policy; Outlook.com email attachments now count against your storage space. If you started with the previously separate 15GB allotment for [Outlook.com](#), however, you get to keep it.

If you need more storage, the next step up is a Microsoft 365 account. The Basic tier, which costs \$19.99 per year, gets you 100GB of storage, more advanced file-sharing options, and [ransomware protection](#). The Personal plan, which goes for \$69.99 per year, increases your cloud storage space to 1TB, lets you download the premium versions of the Office apps, and unlocks additional protection via [Microsoft Defender](#). You can add 200GB of storage for an additional \$1.99 per month or 1TB for \$9.99 per month. The \$99.99-per-year Family plan provides 1TB of storage each for up to six people for a total of 6TB.

For comparison, Apple iCloud, Dropbox, and Google Drive (via a Google One subscription) all offer a \$9.99-per-month plan with 2TB of cloud storage. [Apple](#) and [Google](#) offer their own suites of productivity apps that can take advantage of their cloud storage.

How Does OneDrive Syncing Work?

The OneDrive desktop syncing app runs on Windows 10 and 11 and macOS 10.14 or later. There are workarounds for Linux but no first-party client app. The OneDrive mobile app runs on Android 6.0 or later and iOS 15 or later. It's also available in the Amazon Appstore for Fire tablets.

The desktop syncing app installs quickly and lets you create an account if you don't have one. The setup shows how your OneDrive folder will appear in Windows Explorer (or Finder); it uses a blue cloud icon instead of a traditional folder icon. The setup process also places a cloud icon in your system tray, from which you can open your synced folder or change settings.

When you place a document, photo, or other item in the OneDrive folder, it automatically uploads to the cloud and appears in any of the other OneDrive clients you use. You can now upload files of up to 250GB in size. That's larger than most people will ever need but not as big as Google Drive's 5TB maximum (though there are [some file type limitations](#)). You can share any files or folders in OneDrive storage with either viewing or editing privileges. Paid Microsoft 365 users can password-protect shared files, as well as set expiration times for sharing. Apple and Google's cloud services don't have either of those features at any plan level, though some third-party workarounds are available. [Dropbox](#) offers this functionality with select paid tiers.

For a quick test of cross-platform syncing, I installed OneDrive on both an iMac and a Windows desktop. I then created a new folder in the OneDrive app, which appeared a couple of seconds later in the Mac's OneDrive folder. OneDrive's Windows Explorer integration is incredibly helpful because it means you can save work from any application to your cloud storage directly. That includes apps that autosave files. I should note, however, that the Google Drive and iCloud desktop utilities can do the same.

Additional OneDrive Capabilities

Among OneDrive's most important features are device syncing, folder and file syncing, Personal Vault, folder backup, and synced Microsoft 365 collaboration.

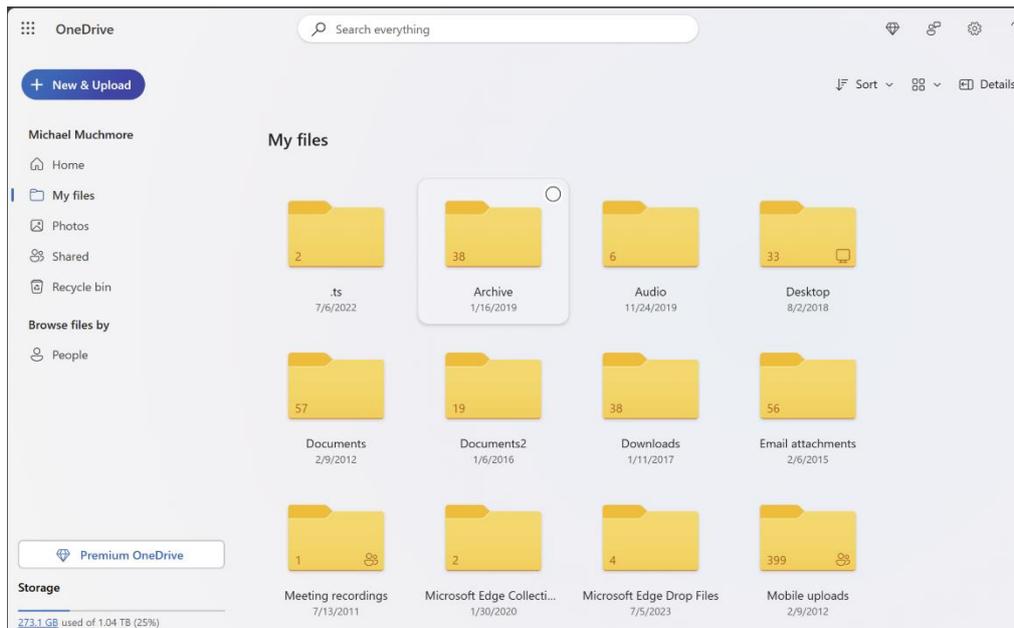
Device Syncing

OneDrive can sync settings and apps on all your Windows desktops, laptops, and tablets. Clients for Android, iOS, and macOS give you access to the files you sync to OneDrive's online folders.

On Android and iOS devices, the OneDrive app can automatically upload photos and videos you take to a camera roll. Other services have this option, too. With this feature active, it's quick and easy to view your images and videos within the OneDrive folder on your PC, [Windows Photos app](#), the web, or any other OneDrive app you use.

Folder and File Syncing

OneDrive's file and folder syncing are similar to what you get from Dropbox and [SugarSync](#). In the past, Microsoft had separate storage and syncing services, but combining them makes much more sense. Unlike SugarSync, OneDrive (like Dropbox) keeps all your synced files under its umbrella folder. In other words, you can't sync a particular folder on one computer to one on another. However, that approach gets messy, and most other services don't support that type of setup either.



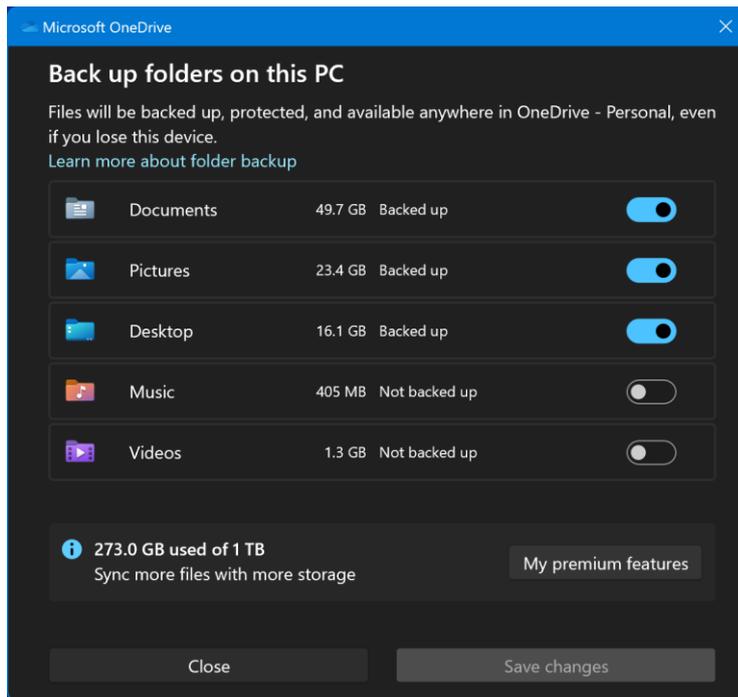
(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

Personal Vault

OneDrive's Personal Vault adds an extra degree of security for files. When you enable your Personal Vault, you must use [multi-factor authentication](#) to open it. This can take the form of a security code to your [authenticator app](#), email, or phone, though the first option provides the best security. BitLocker encrypts these files locally, which lock after a set number of minutes of inactivity (which varies by device). It's not possible to share these files accidentally.

Folder Backup

Unlike true [backup services](#), OneDrive doesn't let you sync *any* file in *every* folder on your local drive to the cloud. That means system files are off-limits, though they wouldn't be compatible with all the platforms you might use OneDrive on anyway. The Backup choice in Settings does let you protect the most important use folders, however: Desktop, Documents, Music, Pictures, and Videos. These folders don't have to live inside the OneDrive folder for you to sync them, either. This capability is a great help if you get a new PC and want your important files to appear on it automatically.



(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

Synched Microsoft 365 Collaboration

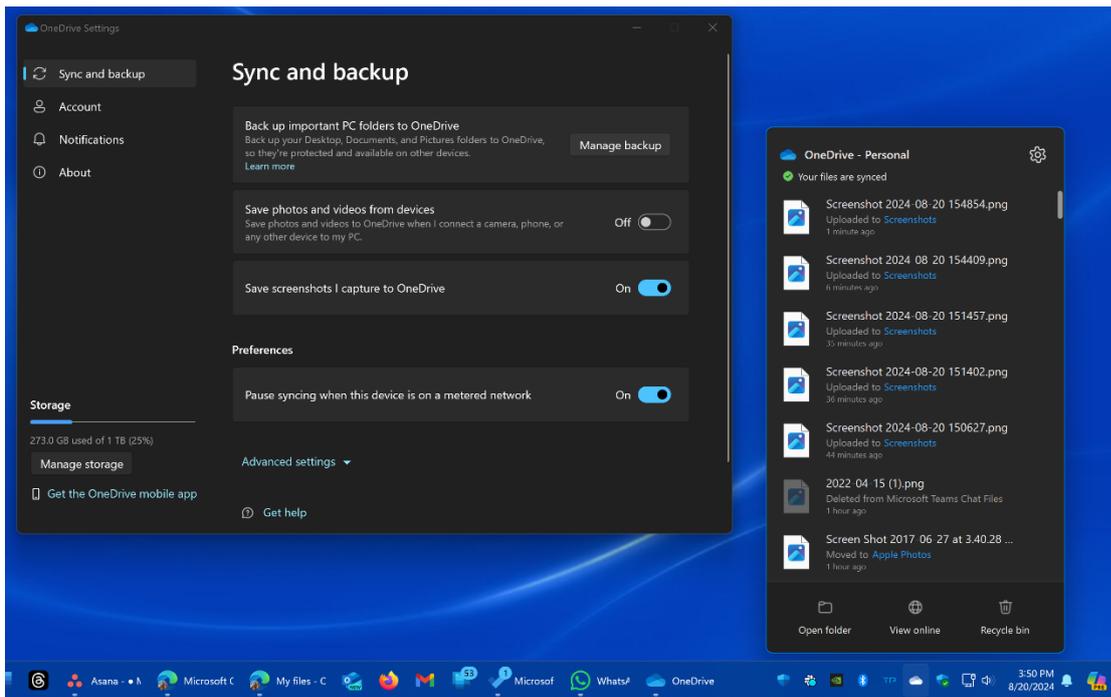
When you create a document in a Microsoft 365 app like Word or Excel and save it to OneDrive, it becomes accessible from any OneDrive client and ready for real-time collaborative editing. You can also collaborate via the online versions of the Office apps.

For more specific tips and guidance, see our guide on [how to manage, sync, and share files in OneDrive](#).

OneDrive in Windows 11

With Windows 11, OneDrive is more of a built-in capability than a separate web service. You see OneDrive in the File Explorer, and you can choose whether to sync all or just some OneDrive folders. Results in Windows desktop searches include OneDrive files, and Windows 11's Media Player can play music files you upload to it.

The Windows 11 version of OneDrive has a slick Settings panel where you can set options for Files On Demand, PC backup, and more.

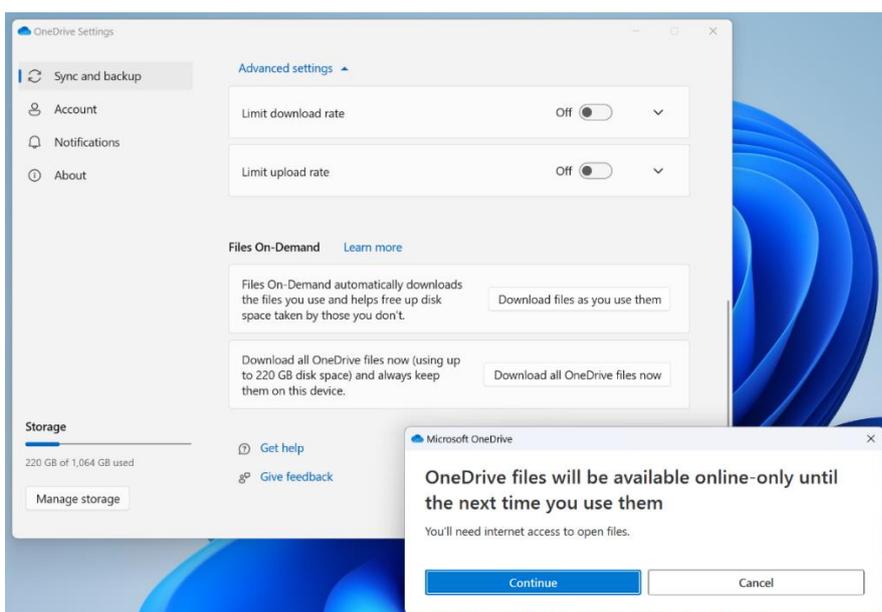


(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

Microsoft no longer supports the OneDrive store app for Windows and instead points users to install the web version as a [PWA, or progressive web app](#). This allows offline functionality for things like viewing and renaming files and opening local apps like Word directly from the OneDrive web app. Unfortunately, these capabilities are available only for organizational accounts.

Files on Demand

One of OneDrive's best features is its implementation of Files on Demand. This feature, which is on by default, means you don't have to fill up every connected computer's hard drive with every file stored in your OneDrive storage. Instead, as the name implies, OneDrive downloads files on-demand only when you open them. This feature is available in the macOS OneDrive client, too.

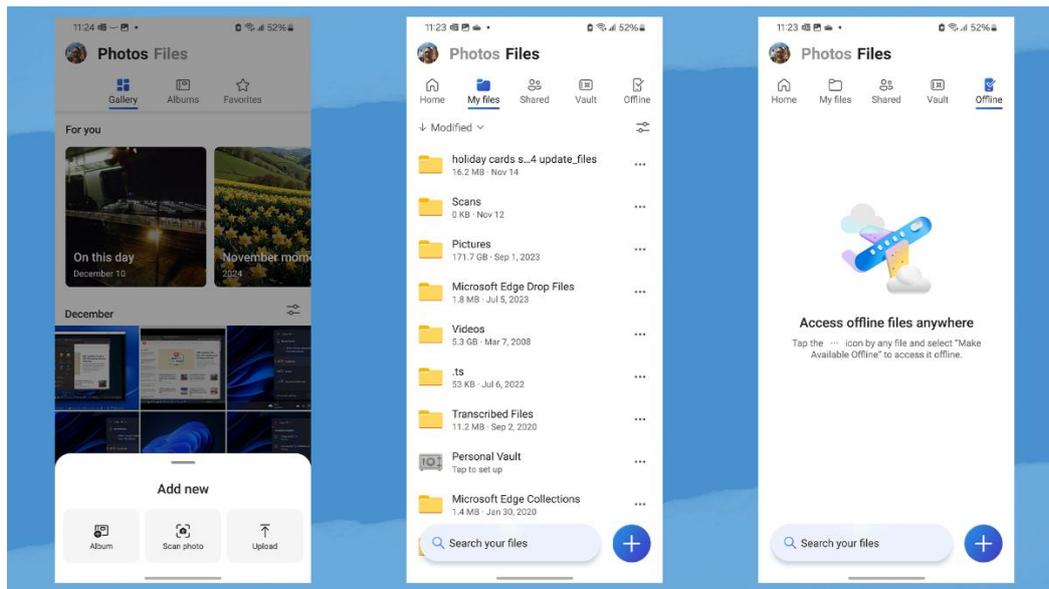


(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

You can still designate some or all folders and files to keep offline. A column in File Explorer called Status shows a cloud icon for online files and folders with a circled checkmark for those that are local. Files pending upload get a circular icon with an arrow. In testing, the Files on Demand feature worked flawlessly. Google's Drive client offers a similar capability. Apple's iCloud Drive still lacks such a feature on Windows, though it works in that mode by default on iOS and macOS.

OneDrive Apps for Other Platforms

Apart from offering the aforementioned Android and iOS apps, Microsoft lets you share game clips from your Xbox to OneDrive storage. The mobile apps also work on Android tablets and iPads, though the web interface is an option on those devices, too.



(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

I tested both the Android and iOS apps. They let you not only view documents, photos, and videos in your OneDrive storage but also upload files. They helpfully group photos by autogenerated tags such as #animal, #building, #people, and so on. You can share files to any apps on your phone, via an email link (with view only, edit, and expiration options), or by copying them to your phone's clipboard. A search capability and the aforementioned Automatically Upload to OneDrive feature round out the experience. Google Drive also offers a search box in its web interface, but iCloud unfathomably lacks this capability.

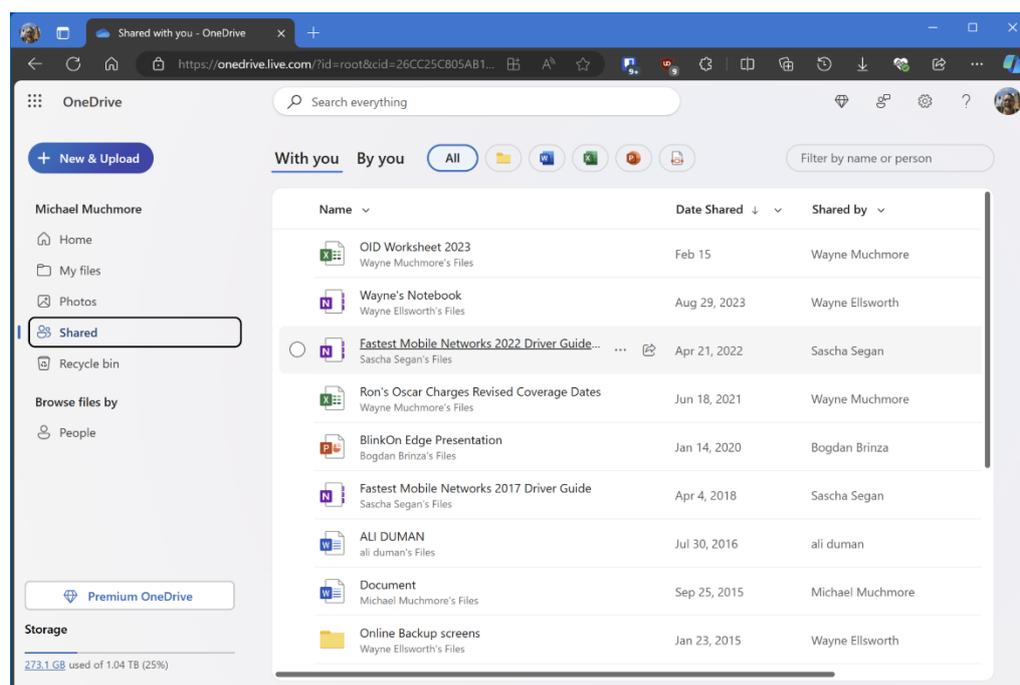
Free mobile versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint can easily open any documents from OneDrive storage. The web version of OneDrive also has an easily accessible drop-down menu of tiles for online versions of Microsoft's Office apps. Documents you create in Office apps sync automatically across all your OneDrive clients.

Media Support

Microsoft's cloud service plays and displays all the most common types of files you might want to store in the cloud, including documents, music, photos, and videos. Here's a rundown of how it handles each:

Documents

You can download and upload documents to OneDrive, as well as view and edit them via either the online or local apps. OneDrive serves as the default save location for all the documents you create with those apps, just as Google Drive does for Google Docs. And just like with Google Docs, multiple authors can edit documents at the same time. An icon shows who's typing where, and the document's content updates in real time. Microsoft 365 Online has better document-formatting fidelity than Google Docs in terms of layout and fonts, and the option to use either the web client or a local app is another advantage. One disadvantage that both share is that you can't see a clean version of your document while revisions mode is on; they force you to see a lot of underlined and crossed-out text. OneDrive's Shared view lets you see all the files you've collaborated on at a glance.

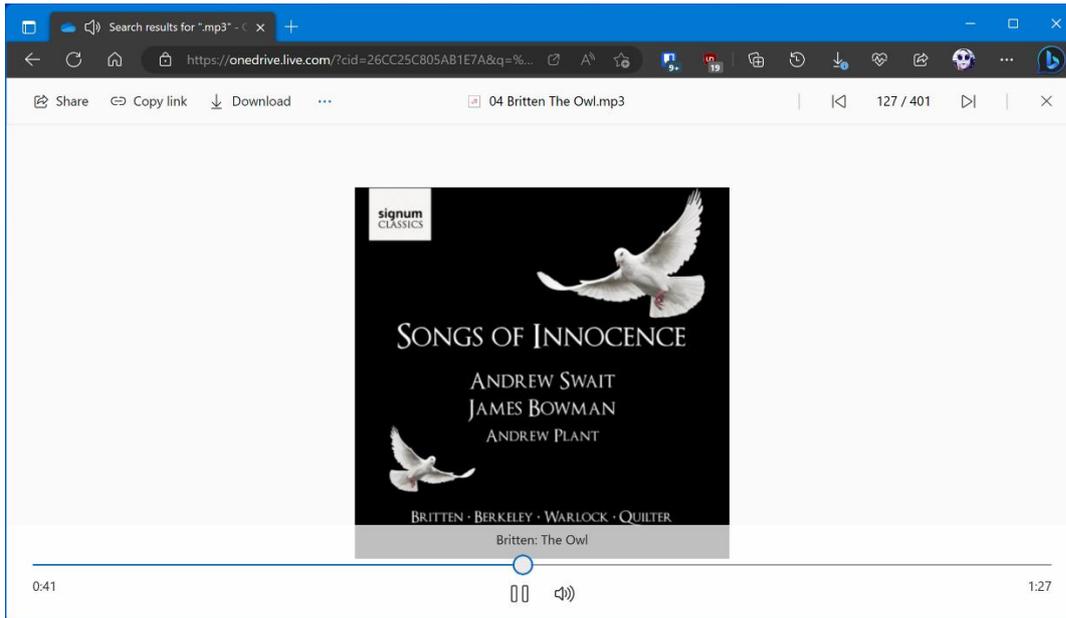


(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

I didn't have any problem viewing Microsoft file formats like Excel spreadsheets, PDFs, PowerPoint presentations, and Word documents via OneDrive on any platform.

Music

[Windows 11's Media Player](#) and Windows 10's Groove app let you play songs directly from OneDrive, though you must download these files first. OneDrive's web version can stream songs, as can Google Drive. The same is not possible with iCloud, and Apple Music can't access songs from iCloud, either.

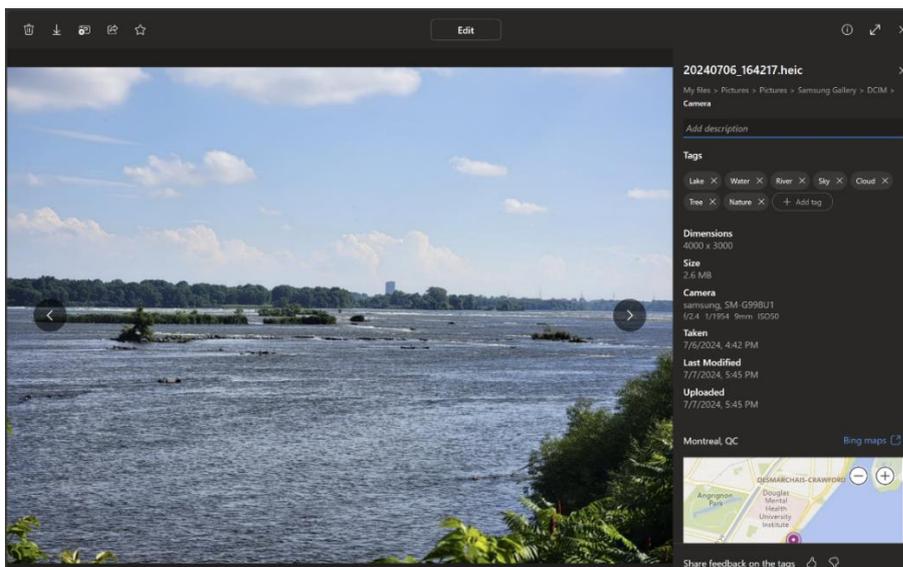


(Credit: Microsoft/Signum Classics/PCMag)

Photos and Video

OneDrive does an impressive job of displaying photos and videos in its web interface. As mentioned, it even tags images using AI like Flickr, grouping, for example, all photos of buildings, crowds, or dogs. You can add tags manually, too. These tagging features are useful for narrowing search results. [Google Photos](#) has a similar search capability, but it doesn't explicitly show you the tags. Both of those services also let you see a map with a photo's real-world location if it has that information, as well as [EXIF](#) camera data. Apple's iCloud web interface has no search or tagging capabilities.

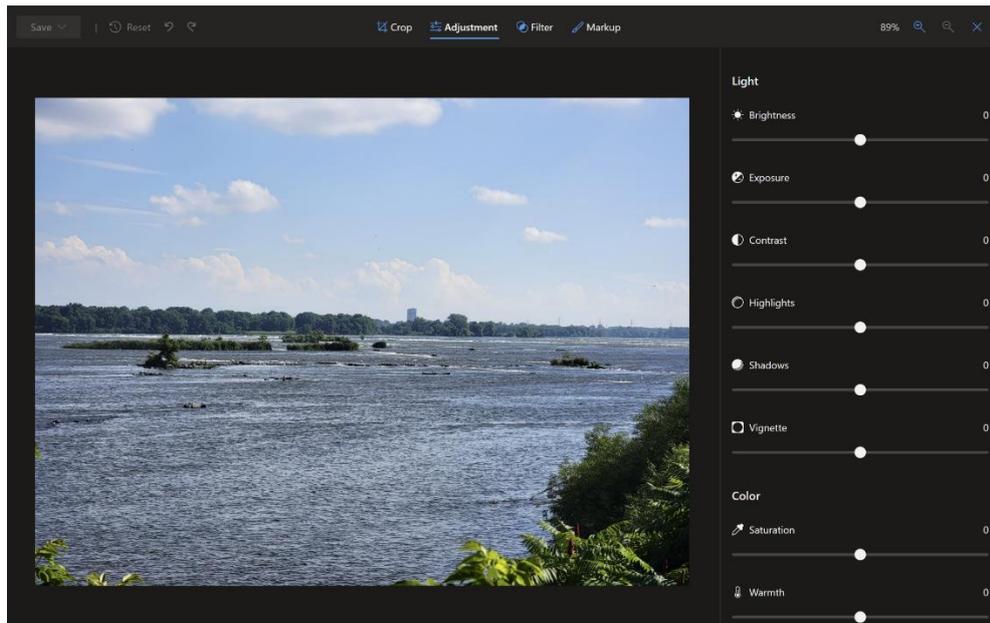
When you share a photo from OneDrive, the recipient doesn't have to sign into a Microsoft account unless you grant edit rights rather than just viewing ones. When you share a video, the cloud service transcodes it on the fly using [MPEG-DASH](#) to match the capabilities of the receiver's bandwidth. This ensures that people you share a video with won't have to download an unnecessarily large file. I tried sharing a video to a phone with just three bars of LTE connectivity, and it played very smoothly.



(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

OneDrive also offers optical character recognition (OCR), meaning it can extract text from images. If you save a photo with text in it to your cloud storage, the Info panel for it will include an extracted text area. You can then click to cut and paste it anywhere. Google Drive's help talks about OCR, but it's not in the Drive interface. You need to open the image in Google Docs to get that functionality. You can forget about any OCR in iCloud, though Dropbox offers it for [business accounts](#).

OneDrive, surprisingly, also lets you [edit photos](#). You get effective tools for adjusting color and lighting, cropping, and rotating. It doesn't provide an auto-correct button, though you can apply and adjust several effect filters. Note that editing works for HEIC files as well as JPGs and PNGs. You can view but not edit [raw camera files](#).



(Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

Using OneDrive With Other Apps

Practically any Windows app or web service can take advantage of OneDrive's cloud storage. [ACDSee Photo Studio](#) lets you open and save edited images to OneDrive, for example. Integrations for business installations of OneDrive include [Wrike](#), [Vimeo](#), [Zapier](#), and [Zoom](#). Business users can open a file directly from OneDrive on the web in its native app. For example, if you have PDFs set to open in Adobe Acrobat, you can launch them in that app.

Is Your Data Safe With OneDrive?

Microsoft cites "advanced encryption, compliance, and other enterprise-grade security features" as it pertains to protecting your OneDrive data. The service supports multi-factor authentication and has at-rest and in-transit encryption for all users and file types. It's not a [zero-knowledge](#) system, but the company doesn't allow staff standing access to data keys. According to OneDrive's documentation, Microsoft "maintains a 'zero-standing access' policy, which means that engineers do not have access to the service unless it is explicitly granted in response to a specific incident that requires elevation of access."

The company also says it proactively [monitors for threats](#): "OneDrive and Office 365 maintain robust, real-time security monitoring systems. Among other issues, these systems raise alerts for attempts to illicitly access customer data, or for attempts to illicitly transfer data out of our service." After more

than a decade in operation, there haven't been any major breaches of OneDrive, which inspires confidence. If absolute privacy for your cloud files is your primary concern, however, you should check out [Proton Drive](#).

Finally, OneDrive has the aforementioned Personal Vault, which requires extra authentication whenever you want to access it.

Verdict: One Place for Your Digital Life

OneDrive's smooth integrations with Microsoft 365 and Windows, collaborative document editing features, security options, strong photo tools, and wide platform support earn it a perfect five-star rating and our Editors' Choice award for cloud storage and syncing. Our only (minor) complaint is that some features require an organizational account. Fellow Editors' Choice winner Google Drive is also excellent, especially if you rely on Google's online ecosystem for email and productivity, but OneDrive still has an edge thanks to its unrivalled flexibility and comprehensiveness.

Apple iCloud Drive

Convenient cloud storage for Apple users



(Credit: Apple)

3.5 Good

Bottom Line

iCloud Drive is the simplest cloud storage and syncing program for iPads, iPhones, and Macs, but its Apple-centric sharing requirement limits its appeal.

- **Pros**
 - ✓ Tightly integrated with Apple products
 - ✓ 5GB of free storage
 - ✓ Low cost
 - ✓ Capable Windows client and web access
- **Cons**
 - × Only lets you share files with people who have an Apple ID
 - × Lacks Android and Linux apps

Apple iCloud Drive Specs

Emphasis	Apple Device Users
File Size Limit	15GB
Free Storage	5GB
iOS App	✓
Online Editing	✓
Windows App	✓

Sometimes, it's easiest to use built-in tools, even if they're not the best you can get in terms of capabilities and price. That convenience is true of iCloud Drive, Apple's [cloud storage and file-sharing](#)

[service](#) included with [iPads](#), [iPhones](#), and Macs. You just need to turn it on and, depending on your storage needs, potentially pay for a subscription (starting at \$0.99 per month). iCloud Drive is a useful, low-cost sync program tightly integrated into Apple products, but Editors' Choice winners [Google Drive](#), [iDrive](#), and [Microsoft OneDrive](#) offer more storage for less money, have more robust sharing options, or both.

Apple iCloud Drive: Plans and Prices

Apple grants 5GB of iCloud Drive storage to everyone who owns an Apple device. That's the same amount of free storage offered by iDrive and Microsoft OneDrive, and much less than the 15GB of free storage offered by Google Drive (though that storage is shared with Gmail).

Paid plans are called iCloud+. The cheapest one includes 50GB of storage for \$0.99 per month. Microsoft OneDrive's entry-level tier is a storage-only plan for \$1.99 per month (or \$19.99 per year) that includes 100GB of storage. With a [Google One](#) subscription, you can increase your Google Drive capacity to 100GB for the same price of \$1.99 per month.

The mid-tier iCloud+ plan has 200GB of storage for \$2.99 per month, the same amount Google One charges for similar storage.

The most expensive iCloud+ plan includes 2TB of storage for \$9.99 per month, the exact price of Google One for the same amount of storage. Microsoft OneDrive lacks a 2TB plan, but it serves up 6TB of storage to share between six people for \$9.99 per month. iDrive offers even better value: 4TB of storage for \$79.50 per year, which is double iCloud Drive's storage for less money.

iCloud+ isn't the most economical choice if you only care about the price per gigabyte. That said, there's a compelling case to stick with it. Apple's tool is the only cloud storage service that syncs images in the Photos app across Apple devices (rivals sync photos from another location, not the Photos app). For many people, that's enough to roll with it.

(Credit: Apple/PCMag)

iCloud+ Perks

A paid iCloud account offers a few security features. For example, Private Relay obscures your IP address while browsing the web using [Safari](#). That makes it impossible for advertisers to track you, and depending on your use case, it could be a decent alternative to a VPN.

Another perk is Hide My Email, which lets you create unique, random email addresses. It's a great option when you want to sign up for online services without using your real email address. iCloud+ also comes with a custom email domain, HomeKit Secure Video support for one camera, and the ability to share everything with up to five family members.

Keychain is another feature that all iCloud users receive, even those not paying for additional storage. Enable it, and you can sync your passwords across devices—even [Windows](#) computers, thanks to a few [browser](#) extensions. Although Keychain is positioned as an alternative to a dedicated [password manager](#), Apple also offers passwordless Passkeys, but not many companies support the technology.

None of the other cloud storage apps we've tested offer quite this many security-specific features, though [Dropbox](#) and more expensive services add other benefits. For example, a paid Dropbox account includes a password manager, e-signature capabilities, and tools for taking screenshots and

recording your screen. [Business-grade Dropbox](#) accounts add even more sharing options, such as the ability to password-protect shared links and track who downloads files. Those accounts are much more expensive, starting at \$16.58 per month. Likewise, Microsoft gives [Microsoft 365](#) applications to subscribers. Google One adds photo editing tools, a mobile [VPN](#), and priority customer support.

(Credit: Apple/PCMag)

What Platforms Does iCloud Drive Work On?

Apple's iCloud Drive is primarily designed for Apple devices, though it also works on Windows. Apple recommends using the most recent version of [iOS](#), [iPadOS](#), and [macOS](#), though the minimal requirements are iOS 8 and OS X 10.10 Yosemite. Some iCloud features, such as Folder Sharing and iCloud Photos, won't work on older operating systems. The Windows client for iCloud Drive runs on Windows 10 (May 2019 Update) or later, and requires a 64-bit device.

iCloud Drive's web version works with most browsers, including Chrome, Edge, Firefox, and Safari. There's no dedicated app for [Android](#) or Linux.

Getting Started With iCloud Drive

If you own an Apple device, you probably have an iCloud account. One of the first things these devices do during the setup process is ask you to either log into your Apple ID or create an account, which is required to use the App Store. You can check your account in the System Settings on your device. Click or tap on your name. Your iCloud settings and an overview of your current data usage are there.

On Apple hardware, iCloud is simply part of the operating system. In fact, many Apple apps that sync data use iCloud by default, such as Contacts, Messages, and Reminders. iCloud also gives you an iCloud Drive folder, which you can find using Finder on Macs and the Files app on mobile devices. There, you'll find folders for every application you sync using iCloud. You can manually add files and folders as needed.

Files you add to the iCloud Drive folder are available on your other devices. By default, folders and files don't download, so they aren't available offline (you must enable downloading if you want offline access). On the Mac, click the Download icon to the right of the file or folder name; on mobile devices, tap and hold, then tap Download Now. Once you have local copies, any changes you make to them are uploaded and synced when you go online.

This is similar to how Microsoft's OneDrive works; syncing only happens if requested. iDrive, by contrast, syncs everything by default. Which approach works best for you is a matter of preference, but either way, it's easy enough to configure your settings to work the way you want. Mac users can optionally choose to automatically sync the entire Documents and Desktop folders to iCloud in the settings. If you do, your Documents folder syncs across Macs and is accessible via mobile devices.

(Credit: Apple/PCMag)

iCloud Drive on Windows

iCloud Drive's Windows client lets you bring other PCs into the syncing picture. Optionally, you can make the bookmarks and passwords saved on your Apple mobile devices available in browsers on your Windows computer.

Any files you drag to the iCloud Drive folder appear on other devices but aren't automatically downloaded. A status icon shows whether a file is downloaded, syncing, or in the cloud. You can right-click any file or folder to download it for offline use. Like on Apple devices, any offline changes you make to files are uploaded the next time your device is online. It's similar to the way OneDrive works in Windows.

Apple's iCloud Drive feels right at home in the Windows user interface. If you're an iPhone user with a PC, there's no reason not to install it. If you're primarily interested in syncing just photos, we have a separate tutorial on [how to sync Apple Photos to your Windows 11 PC](#).

A Streamlined Browser Experience

You can access and manage your iCloud Drive from [iCloud.com](#). Simply sign in with your Apple ID and click the Drive button. From there, you can browse and manage your iCloud Drive folder.

The user interface is similar to the Files app on iPad and iPhone. Common file types, like images, can be previewed within the web interface. You can edit Pages, Sheets, and Keynote files right in the browser, which is handy if you're on a PC and don't use the far more popular Google Docs or Microsoft 365 apps. Like those two office suites, Apple's productivity apps offer simultaneous co-editing with multiple authors, thanks to iCloud syncing.

Sharing Across Platforms

iCloud's macOS sharing functionality is slightly obscured, but you can find it by right-clicking a file in your iCloud and then clicking Share. You can collaborate with another iCloud Drive user or send a file copy. The process is arguably a little more streamlined on Windows. After you right-click a file, the sharing options are immediately visible instead of hidden in the systemwide Share menu.

iCloud has one big shortcoming, though: Its sharing functionality requires the recipient to have an Apple ID. There's no way to share a link without requiring a login. That's incredibly disappointing, because Dropbox, Google Drive, IDrive, and Microsoft OneDrive don't have that barrier.

(Credit: Apple/PCMag)

Verdict: The Best Cloud Storage for Apple Users, But Not Overall

There's no reason not to use iCloud if you own an Apple device—and that's by design. It works well with Apple hardware and is the default tool many apps use for syncing. The pricing is reasonable, too. However, Editors' Choice winner OneDrive is a better pick for most people due to its superior cost per gigabyte, optional Android app, and office apps (with a premium account). Likewise, Google Drive is an Editors' Choice for its generous free tier and robust online productivity suite. Finally, Microsoft OneDrive—another Editors' Choice winner—has a low-cost entry-level plan that serves up 20 times the storage (100GB) compared with iCloud's beginner option (5GB).

Google Drive

Much more than cloud storage



(Credit: Google)

4.5 Excellent

Bottom Line

Google Drive is one of the slickest, fullest-featured, and most generous cloud storage and syncing services around, with excellent collaboration capabilities.

- **Pros**
 - Generous free storage space
 - Excellent productivity suite collaboration
 - Includes desktop-to-desktop file syncing
 - Many third-party integrations
 - Cross-platform apps
- **Cons**
 - No password protection for shared files
 - Anyone with your email can place items in your account
 - Multiple apps required for all related functions

Google Drive Specs

Android App	✓
Emphasis	Full service file storage, sharing, syncing, and collaboration
File Size Limit	5TB
File Versioning	✓
Free Storage	15GB
iOS App	✓

Online Editing



Windows App

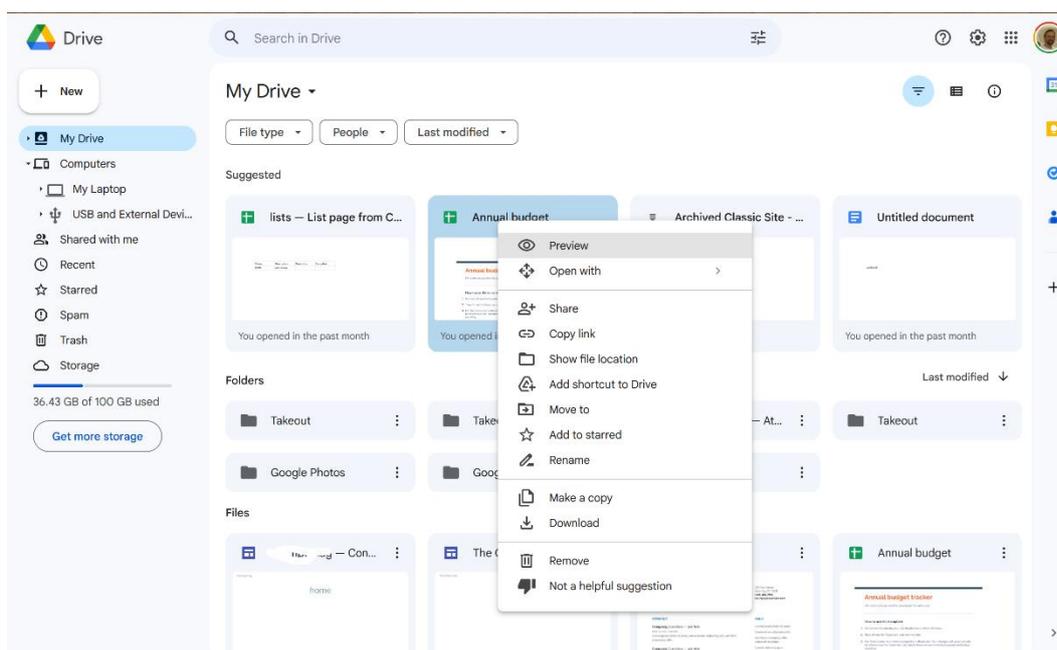


Google Drive is much more than just a [cloud-based storage and syncing service](#) with a generous free storage plan. It's also an integral part of a full, collaborative [office suite](#). You can use Google Drive to store documents you create in Google Docs and back up files on your computer. In addition, you can specify any folder on your device for backup and save space by not duplicating files on local storage. Paid plans, which add extra storage space and other perks, are branded as Google One, and you get a lot for your money. Google Drive is truly impressive in how it can help you store, back up, create, and even edit files, whether you work solo or as part of a team. Along with [Microsoft OneDrive](#), it's an Editors' Choice winner for file storage and syncing.

What Is Google Drive?

Google Drive is the file storage and syncing component included with any Google account. If you use [Google Workspace](#), Drive is a part of the whole suite, alongside other specific apps such as Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, and so forth. When you create a new Google Doc, it automatically saves to Google Drive. The online storage you get is shared among documents you create or save there, plus [Google Photos](#) and [Gmail](#), including those email attachments that can quickly fill up your allotted storage space.

In addition to using Google Drive as the default save space for all your Google-related files, you can upload any old file you like to it via its website, or you can install the Google Drive desktop client to run locally on your device as a file-syncing and storage solution, much the same way [Microsoft OneDrive](#) or [Dropbox](#) can. When you set up Google Drive locally, it saves and syncs any files you include under its subfolder. If your computer ever suffers a data loss (anything from a hardware failure to a house fire to ransomware), all the files you saved using Google Drive are safe and available to you to access or download from the Google Drive website. That way, if you have to buy a new computer or fully wipe and reset your computer, you can get all your files back.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

How Much Does Google Drive Cost?

It doesn't cost anything to sign up for a Google account and start using Google Drive. You get 15GB of space for free, which is generous compared with what other storage services give you for nothing.

If you need more storage space, you have to pay for a [Google One](#) account. Google One is nothing more than a bundle of subscription services. When you become a paying customer for extra storage space, Google throws in a few additional benefits, such as extra [photo editing tools](#) and discounts on Google products. All paid Google One plans can be shared among up to five family members and friends.

Google One's Basic plan increases your space to 100GB and costs \$1.99 per month or \$19.99 per year. You get the bonus photo editing tools in the Google Photos mobile app, as well as support via phone and text chat.

Since our last update of this review, the \$2.99-a-month (or \$29.99 per year) 200GB Standard plan has been removed from Google's pricing page. Strangely, it was still available as a downgrade option on my plan during my testing.

The \$9.99-per-month (or \$99.99 per year) Premium plan gets you 2TB of storage and a 10% discount in the Google Store on Pixel phones, Nest [smart home devices](#), and other products. For those with large storage needs, prices go all the way up to \$149.99 per month for 30TB of storage.

For comparison, a \$9.99-a-month or \$99-per-year [Microsoft 365](#) account gets you 6TB of [OneDrive](#) storage—1TB each for six people (compared with 2TB from Google for the same price). Microsoft also gives you installable Office productivity applications, [Teams](#), premium Office templates, Family Safety features, and support by phone and chat. A single-user account is \$6.99 per month or \$69.99 per year. Free users get just 5GB and use of the web versions of Microsoft Office.

Apple device owners familiar with [iCloud Drive](#) may know that the free storage allotment there is a measly 5GB (it's an even measlier 1GB if you didn't buy an Apple computer or mobile device). You can add 50GB more storage for 99 cents per month, 200GB for \$2.99 per month, or 2TB for \$9.99 per month. The last two options cost the same as Google One. At all levels, you get the quasi-VPN service Apple calls Private Relay, but it only works in Safari.

Note that Apple One, despite its similarity in naming to the Google and Microsoft offerings, is a different animal. It delivers online content (Apple TV+, Apple Music, Apple News, etc.) and not much cloud storage for a starting subscription of \$19.95 per month, which only gets you 50GB of storage.

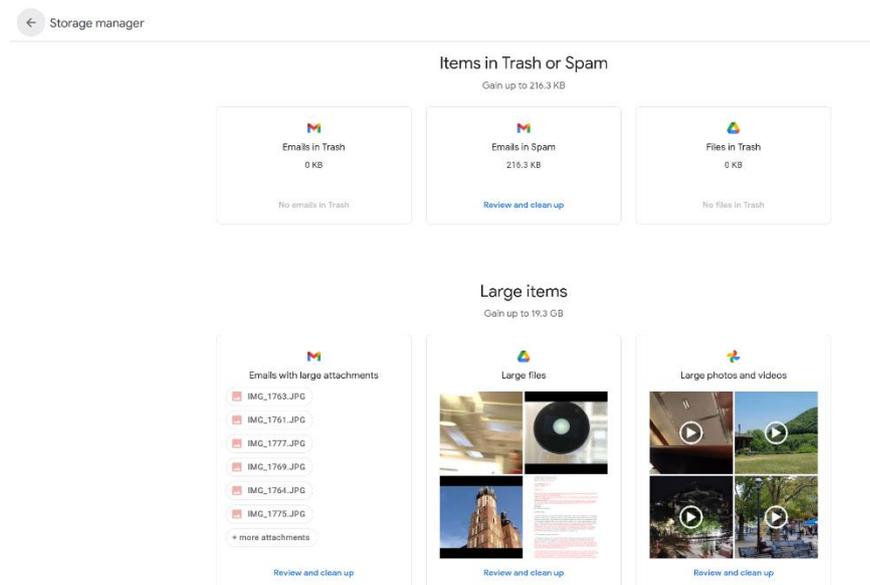
Plenty of other services offer cloud storage and syncing without turning them into bundled deals. Editors' Choice winner [iDrive](#) charges \$79.50 per year for a beefy 5TB and [Dropbox](#) provides you with 2TB for \$119.88 per year or \$11.99 month-to-month.

Google Drive's Web Interface

Google Drive's online design has improved over the years and is now more intuitive than ever. It's easy to change the file view to see either thumbnail images or a list. Creating folders and subfolders to organize your files is straightforward. Other ways to organize, besides using folders, include using color coding and stars. One convenience worth noting is that you can drag and drop files from your computer onto any open folder in the browser to upload them.

If you use Google Drive to sync files from other devices, you'll find them in the left pane under Computers. Google Drive automatically calls them by the device name, but you can rename them however you want.

One of the few things that's still clumsy and complicated in the web app is figuring out [how to free up space in Google Drive](#) by identifying and removing large and unwanted files, especially files shared with you. Admittedly, since the launch of Google One, it's gotten much better. An interface now helps you find the cause of nearly full storage. As you drill down, it pinpoints potential problem areas.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

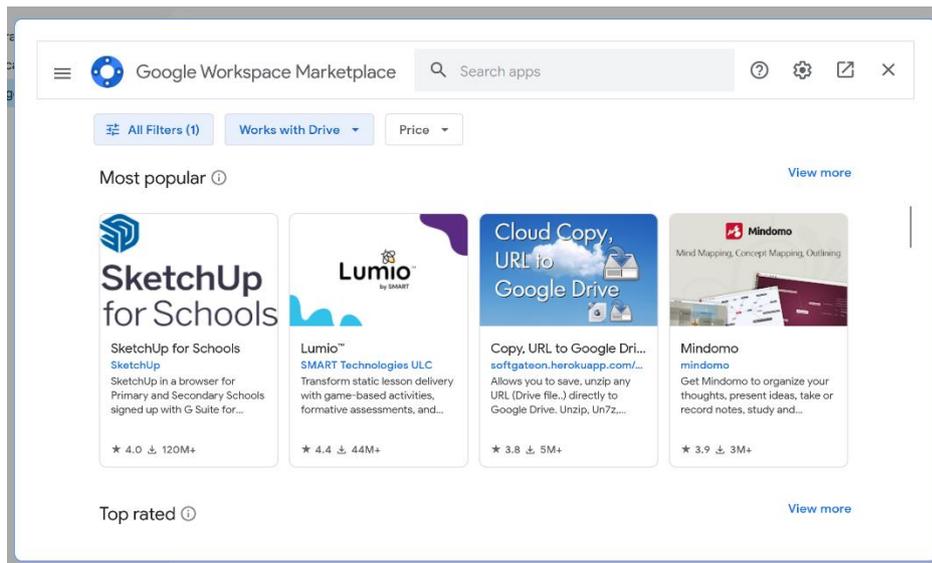
In addition to supporting Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides, Drive can store Forms, Drawings, Maps, PDFs, image files, and more. You can even integrate with a wealth of third-party Web apps to work with other types of files, such as CAD or music files (more on this below).

We won't get into the office suite features here. For that, see PCMag's review of [Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides](#).

Sharing and Connected Apps

You can share any files stored on Drive either privately or publicly. But when you share files and folders from Google Drive, the options are limited. You have good control over making a file publicly available to anyone with a link or restricting access to specified people, as well as determining whether someone has read-only or editing privileges, but you still can't add a password to a shared file or set an expiration date for when a shared link should expire, as you can with OneDrive. [Box](#), [Dropbox](#), and other services also offer more options when you share files, though in some cases you need a paid account to get all those features.

One potentially undesirable aspect of sharing in Google Drive has prompted reader feedback to us: Anyone on the web can put whatever they want in your Shared With Me section. Most of the time, the files are those you want, but if someone has the email address you use for Drive, they can post something that you may *not* want. Google blocks known [malware](#), but that doesn't stop anyone with your email address from placing something offensive, disturbing, or just plain unwanted in your Drive. It would be better if you got an alert and had the chance to block, approve, or reject new files.



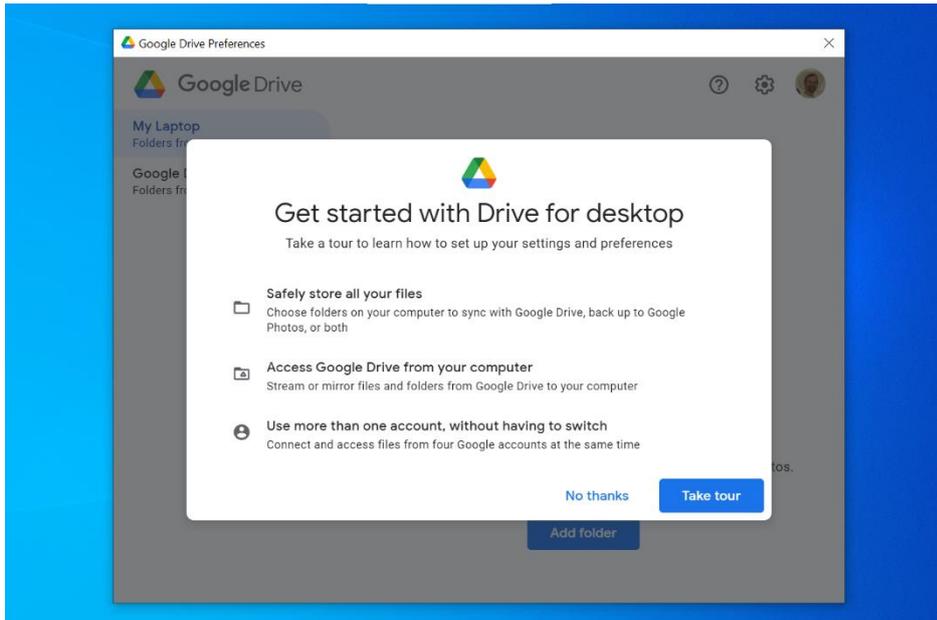
(Credit: Google/PCMag)

On a happier note, Google Drive integrates with as many web services as any other online storage more web services than, if not more. Many cloud-based apps let you easily use it for storage. Above, we mentioned that you can use integrations to edit CAD or music files. And if you're planning on using online productivity or workplace collaboration tools, Google Drive almost certainly works with it. You can even find online apps that add [ChatGPT](#) features to your spreadsheets, showing how up-to-date these connections are.

Make note of one set of online apps that disappointingly, but understandably, doesn't integrate with Google Drive: the online versions of the Microsoft Office apps. If you prefer those to Google Docs, you have to download the files or use the Google Drive desktop client before you can work on them.

Google Drive as a Desktop Client

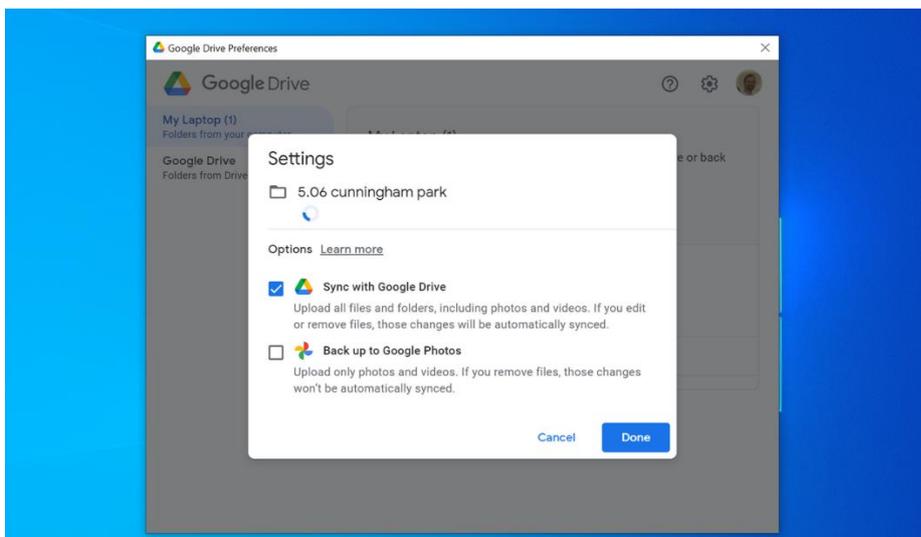
In the past, Google called its desktop client for syncing by different names: Backup & Sync for consumers and File Stream for business accounts. We mention this for two reasons. First, you may come across those names in old help documents or articles. Second, if you installed one of the older versions of the clients in the past, you should get rid of it and install the latest Google Drive for Desktop application. It's much better. When you do install it, it alerts you if you have the old version installed and asks if you'd like to do away with it.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

The Google Drive desktop application is available for Windows 10, [Windows 11](#), or macOS 10.15.7 or later. It is not in either OS's app store, however. You have to download it from the browser and run an installer. There's no version available for Linux, but [ChromeOS](#) uses Google Drive for *all* its storage, so it's built into that [operating system](#).

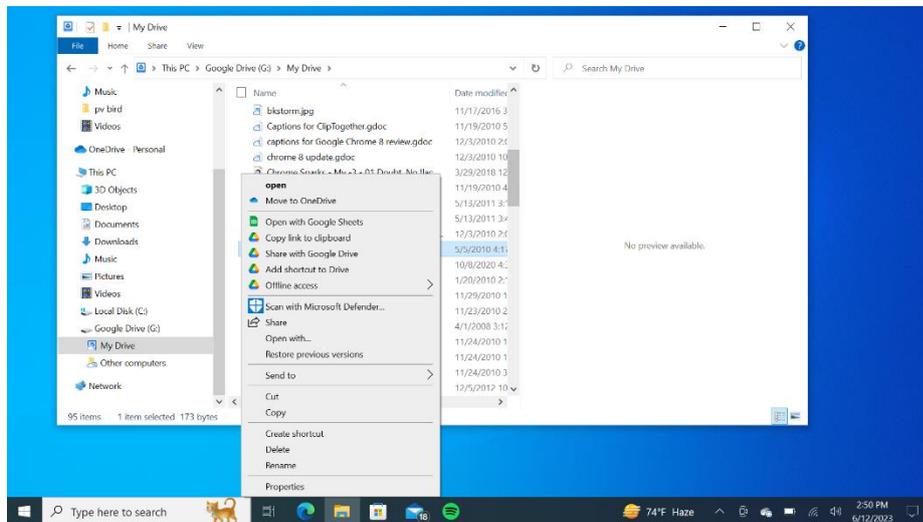
After downloading and installing the desktop client, it asks you to authenticate your account back in the web browser. Then the Google Drive app prompts you to give it access to files in various locations, such as your Desktop and Documents folder. Those are cursory approvals. You still need to give the app instructions to start backing up anything. You have to open the app and indicate which folders on your computer you'd like to back up.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

If you've used other backup and syncing apps before, Google Drive is a bit different. With some dedicated backup services, such as [Backblaze](#), you select the areas of your computer that you want to back up from a file tree view, and you can choose multiple locations at once. With Google Drive,

you pick individual folders, one at a time. For folders that include images, you get options to upload them to your standard Google Drive, to Google Photos, or to both. Choosing the latter doubles the amount of storage the images use.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

Once you have the Google Drive desktop application installed, you see an entry for it in Windows File Explorer or macOS Finder, where you can access files just as you would local ones, even if you've chosen the streaming option (see next section). You also get right-click context menu options to store any selected file to Drive or to make Drive files available offline or cloud-stored only. You also get access to Google Drive settings from a small icon in the Windows system tray or the macOS menu bar.

Streaming vs. Mirroring on Google Drive

So far, we've looked at creating and saving files in Google Drive and syncing and backing up files from the desktop to Drive. But what about syncing those files you created *in* Drive (or uploaded to Drive) *to* your computer? You have two options: streaming and mirroring.

Streaming files means you store all My Drive files in the cloud and access them on-demand from your computer. "My Drive" files here refer to files that you either create right in the Google Drive web app or upload there, that is, files that *do not* originate from an external source, like your computer or phone. With this option, you can also choose files and folders to make available offline. Any changes you make to the files sync automatically. This option is similar to OneDrive's Files on Demand feature.

Mirroring files means you store all My Drive files in the cloud *and* on your computer. All files and folders will be available offline, so you don't have to choose individual ones for that. Once again, any changes you make to any of the files sync automatically to the other place.

Streaming is the better option if you don't want to use up a lot of local storage on your computer. The only time files will take up space on your machine is when you're working on them and the ones you choose to make available offline. On Windows, mirroring is the better option if you don't want to mess around with choosing which files should be available offline—but this option will take up more space on your computer.

Powerful Search and OCR in Google Drive

The files you store in Google Drive are highly searchable. One way is through optical character recognition or OCR. When you save and sync image files and PDFs in Google Drive, the app scans the files for text, which the app then makes searchable. To test it, we uploaded a PDF of a recipe for chocolate cake and made sure the word "chocolate" wasn't in the filename. Seconds after uploading the file, we searched for the word "chocolate" across all our Google Drive files, and the app found it straight away.

Microsoft OneDrive uses OCR on images and PDFs, too. It uses AI to apply tags to photos and extract text that you can see in the info panel of any file.

If you have more needs for OCR, say you want to be able to extract text from PDFs and images so that it's editable, see our roundup of the [best mobile scanning apps with OCR](#) and our tutorial on how to [turn PDFs and image files into Word docs](#).

How Secure Is Google Drive?

As mentioned in other PCMag reviews of Google and parent company Alphabet's products and services, Google's data centers are highly secure. They are geographically distributed, have completed all relevant SOC audits, and meet all necessary standards to ensure your data's security. The company says that data is "encrypted when it's stored on disk, stored on backup media, or traveling between data centers." Could an attacker steal your password and access files you store in Drive? Yes. But Google does give you added protections for securing your account, such as supporting more than one [multi-factor authentication](#) option.

Some online backup services let you choose an encryption key that's in your possession alone, so that not even the company's employees can decrypt your files. If you go this route, just be careful not to lose your encryption password or your data will be gone for good. OneDrive offers what it calls a Personal Vault, which requires an extra authentication step before its contents become visible. Google Drive has no comparable feature.

As for privacy, a couple of comforting statements appear in the Google Drive documentation. First: "We don't use information in apps where you primarily store personal content—including Drive—for advertising purposes, period." And the other is: "We access your private content only when we have your permission or are required to by law." (Note, however, that governments can cast broad nets for data they want to examine, and the number of requests grows substantially every year.)

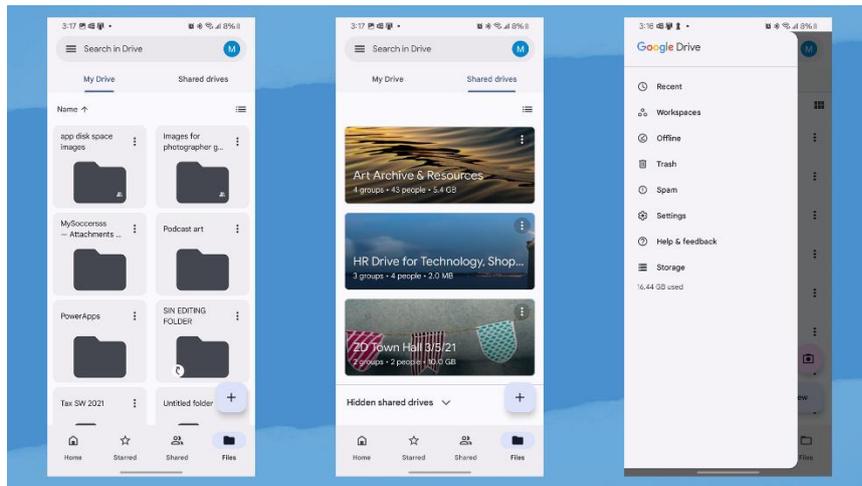
The service gives you some good controls for disabling or deleting information that Google records about you and your activities. The hardest part is reading through all your options and finding the information you want to control or delete without going down the wrong rabbit hole first.

The company has a [transparency report](#)—something we like to see—indicating how many requests it gets for things like user information and government requests to access data. Google/Alphabet is a massive company with many divisions, products, and services, so even its transparency report is just a long list of additional links, so you might spend some time finding what you want.

Google Drive's Mobile Apps

Google Drive has mobile apps for all major mobile platforms. They give you access to the most recent versions of all your files from your phone or tablet. You can view dozens of different file types right in the Google Drive app. In some cases, you can edit files in Google Drive, though often the app will

suggest editing in other Google apps, such as Sheets or Docs. You can, however, read and add comments to files from the Google Drive mobile app.



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

Many file syncing and storage apps, such as Dropbox and OneDrive, offer to automatically upload images and videos that you take on your phone or tablet. That way, you never have to remember to back them up. The Google Drive app doesn't have that feature, though the Google Photos app does.

The Google One mobile app duplicates functions in the regular Google Drive app, offering phone backup and storage management.

What Else Could You Want? Well, We'll Tell You...

Despite its wealth of tools and slick operation, we'd still like to see more from Google Drive. For example, its multimedia features aren't all that robust. There are no tools for [deduping](#) photos, except by eyeing them. (OneDrive has the same problem.) Above, we've mentioned other limitations that we'd like to see addressed, including the lack of passwords for file sharing, the inability to block any incoming shared files, and the limitations of the mobile apps.

Verdict: You're in the Driver's Seat

If you have a Google account, you should take advantage of Google Drive, especially in conjunction with other Google productivity apps. You may not even need to pay anything if the 15GB free account fits your needs. Either way, Drive easily earns our Editors' Choice award for cloud storage and syncing. Our other winner in the category, [OneDrive](#), is well worth your consideration, too, thanks to its more robust [productivity apps](#) (Office is hard to beat), integrated photo tools, and better sharing options.

Dropbox

A strong cloud storage contender that charges too much



3.5 Good

Bottom Line

Dropbox, once a pioneer in the cloud storage and file-sharing space, is as reliable as ever, but it's not the best value.

- **Pros**
 - Plenty of additional features
 - Integrations with thousands of applications
 - Fast upload speeds
- **Cons**
 - Expensive
 - Overly complex

Dropbox Specs

Android App	
Emphasis	Simplicity, Ease of Use
File Size Limit	Unlimited
File Versioning	
Free Storage	2GB
iOS App	
Online Editing	
Windows App	

Once upon a time, Dropbox was a surprisingly simple [cloud storage and file-sharing service](#). You'd drag files into a magic Dropbox folder, and the files would sync to the cloud and to all your other devices. Dropbox can still work this way if you want, but the company offers a whole lot more, including a backup service, tools for taking screenshots and recording video of your screen, e-signature services, and an online document editor. While having more features is a boon, Dropbox has become increasingly complex. It's still a capable online cloud storage service, but you can pay less and get more space from competitors such as [Microsoft OneDrive](#) and [IDrive](#), both of which are Editors' Choice winners.

Note that this review focuses on Dropbox for personal use. For the corporate audience, PCMag has a separate [review of Dropbox for Business](#).

How Much Does Dropbox Cost?

Dropbox offers a free version called Dropbox Basic, which offers 2GB of storage space. You can earn up to 16GB of free storage space by referring people to Dropbox, but this takes work, as you only get 500MB per person you refer.

Either way, the amount you get for free is less generous than what you get from much of the competition. [Microsoft OneDrive](#), [Apple iCloud](#), [IDrive](#), and [Sync](#) all offer 5GB, while [Google Drive](#) comes with 15GB of storage, although it's shared with Gmail. Another limitation of Dropbox's free tier, compared to similar applications, is that you can only install the app on three devices. None of the other apps mentioned is limited in this way.

Dropbox's paid plans start at \$11.99 per month or \$119.88 per year for Plus, which offers 2TB of storage space and removes the device limitation. It's still pricier than the competition. [Google One](#), which adds storage space to individual Google Drive accounts, charges \$9.99 per month or \$99.99 per year for 2TB of storage. Apple's iCloud also charges \$9.99 per month for 2TB of storage. Microsoft charges \$99.99 per year for Microsoft 365 Family, which, in addition to offering 1TB of storage each to 6 users—for a total of 6TB—also includes office apps like Word, Excel, and Outlook. And it's not just the big companies. [Sync](#) costs less than Dropbox with a Solo Basic account for \$96 per year for 2TB. [IDrive](#) has one of the best deals available at \$79.50 per year for 5TB.

Another option is Dropbox Family, which gives you the same 2TB of storage you get for Dropbox Plus but lets you have as many as six people on the account, all with their own logins. You also get some special sharing features for everyone on the account; otherwise, the benefits are the same as what you get from Plus. The Family plan costs \$19.99 per month or \$203.88 per year. Dropbox has a few other account options, but they are all business-grade, and this review focuses on Dropbox for personal use.

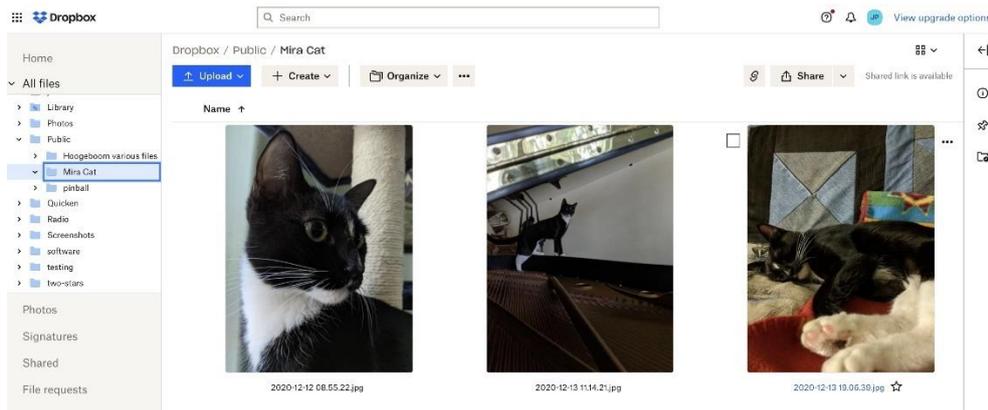
Terabyte for terabyte, then, Dropbox charges more than most of its competitors.

What Operating Systems Does Dropbox Work On?

Dropbox's desktop client is available for Windows (8, 8.1, 10, or 11), macOS (13 High Sierra or later), and Linux (Ubuntu 14.04 and later, Fedora 21 and later).

The web version is officially supported in the two most recent versions of Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge, and Safari.

Dropbox's mobile application is supported on Android (6 and later) as well as iOS and iPadOS (13.1 and later).



Getting Started Can Be Tricky

Before you can use Dropbox, you need to head to Dropbox.com and sign up for an account. Note that for individual users, the only option after signing up is the Plus plan—the free Dropbox Basic plan isn't visible, nor is the free trial of Dropbox Plus. To get the free version, you need to go to Dropbox.com/basic and sign up there. Dropbox Basic is not linked to from the homepage or mentioned on the Sign Up page. Even if you figure it out, the only way to get the free version is to click this tiny link at the bottom of the page. Likewise, you can get a free trial of the Plus plan, but you don't see that offer anywhere until you begin to sign up for Dropbox Basic.

I understand the economic incentives at play—free users don't earn Dropbox any revenue—but making the free and trial versions so hard to find shows a willingness to make users jump through hoops. It doesn't build trust.

Try out the best of Dropbox for free for 30 days

We'll remind you when you have a few days left in your trial. ⓘ

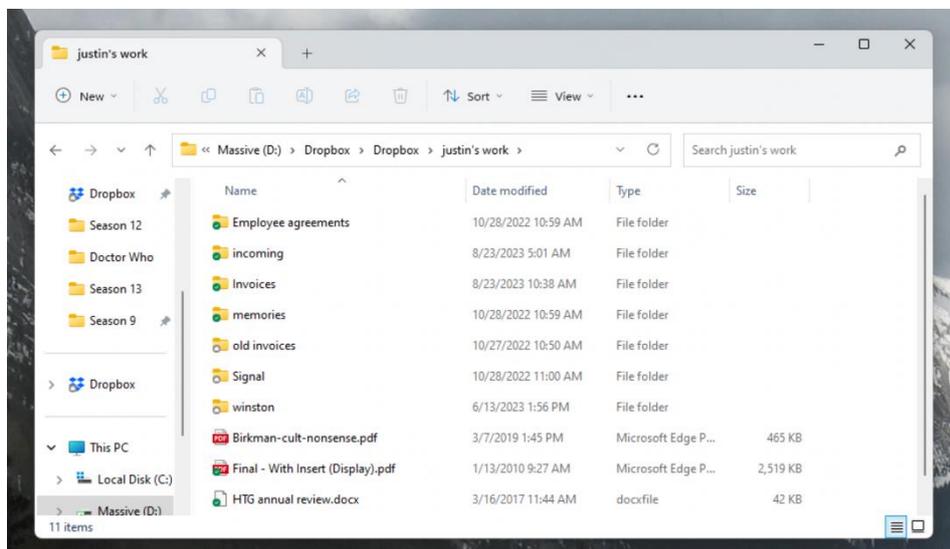
✦ Best Value		
<p>For individuals</p> <p>Plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 user 2,000 GB storage Free up your hard drive automatically Link as many devices as you need 30-day accident, theft, and disaster recovery <p>Try free for 30 days</p> <p>or purchase now</p>	<p>For solo-workers</p> <p>Professional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 user 3,000 GB storage Share your work with increased control and security 180-day accident, theft, and disaster recovery <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited eSignatures, and more ⓘ <p>Try free for 30 days</p> <p>or purchase now</p>	<p>For teams</p> <p>Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3+ users 5,000 GB storage Organize team content in a central workspace Unlock easy-to-use security controls 180-day accident, theft, and disaster recovery <p>Try free for 30 days</p> <p>or purchase now</p>

[Continue with 2 GB Dropbox Basic plan](#)

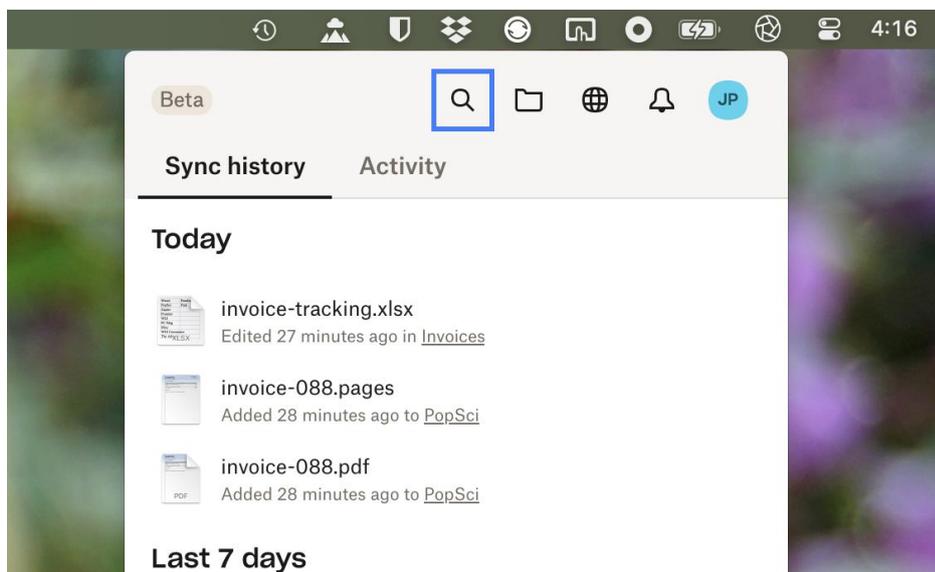
After signing up, the site prompts you to download the Dropbox app for your computer, which is a straightforward affair. The app then creates a Dropbox folder for you. If you used Dropbox in its early years, this part of the process will be familiar. Any files you put in this folder are uploaded to the cloud, becoming available on the other devices where you've installed Dropbox and from the Dropbox web app. Depending on your settings, your files may also be available offline (more on that part in a moment). It's a simple enough setup, one since copied by many other services. When Dropbox first launched, however, the concept was brand new.

Classic Syncing With Cloud Compromises

Dropbox's main feature is, as mentioned above, *the Dropbox*, a folder on your computer you can drop anything into for it to sync to the cloud and your other devices. Open this folder, and you see icons added to every file. A green circle with a checkmark means the file or folder is fully synced and available offline. A blue icon means the file is syncing or the folder contains files that are syncing. A gray cloud icon means the file is only available online. It's simple enough, and it works.



Outside this folder, Dropbox's desktop app primarily lives as an icon in the Windows system tray or Mac menu bar. Click it to see a summary of files that have recently been uploaded, or select your profile icon in the top-right corner to find the settings. From here, you can enable or disable the backup feature, set a cap on the application's bandwidth usage, decide what notifications you want to see, and choose which files will be synced to your device.



Pay attention to the syncing settings. Dropbox, by necessity, works differently than it did in the first few years after it launched. Back then, the model was to sync files directly from your computer to the cloud and to other computers from there. The problem today is that at 2TB, Dropbox's cheapest paid plan offers more space than most people have room for on their computers. If you sync files from

multiple computers and Dropbox puts a copy of all those files on every device you sync, you won't have room for them all locally.

The result is a compromise. When I set up Dropbox on a Windows machine that previously didn't have the application, all new files were only available *online* by default. It changed if I opened a file, which caused the cloud icon to disappear and the file to download and become available for offline usage. To summarize, the default setting doesn't sync all your files but rather makes them available and visible but only downloads them when you open them.

It's worth noting that this selective syncing feature is only available to paid customers, and it's currently not fully working on macOS. Dropbox [advises Mac users](#) to make files available offline before attempting to open them using third-party software. If you don't want to use this feature, you can instead exclude certain folders from showing up on any of your synced devices entirely.

Dropbox also offers backup in the desktop version. You can choose to back up the Documents, Desktop, and Downloads folders on your computer. A drop-down menu also allows you to back up Music, Pictures, and Movies. There's no ability to back up any other folders, which might annoy users with multiple hard drives. But it makes sense. Dropbox isn't aiming to become a full-fledged [backup service](#), only to keep a copy of your data safe and synced. It's nice to have the basics covered, though. Backed-up files can be recovered from the web interface, which allows you to revert to any version of a file created in the last 30 days.

The desktop application adds a few other nice-to-have features. For example, you can enable Dropbox as a save location in [Microsoft Office](#), and an overlay in the Office application lets you track versions of a document.

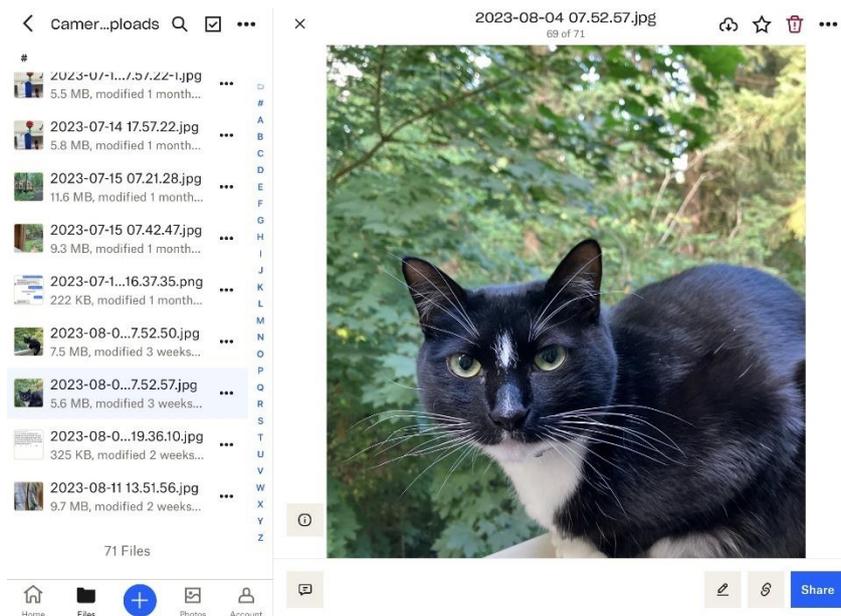
Sharing Files and Folders With Dropbox

You can share a file from the desktop application by right-clicking on any file or folder, or you can do it from your browser. You can share files specifically with another Dropbox user, or you can generate a link that allows anyone to access the file. The options for sharing are strong, but only if you have a business-class Dropbox account. Even with a paid Dropbox Plus account for home users, the options are limited. You can't set expiration dates on shared links, password-protect shared links, or make files view-only so people can't download them. We'd expect to see such features for the price Dropbox charges for a Plus account.

A File Request feature lets you set up a web page where people can upload files to you, whether they have a Dropbox account or not.

Accessing Files on the Go With Dropbox

Dropbox's mobile application is available for Android devices, iPhones, and iPads. I tested it primarily on an iPad mini and a Pixel phone.



The application lets you browse all files in your Dropbox, as well as any computer folders you may have backed up. You can decide to make any file or folder available offline if you like, and you get the ability to edit certain files using the appropriate applications, such as editing a spreadsheet stored in Dropbox using the Excel app on your phone.

The Dropbox mobile app also has the option to automatically store in Dropbox all the photos and videos you take using your device. It's a standard feature of the best file-syncing services. If your phone is lost, stolen, or broken, your images and videos need not be gone forever. And an added benefit is you have access to all your photos on all your devices.

For free users, installing the Dropbox app on your phone counts as using up one of your three devices, though you can get around this by using the web app in a mobile browser instead. It works pretty well, though you lose out on being able to automatically sync any photos and videos you take with your phone to Dropbox.

The Dropbox Web Experience

The nice thing about the web version of Dropbox is that you don't really need to use it very often, and that's a compliment to the product. You can do almost everything in Dropbox using the apps, which is relatively rare in today's software ecosystem.

The web interface is a competent alternative to the desktop or mobile experience. You can browse and manage all your files, [preview hundreds of file types](#), and easily restore any file you deleted in the past 30 days. That applies if you have Dropbox Basic (free), Plus, or Family. You also have 30 days of version history for all your files.

Dropbox Extras and Integrations

Perhaps one of the best arguments for using Dropbox is the sheer scale of extras you get in the form of included extras and supported integrations. Granted, Dropbox doesn't offer a full suite of its own office apps the way Microsoft or Google do, but you can connect Dropbox to practically any major app to integrate it seamlessly.

Among its own special tools and features is [Dropbox Capture](#). Capture is a simple tool for recording videos or [taking screenshots](#) on a Windows or macOS computer. It's included even at the free level

and is a great alternative to [Loom](#), an application that costs \$8 per month. The only real limitation is the amount of space you have left in your account.

[Dropbox Sign](#), formerly known as Hello Sign, allows for legally binding document signatures—Dropbox Plus subscribers can request three signatures per month. [Dropbox Passwords](#) is a [password manager](#) that's free to all Dropbox users. [Dropbox Paper](#) is a bare-bones alternative to Google Docs that works well for quick notes. None of these applications is going to make the cost of a Dropbox subscription worthwhile on its own, but any of them could be compelling when combined with the cloud storage and syncing that is Dropbox's main feature.

Back to integrations, the sheer number that Dropbox offers is another reason to consider this file-syncing service over others. The [Dropbox App Center](#) offers hundreds of tools you can connect to Dropbox, allowing you to do things like share Dropbox files in Gmail conversations or automatically send content to any folder using [IFTTT](#) or [Zapier](#). If an application can connect to any storage service, it can connect to Dropbox, and that's a powerful advantage.

How Fast Does Dropbox Upload Files?

Make no mistake: Dropbox is fast. I uploaded 505GB of files to Dropbox, which took 1 day and 38 minutes. That's an average rate of 2 minutes and 56 seconds per gigabyte, making it one of the fastest services I've tested. IDrive comes close. It uploaded a gigabyte at an average rate of 3 minutes and 24 seconds. Sync, on the other hand, takes 5 minutes and 31 seconds per gigabyte. For context, I ran my tests on a Windows 10 desktop with a mechanical hard drive attached to my local network via ethernet. My home internet upload speed is 50mbps.

Capable, But Complicated

Dropbox deserves credit for being a pioneer in the cloud storage and file-sharing space, and it's still a decent service. It's fast, offers thousands of app integrations, and has many bonus features. On the other hand, it's complicated and expensive, even considering its many features. That's not to say Dropbox is bad, just that there are better choices. [OneDrive](#), for example, which comes with Microsoft 365 accounts, costs less and offers better syncing. Online backup service [IDrive](#) is an even more affordable option with an optional syncing service. Both of these services are Editors' Choice winners.

IDrive

The best backup deal on the market



(Credit: IDrive)

4.5 Excellent

Bottom Line

IDrive is fast, easy to set up, and simple to use—and you won't find a better price per terabyte for backing up your devices.

- **Pros**
 - Free local backup
 - Unlimited devices per account
 - Fully encrypted
 - Fast upload speeds
 - Excellent value
 - Inexpensive add-on for backups of Microsoft and Google accounts
- **Cons**
 - Storage isn't unlimited
 - Limited Linux support
 - Complete disk image backup only for Windows

IDrive Specs

Android App	
Emphasis	Backup
File Sharing	
File Size Limit	2GB
File Versioning	
Folder Syncing	

Free Storage	10GB
iOS App	✓
Number of Computers (Base Plan)	Unlimited
Private Key Encryption	✓
Storage (Base Plan)	100GB
Versions Kept	30
Versions Period	Unlimited
Windows App	✓

Everyone should have some kind of [backup software or service](#) set up, or you risk losing all your data. Most people's best bet is IDrive, which offers more storage space than most users will ever need for a price lower than most of the competition. It's also fast and easy to set up and use. You can install IDrive on all your PCs and mobile devices and then not think about it, which is precisely how it should work. It's also a great choice for backing up your Google and Microsoft cloud data. For its outstanding value and reliable service, IDrive is an Editors' Choice winner for backup software.

How Much Does IDrive Cost?

IDrive offers a free version with 10GB of storage space. No credit card is required to sign up for this version. Most people won't be able to back up their entire computer with 10GB, but it's enough space to store a lot of documents and images. It's also quite generous. Most backup applications don't offer a free version at all.

It's also worth noting that all versions of IDrive, including the free version, can back up files locally to an external or network drive. Many services don't offer local backup; others, including [Carbonite Safe](#), charge extra for the feature. There's no device limit, so you can back up as many devices as you like with any of IDrive's plans.

IDrive's cheapest plan, IDrive Mini, starts at \$2.95 per year for 100GB of storage. That's an exceptionally low price, though anyone with a large collection of videos, photos, documents, and audio files may fill up that space quickly. Still, it's an excellent value, especially for anyone who doesn't save a lot of multimedia.

For most people, though, IDrive Personal is the better option for individual users. Personal starts at \$99.50 per year for 5TB of storage. You get a discount on the price for the first year (\$69.65).

Competitor [SpiderOak One Backup](#) offers 400GB for \$115 per year. Its 5TB plan costs \$320 per year. [Elephant Drive](#) charges \$100 per year for 1TB of storage and \$500 per year for 5TB. [Backblaze](#) offers unlimited storage space for \$99 per year. Notably, that plan can only be used to

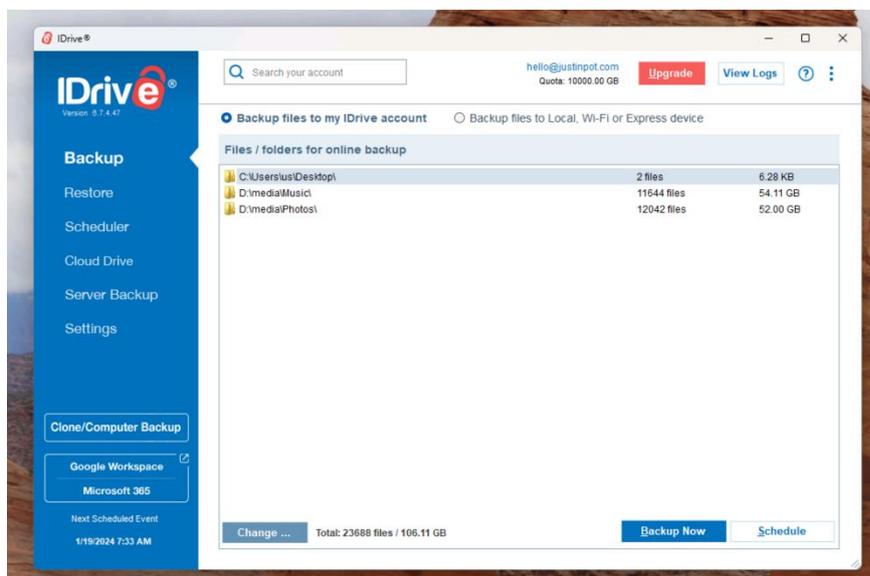
back up a single computer and doesn't support mobile devices. This means that IDrive represents the best value for most individual users, especially if they only need 100GB of storage.

IDrive's Business plans start at \$99.50 for 5TB of storage shared among five users and five computers and scale up from there. It's competitive for business-grade backup. Elephant Drive charges businesses \$400 per year for 2TB of storage, while SpiderOak charges \$320 per year for 5TB of storage.

IDrive recently added a service to back up Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 accounts. These services both cost \$20 per account per year—a great price. For comparison, [Fileshadow](#) exists entirely to backup cloud services, and it starts at \$90 per year for only 30GB of storage and can cost as much as \$900 per year for 600GB. That's a much higher price for much less storage than what you can get with IDrive.

What Operating Systems Does IDrive Support?

IDrive offers desktop clients for Windows (7 and later) and macOS (10.11 El Capitan and later). There is a command-line-only version of IDrive for Linux, intended for servers, that you can only get if you email the support team and ask for it. There are also mobile clients for iOS and Android.



(Credit: IDrive/PCMag)

Getting Started With IDrive

Before using IDrive, you need to sign up for an account, which you can do without a credit card if you opt for the free version. After creating your account, you get links to the IDrive application for various devices. You must install the software on every device you want to back up.

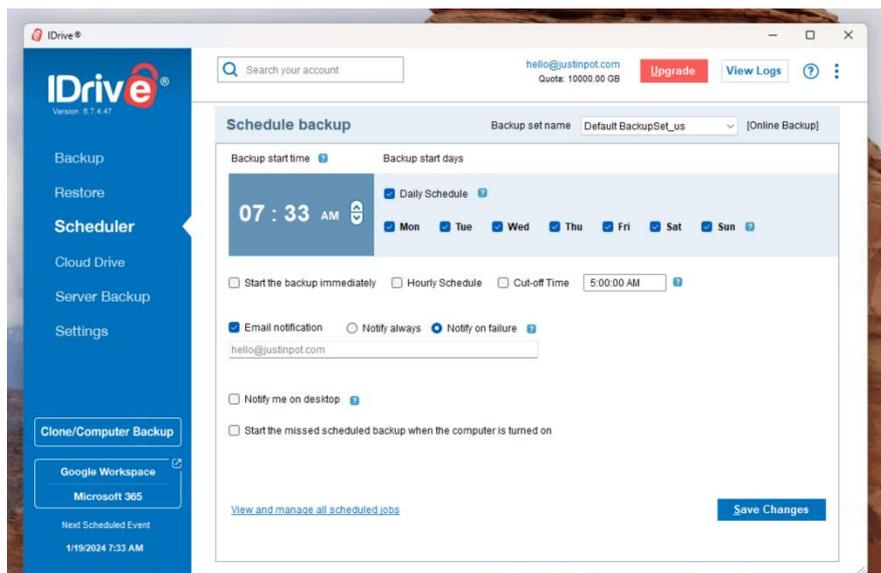
After installation, you sign into your account and decide which files to back up regularly. You can back up only selected folders, such as your documents and pictures, or back up your entire hard drive. It's up to you.

You can enable an optional syncing service called Cloud Drive from the settings. Any files you drop into your Cloud Drive folder are backed up and synced to other computers, which is similar to how [Dropbox](#) works. It's not turned on by default, and the company even refers to it as a "separate service," which is odd, seeing as it's included with IDrive.

Desktop Backup Done Right

The desktop app makes it easy to back up as many files as you like on a regular schedule—or nearly continuously, called Real-Time in the options. The default is to back up every day first thing in the morning, which is probably ideal for most people. Those who want less frequent updates can choose days of the week and times for the operation. Most people can probably stick with the defaults, but power users will appreciate the flexibility.

One setting I like is the option to receive email notifications only when a backup doesn't complete. If everything is working fine, I don't want to think about it.



(Credit: IDrive/PCMag)

As I previously mentioned, IDrive doesn't just do cloud backups; it can also back up files to an external hard drive or a network drive. Having at least two backups—one remote and one local—is a good strategy, and with IDrive, you can use the same application to do both. There's even support for creating a complete disk image, although it's limited to the Windows version. All these features make IDrive a complete backup offering.

Mobile Backup Included

IDrive can back up your mobile devices in addition to your computer. On iOS, it can back up your photos, videos, contacts, and calendar. Android users have even more options, with the ability to back up all that, plus complete SMS and call log history. There's also support for Android users to back up locally stored music and other files.

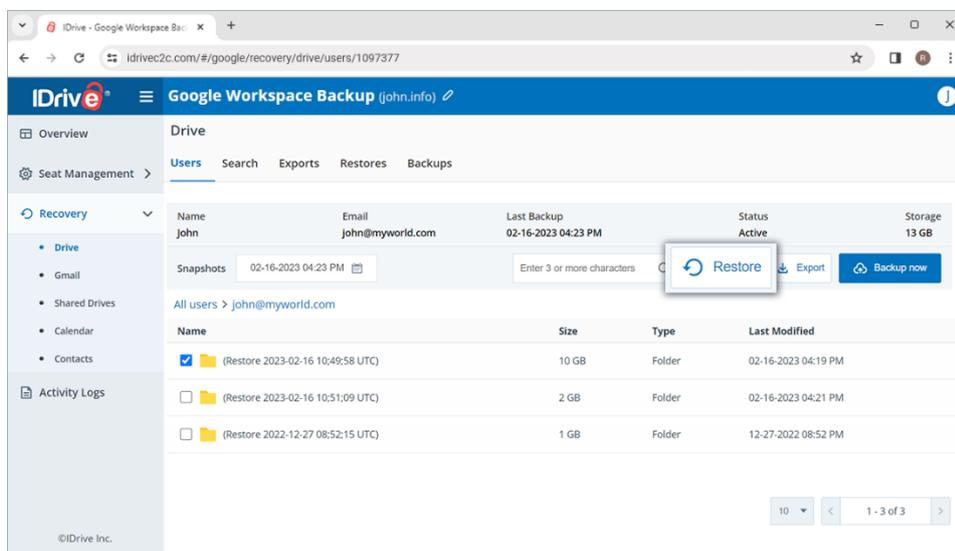


(Credit: IDrive/PCMag)

The photo backup is the biggest selling point here, though, because photos are the only truly irreplaceable data most people keep on their phones. Installing IDrive on a mobile device is an easy way to ensure you never lose those pictures. You can also use the mobile app to browse and download any file you've backed up.

Backup your Google and Microsoft Accounts

IDrive isn't limited to backing up files on your computer. It can also back up files you've stored in other cloud services, which is potentially useful if you ever lose access to your cloud account or if files are deleted accidentally. IDrive currently supports backing up two services: Google Workspace and Microsoft 365. It includes both files and emails. As mentioned, including cloud backup in your IDrive account adds \$20 per year per service to your subscription fee.



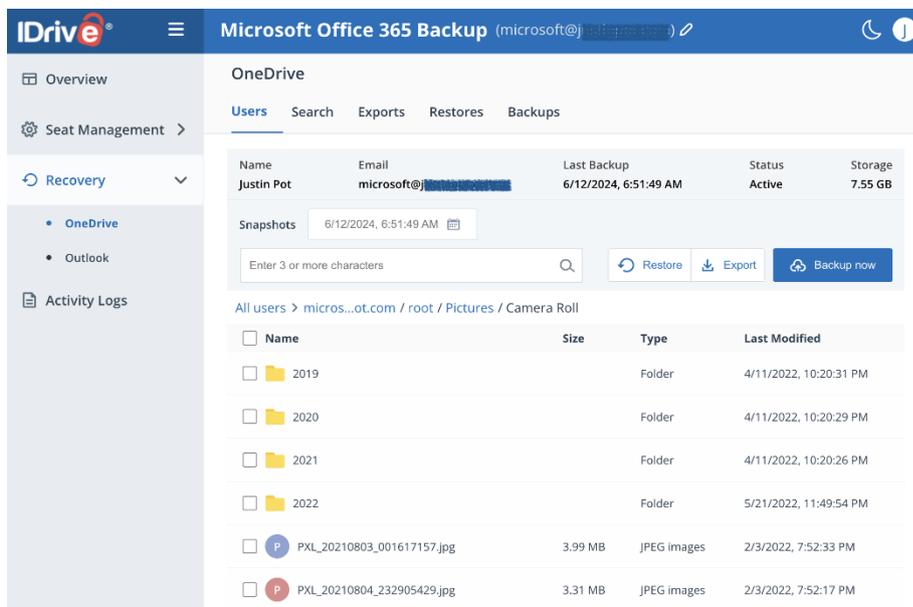
(Credit: IDrive)

The Microsoft backup comes with unlimited storage while the Google Workspace backup is capped at 10TB. Because you pay an additional fee for this service, the space you use for it does not count against your storage space for the rest of your IDrive account. They're counted separately.

The service is straightforward to use. You sign into your service, and the backups begin. Your files (in Google Drive for Google and OneDrive for Microsoft) and your emails (Gmail and Outlook) are backed up automatically and incrementally. If you want to recover a specific version of a specific file—say, the version of a document from last week, before you made certain changes—you can do that.

Note that the Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 backup service is geared more toward companies than individual users. When you use it, it looks and feels less like what you would normally see with consumer backup services and more like what administrators of large business accounts see.

At its heart, though, it's the same IDrive backup—it backs up files from your cloud storage. It would be nice to see more cloud storage services supported, like [Dropbox](#) and [Box](#), and a more streamlined version of the service for individuals.



The screenshot shows the IDrive web interface for Microsoft Office 365 Backup. The top navigation bar includes the IDrive logo, a menu icon, the title "Microsoft Office 365 Backup", and a user profile icon. The left sidebar contains navigation options: Overview, Seat Management, Recovery (with a dropdown arrow), OneDrive, Outlook, and Activity Logs. The main content area is titled "OneDrive" and includes sub-tabs for Users, Search, Exports, Restores, and Backups. A table lists backup details for "Justin Pot" with columns for Name, Email, Last Backup, Status, and Storage. Below this, there are "Snapshots" and a search bar. A file listing table shows folders for the years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, along with two JPEG image files. Action buttons for "Restore", "Export", and "Backup now" are visible.

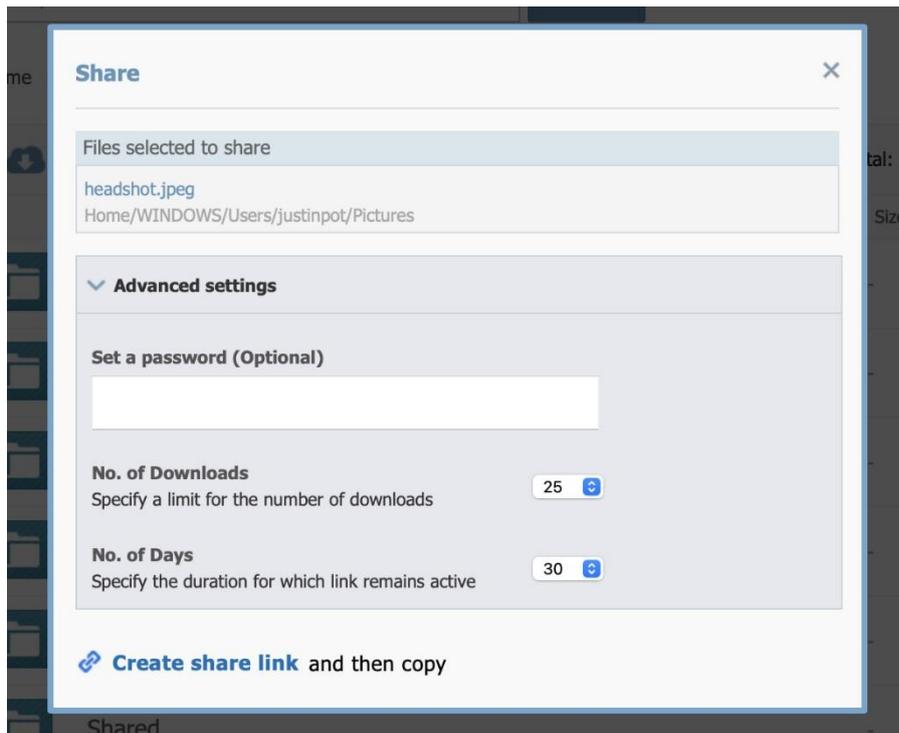
Name	Email	Last Backup	Status	Storage
Justin Pot	microsoft@j...	6/12/2024, 6:51:49 AM	Active	7.55 GB

Name	Size	Type	Last Modified
2019		Folder	4/11/2022, 10:20:31 PM
2020		Folder	4/11/2022, 10:20:29 PM
2021		Folder	4/11/2022, 10:20:26 PM
2022		Folder	5/21/2022, 11:49:54 PM
PXL_20210803_001617157.jpg	3.99 MB	JPEG images	2/3/2022, 7:52:33 PM
PXL_20210804_232905429.jpg	3.31 MB	JPEG images	2/3/2022, 7:52:17 PM

(Credit: IDrive/PCMag)

Simple Sharing

You can share any file backed up with IDrive from the web interface. There's no support for directly sharing a file with another IDrive user, just the ability to generate and copy a URL to the file. You can password-protect shared files, cap the number of times the file can be downloaded, and set the number of days the file will be available for others to view and download. I'd appreciate the ability to share files directly with other users, however, as you can with Dropbox.



(Credit: IDrive/PCMag)

Note that you cannot share files that are backed up from cloud services the way you can share files that are backed up from your computers. The reason is for security—remember, that IDrive's cloud backup is designed for business customers. The ability to share rightfully is controlled from Google Workspace or Microsoft 365.

Is IDrive Secure?

IDrive [says](#) all uploads are encrypted using 256-bit AES encryption on transfer and storage, which is the industry standard. [Multi-factor authentication](#) is also supported. You can use time-based one-time passcodes sent to an [authenticator app](#) (the method the PCMag security team recommends), or you can settle for receiving a code by email or SMS.

How Fast Does IDrive Upload Files?

During my testing, I backed up 505GB to IDrive in 28 hours and 44 minutes, which works out to an average upload time of 1GB every 3 minutes and 25 seconds. I tested on a Windows 10 desktop with a mechanical hard drive attached to my local network via Ethernet. My home internet upload speed is 50mbps. With these speeds, you can expect to max out your 5TB of storage in under 12 days, which is pretty impressive.

When I tested competitor [Box](#), I uploaded 98.7GB of files before my test files maxed out the 100GB of storage provided by the Personal Pro plan. That upload took around 6 hours and 4 minutes, which implies I was uploading files at a rate of 16.1GB per hour, which works out to 1GB in less than 4 minutes, nearly the same as IDrive. ElephantDrive uploaded 1GB of files from a NAS in an average of 15 minutes. Based on that figure, a terabyte of data could take roughly 10 days to upload, but with ElephantDrive, all files are encrypted before uploading, meaning the CPU affects the transfer speed from beginning to end. Your results will vary, of course, but these tests should give you an idea of the relative speeds of the services.

How Does File Recovery Work With IDrive?

The IDrive desktop and mobile applications both have Restore functionality that lets you choose which files you want to restore to your computer and where you'd like them to go. Everything happens in the background, which is what you want, although restoring a lot of files might take a while.

For some people, like those with finicky internet or frequent power outages, initiating a long, slow downloading process that runs in the background over hours or days isn't a viable option. For those people, IDrive also offers the ability to recover files via a hard drive shipped to you in the mail—an option called IDrive Express, and you can find it by logging into IDrive in the browser. It's potentially much faster to restore a large amount of data via a physical hard drive than over the internet. Subscribers with a Personal plan can request their data via post once per year with no extra charge. Business customers can do it three times a year without paying extra.

In addition to the US, restoration by mail is only offered in Canada, Germany, France, Italy, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK, according to IDrive. If you're in the US, IDrive provides a return shipping label for the hard drive. Customers outside the US may incur additional shipping costs, and all customers have to pay for any damaged drives.

This kind of service is not common, but it's also not unique. Backblaze, for example, offers a similar feature. It charges \$189 for the service, and you can get a refund by returning the drive within 30 days. Still, it's nice to have a quicker option for restoring large backups, particularly for people with slow download speeds.

Cloud backups can be restored in their entirety to either the original cloud account or to a new one. Microsoft accounts can only be restored to Microsoft accounts and Google accounts can only be restored to Google accounts. There's also an export option, which makes it possible to download all files from a cloud account to your computer.

Verdict: The Best Value in Backup Software

IDrive is a complete backup service that uploads files quickly and offers a staggering amount of value—you won't find a better deal for backup software. Still, other applications may also be worth looking into depending on your needs. [ShadowProtect SPX Desktop](#) is exceptional at creating full-disk images of Windows machines, and [Acronis Cyber Protect Home Office](#) combines all sorts of security tools with its offering. For most people, though, IDrive is the first backup solution to consider, and our Editors' Choice winner.

Box (Personal)

Browser-based storage with deep app integrations



(Credit: Box)

3.5 Good

Bottom Line

Box, a browser-focused cloud storage app, offers generous free storage, but its paid plan is a bit expensive for what you get.

- **Pros**
 - Flexible web app that can open files using desktop software
 - Integrations with more than 1,500 applications
 - Offline file access
 - Free version
- **Cons**
 - Pricey for the amount of storage offered
 - Low file-size limit
 - Can't configure location of desktop syncing app

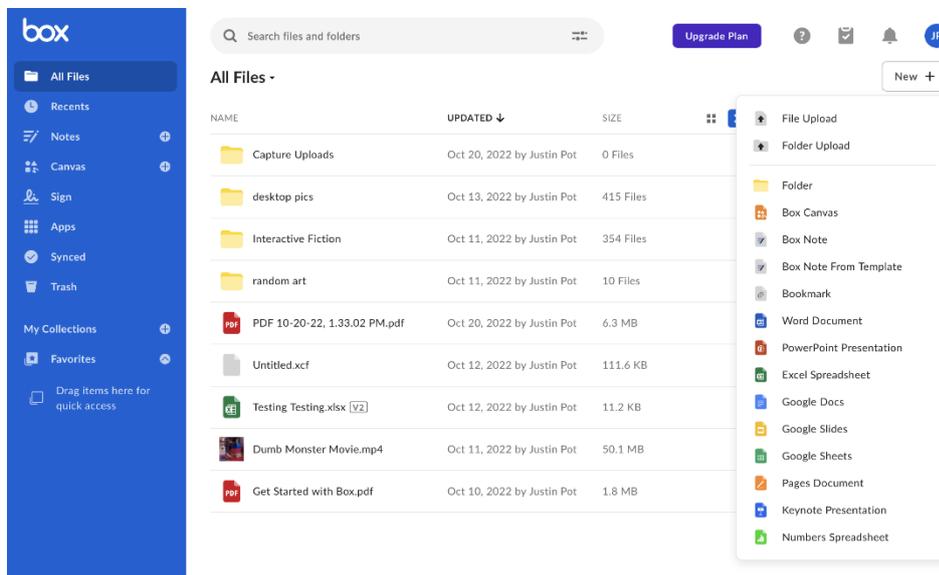
Box (Personal) Specs

Android App	
Emphasis	Business Use, Compatibility
File Size Limit	5GB
File Versioning	
Free Storage	10GB
iOS App	
Online Editing	
Windows App	

Box is a dependable [cloud storage and file-sharing service](#) focused more on the former than the latter. It works differently than many competitors because it's designed for browser use, with desktop functionality treated as an add-on. This strategy is terrific for businesses primarily working in the cloud, as it leverages Box's collaboration and integration features. For home users—the focus of this review—Box's paid subscription doesn't offer a lot of storage for the price. The free service tier is a good option if you mostly store text documents and small image files. Otherwise, you're better off with one of our Editors' Choice winners, [Google Drive](#), [iDrive](#), or [Microsoft OneDrive](#).

Plans and Prices

Box has a free version with an impressive 10GB of storage. That's twice the amount offered by similar tiers of [iCloud](#), [iDrive](#), and [OneDrive](#) (5GB), and five times as much as [Dropbox](#) (2GB). However, there's a 250MB limit on individual files, making Box's free version useless for anyone working with video or large audio files, such as [podcast recordings](#). Box's free version is perfectly serviceable if you mostly stick to documents and smaller images.



(Credit: Box/PCMag)

Box Personal Pro costs \$14 per month (or \$120 per year) and offers a relatively small 100GB of storage with a 5GB file size limit. With [Google One](#), you get 100GB of storage for only \$1.99 per month. iCloud lacks a 100GB tier, but you can snag 200GB for \$2.99 per month—that's twice as much as Box for almost one-fifth the cost. Even Dropbox's 2TB plan (\$11.99 per month or \$119.88 annually) costs less than what Box charges for 100GB.

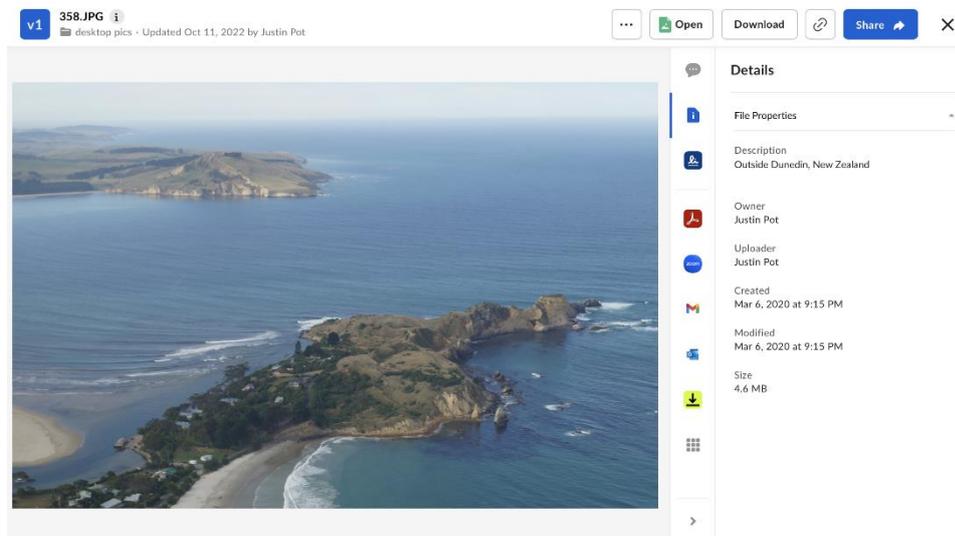
It doesn't help that Box's 5GB file size limit is lower than most competitors, too—a real problem if you work with big files. Dropbox's limit is 2TB; Google Drive's is a staggering 5TB; iCloud's is 50GB; and OneDrive's is 250GB.

Box's business plans fare better against the competition, but they're not our focus here. Read our [Box for Business](#) review for more on that version.

Getting Started With Box

You must create a Box account, even if you use the free version. Simply head to [Box.com](#) to choose a plan, but note that the personal options are hidden. To find them, click the Individuals and Teams banner at the top of the screen. After that, you'll see the free tier and the Personal Pro plan.

As mentioned, Box is designed to run in a [web browser](#). It supports the two most recent versions of Chrome, Edge, Firefox, and Safari.



(Credit: Box/PCMag)

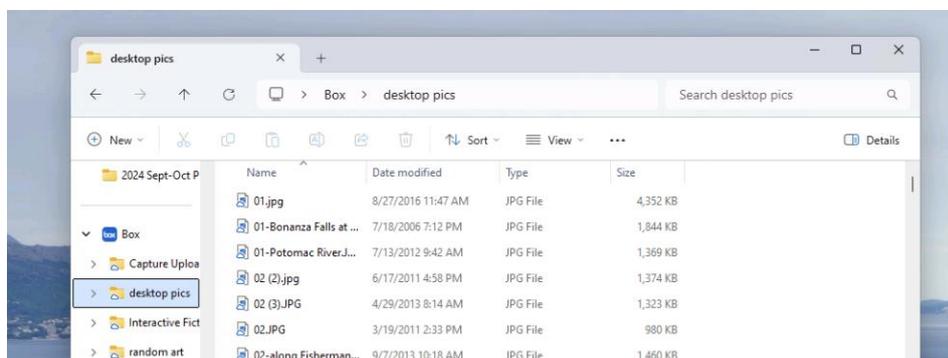
You can add desktop functionality by installing Box's two desktop apps: Box Drive and Box Tools. Box Drive lets you browse and access files from your PC's system file explorer. Box Tools opens the corresponding desktop app when you open a file from the web browser.

According to a Box representative, the apps work with the two most recent versions of both major operating systems (macOS [Sequoia](#) and [Sonoma](#), [Windows 11](#) and [10](#)). It's a little confusing that these are two separate tools, but it's a minor complaint. We'll explore those apps later.

Web and Desktop Experience

Unlike most file-sharing services, Box does not prompt you to install desktop software after you set up an account. Instead, it takes you straight to a web version. You upload files and folders by dragging them from your computer's file manager into the browser window. It's an effortless experience that recalls Google Drive.

Clicking the New icon lets you create [Apple iWork](#) and [Microsoft Office](#) documents, which open in the online versions of those respective applications. You can also create [Google Docs](#) files, although the resulting file functions as a link to a document stored in Google Drive.



(Credit: Box/PCMag)

Click a file to see its preview, assuming it's a [format supported by Box](#). Most images, documents, media, and 3D file formats work. Box Personal Pro gives you access to the 10 most recent file versions in the web interface, but the free version lacks that feature.

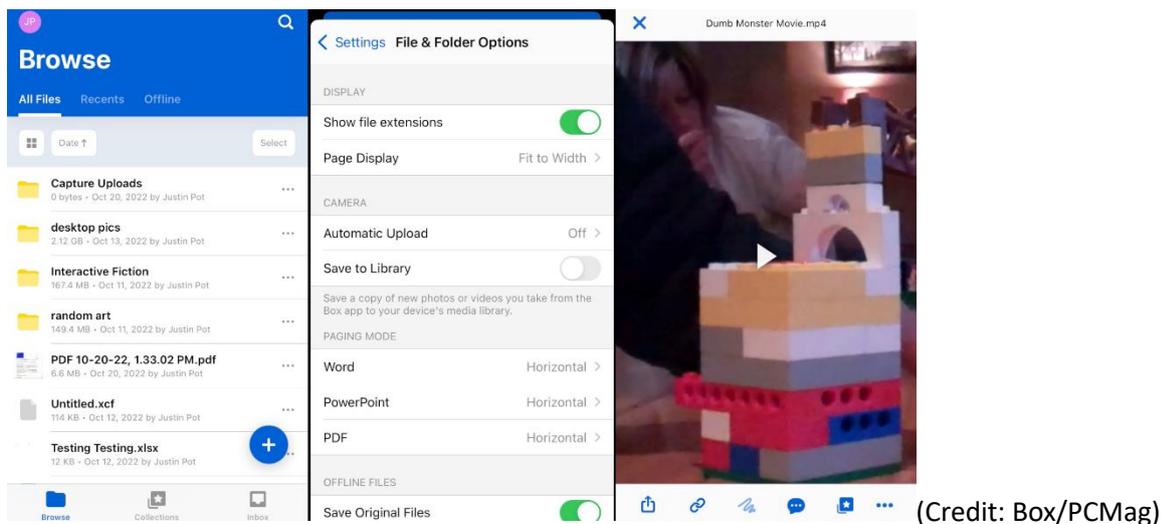
Sidebar icons let you add a file description, chat with collaborators, quickly start a Zoom meeting, or share the document with Gmail or Outlook using integrations (more on those in a bit). Box uses Word Online and other supported web apps for viewing and editing files. You fill out PDFs using Adobe Acrobat's web version.

On the desktop side, Box Tools is a useful option if you want to integrate traditional desktop software into the mix, like Adobe Creative Suite or CAD. Any file you store in Box can be opened using the file's respective desktop app. Saved desktop work is uploaded to Box. If you collaborate with others, Box stores their comments in your account so you can see them without opening the file. It's a cool, best-of-both-worlds approach.

Box Drive is for people who'd rather avoid the web version entirely. With it, you browse files using File Explorer on Windows or Finder on Mac. This app is necessary to sync files to your computer for offline use. Just right-click a file and select Make Available Offline.

Frustratingly, you can't configure Box's location Drive; there's no way to set up a Box folder on a secondary hard drive. Still, one of these apps will probably do the job for most people.

Sharing is simple. The default option is to create a public link—anyone with that link can look at and download the file, even if they don't have a Box account. Paid users have more options, including setting a link expiration date. There's also direct sharing with specific people, including permission to edit files, though that feature requires the recipients to have a Box account, too. Box is a far easier form of file sharing than iCloud, an app that requires all parties to have an Apple account.



Android and iOS Apps

Box has mobile applications for [Android](#) and [iOS](#). I tested mobile Box primarily on an iPhone and found it easy to browse and upload files.

Like Google Drive and many other cloud storage and file-sharing apps, Box lets you scan documents using your phone's camera. You can also snap photos and record audio and video directly to your account. An optional feature called Continuous Capture launches the camera when you open Box, which is ideal if you use the mobile app to scan documents or upload images.

For added security, lock the mobile app with a PIN or biometrics (fingerprint, facial recognition).

Integrations

Box's [App Center](#) has integrations with more than 1,500 applications, meaning there's a good chance the service works with apps and services you already use. A few app integrations work by default, such as the web versions of Apple Pages and Microsoft Word. Other integrations let you upload files to Vimeo directly from Box, securely share files in [Microsoft Teams](#) or [Slack](#), and sign documents using DocuSign.

Box isn't alone in providing these kinds of integrations. Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive also have extensive marketplaces of third-party apps. So does Dropbox, which has its own e-signature tool, [Dropbox Sign](#).

Verdict: Good for Personal Use, Better for Business

Box works well. It's reliable, easy to use, and integrates with many useful web apps. The service has a few flaws, however. The free version has generous storage, but a low limit for individual files offsets that generosity. In addition, Box's paid individual plan is expensive, considering the amount of storage it offers. You get a better deal with Editors' Choice winners Google Drive, iDrive, and Microsoft OneDrive, services with more storage than Box for less money (and office apps in some instances). If you want to dabble in Box for anything other than small files, we suggest signing up for the business version.

Proton Drive

Highly secure cloud storage



Proton Drive

(Credit: Proton)

4.0 Excellent

Bottom Line

Proton Drive is the best choice if security and privacy are your main concerns in a cloud storage app, but that peace of mind comes at a price.

- **Pros**
 - All files fully encrypted
 - Flexible sharing options
 - Protected by Swiss privacy laws
 - Free tier available
- **Cons**
 - Somewhat slow upload speeds
 - No Linux app

Proton Drive Specs

Android App	
Emphasis	Privacy
File Size Limit	Unlimited
Free Storage	5GB
iOS App	
Online Editing	
Windows App	

Proton's whole purpose is to provide secure and private alternatives to common web services. Proton Drive brings that vision to the [cloud storage and file-sharing](#) space. It delivers the same privacy and security that Proton users have come to expect from other Proton apps, like [Proton Mail](#) and [Proton VPN](#). No one at the company can access files you upload to Proton Drive—they're

fully encrypted first. That comes at a cost, in both price and upload speeds. Still, if privacy is what you value most, then Proton Drive should be the first cloud storage service you try. If not, go for one of our Editors' Choice winners: [Microsoft OneDrive](#), which is best overall, [IDrive](#) for value, or [Google Drive](#) if you're primarily a Google Apps user.

How Much Does Proton Drive Cost?

Proton Drive's free account gives you 5GB of storage, which is about average. Microsoft OneDrive, IDrive, and [Sync](#) also give you 5GB for free. Google Drive comes with three times more (15GB for free), though it's shared with Gmail and Google Photos.

Proton Drive Plus costs \$4.99 per month or \$47.88 per year, and it increases the storage to 200GB. You can get 500GB as part of Proton Unlimited, a package that costs \$12.99 per month or \$118.88 per year and includes [Proton Mail](#), Proton Calendar, [Proton VPN](#), and [Proton Pass](#); the storage space is shared with Proton Mail. Proton Family is a plan for up to five people and gives you 3TB of storage to share—it costs \$29.99 per month or \$287.88 per year.

These rates are considerably more expensive per gigabyte than most of the competition. IDrive has one of the best deals around, at \$79.50 per year for 5TB. [Google One](#), which adds storage space to Google Drive accounts, online discounts, and photo editing tools, starts at \$1.99 per month for 100GB. You pay \$9.99 per month or \$99.99 per year for a Premium Google One subscription that gets you 2TB of storage.

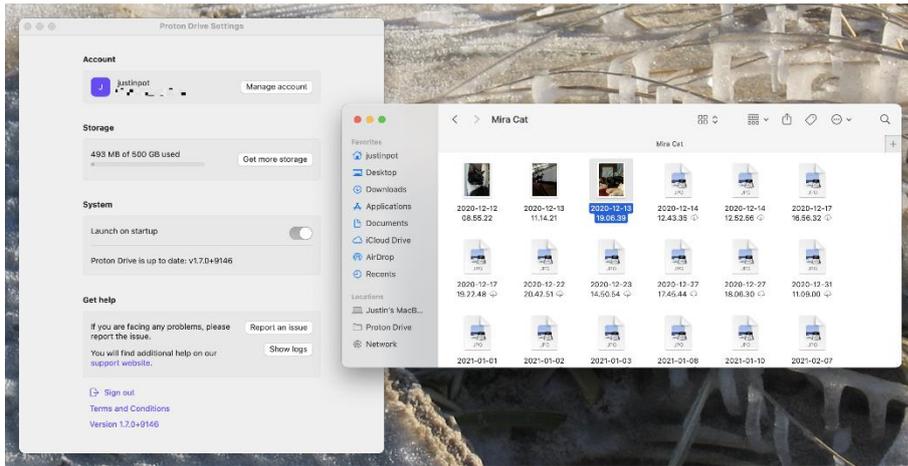
[Apple iCloud](#) charges \$9.99 per month for 2TB of storage, but you can get 50GB for 99 cents per month and 200GB for \$2.99 per month with [iCloud+](#); it includes a faux VPN called Private Relay that only works in Safari and a custom email domain.

Microsoft charges \$69.99 per year for a [Microsoft 365](#) Individual account with 1GB of OneDrive storage. Families of up to six people can pay \$99.99 per year for a total of 6TB. Both those accounts include installable productivity apps like Word, Excel, and Outlook.

Proton Drive cannot even come close to competing with any of these companies in terms of price per gigabyte. However, Proton's aim isn't to win on price. It's to provide an alternative to these other cloud storage services built around privacy and security first.

How Secure Is Proton Drive?

Proton Drive's core feature is security. Files are encrypted before being uploaded to Proton Drive, and the encryption keys are generated on your device. This means the company itself doesn't have access to your files, which also means that any hacker who breaks into the Proton Drive server (or any individual who has access to the server in question) can't view your files or even see the filenames.



(Credit: Proton/PCMag)

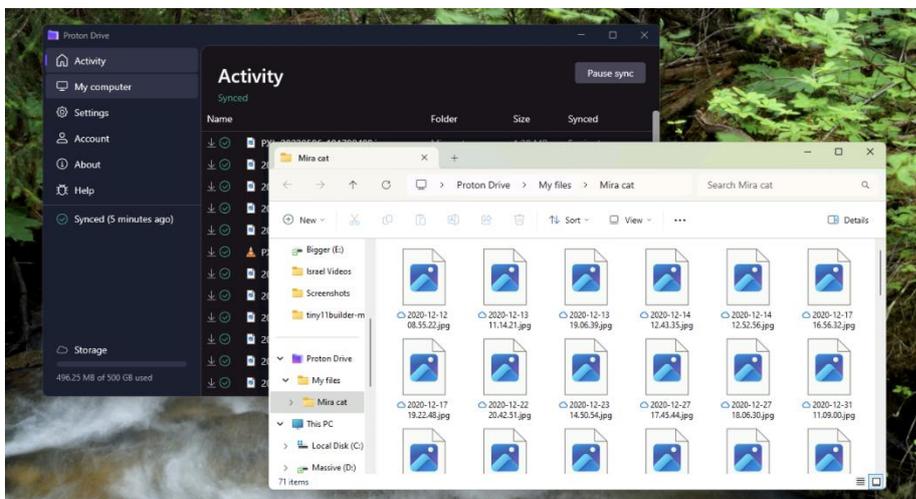
You can read more about [Proton Drive's encryption procedures](#) on its website, but the summary is that everything is truly locked down. Proton also points out that the company is headquartered in Switzerland and, therefore, protected by the country's strong privacy laws. Proton customers have legal protections in Switzerland that prevent law enforcement from requesting access to their data without going through the courts first. Proton Drive makes a compelling case if security and privacy are your top priorities. Most other cloud storage and syncing services don't lock down information to this extent, [SpiderOak One Backup](#) being an exception. IDrive and Sync have an option to enable private encryption keys, but it's not on by default.

Another way Proton helps you stay private is by allowing you to pay for your account in cash by sending dollars, euros, or Swiss francs to a mailing address on Proton's website. You can pay with bitcoin or by bank if you prefer, or the more traditional way with a credit or debit card.

Which Platforms Is Proton Drive Available On?

Proton Drive has [mobile apps for iPhone](#), iPad, and [Android](#), and a desktop app for Windows and macOS. There is no Linux client.

Proton Drive also runs in the web browser. The company recommends using a [privacy-centric browser](#) such as Firefox, Brave, or Tor, though Proton Drive is also compatible with more [mainstream browsers](#), including Google Chrome, Safari, Microsoft Edge, and Opera.

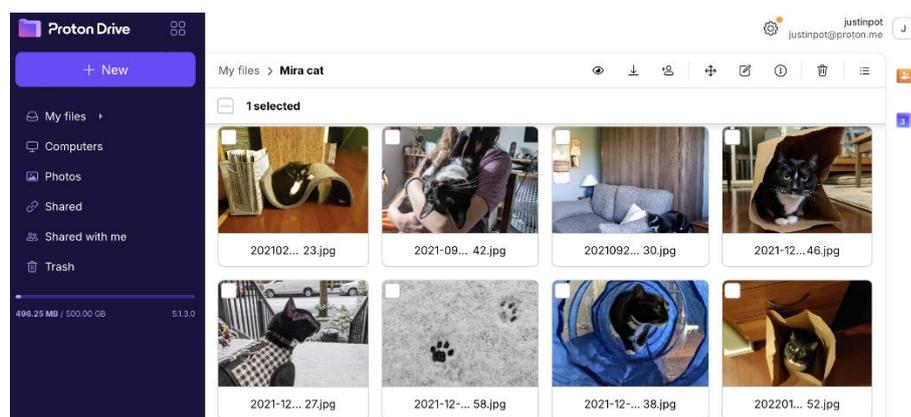


(Credit: Proton/PCMag)

Getting Started With Proton Drive

Before you can use Proton Drive, you must sign up for an account. If you already use Proton Mail or Proton VPN, the same account can work for Proton Drive. Otherwise, you need to sign up and choose your plan. Note that you do not need to enter payment details if you opt for the free version.

Next, you choose a username, which will double as your email address if you use Proton Mail. Then, you create a password and provide some recovery details. Finally, the app asks you to choose a color scheme for the web version of the app.



(Credit: Proton/PCMag)

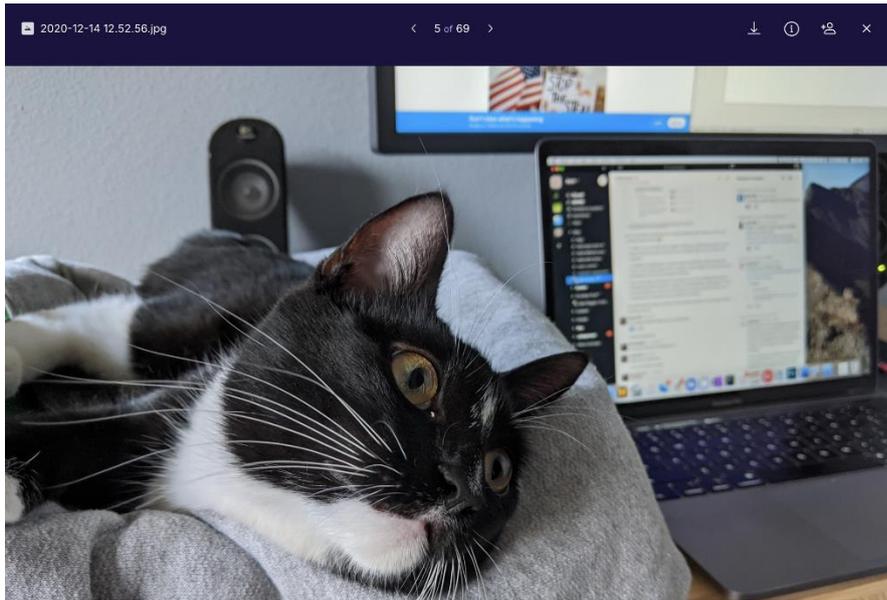
You can start uploading files immediately—individual files or entire folders— by dragging them onto your browser or clicking New Upload. Files you upload are encrypted in your browser before being uploaded to Proton's servers.

Windows and Mac users should also install the desktop application. The Windows version can sync files from anywhere on your computer. It asks if you want to back up your Desktop, Documents, and other folders, while also providing you access to your Proton Drive files from Windows Explorer. The Mac version, likely owing to Apple's security policies, only offers access to your Proton Drive files from Finder. In either case, you can choose whether particular files are available for offline access.

Online Editing for Documents Only and Limited Previews

Proton Drive recently added [online document editing](#), a feature that could become an alternative to Google Docs. You can create new documents to collaborate on them or you can open any uploaded docx file to convert it. You don't get spreadsheets or presentations, but it's a start.

The online document editor is the only option you have for editing any kind of file in Proton Drive's *web* version. If you want to edit anything else—an image, say, or an audio file—you have to download the file, edit it, and then reupload it. It's a lot easier if you install the Windows or Mac application because you can open files and edit them using the appropriate desktop software, and your changes automatically sync.



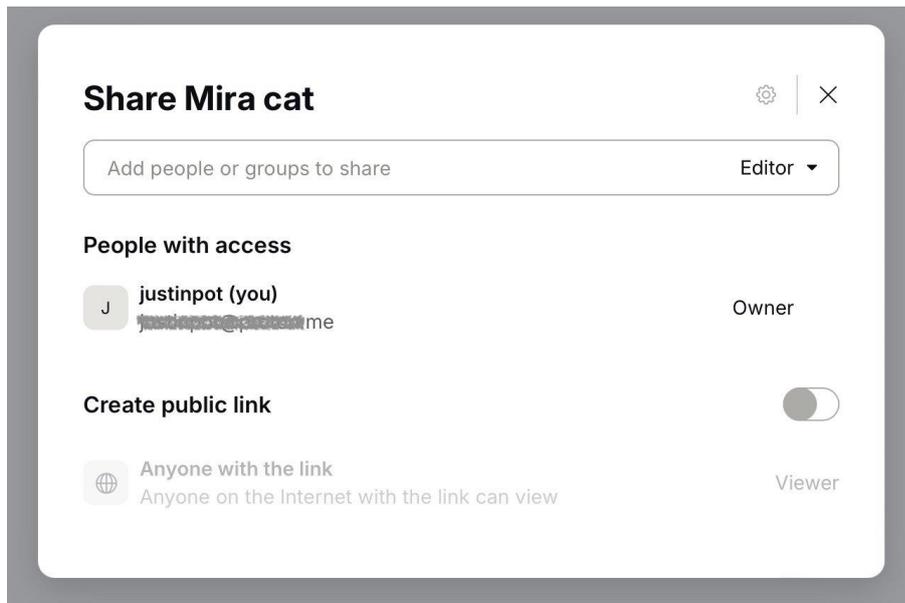
(Credit: Proton/PCMag)

Proton Drive lets you collaborate with other Proton Drive users by sharing a folder, but other than the document editing feature there are no collaboration tools. You can't comment on a file the way you can in other cloud services, like Google Drive or Dropbox.

A limitation of the web version is the preview functionality. You get previews for images, videos, audio files, and PDFs, but not proprietary formats like Microsoft Office documents, as you do in Google Drive and, of course, OneDrive. From the web interface, you can play MP3s and even FLACs.

Sharing Files in Proton Drive

Proton Drive gives you two ways of sharing files: directly with other Proton users or indirectly using a public link. You can right-click any file or folder from Proton Drive's web version and select Share to see your options. When you share directly with another Proton user, you can assign roles, meaning you control whether they may edit files in your folder or not. With Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, and the web apps related to them (Word Online, Google Docs, and so forth), you can collaborate with anyone. They are much more open systems in that way. Proton Drive, however, is more restrictive, but that's fitting given its emphasis on privacy.



(Credit: Proton/PCMag)

Another way you can share files in Proton Drive is by creating a public link and sending it to anyone, which all cloud storage services do. Optionally, you can password-protect your shared files and set an expiration date for the link. Again, that's a fairly standard feature, though in some apps, like Dropbox, you have to be a paying subscriber to get them. Note that the Windows and Mac versions of Proton Drive do not have sharing features. You need to log into the web version to share a file.

Proton Drive's Mobile App

As mentioned, you can install the Proton Drive mobile app for Android, iPhone, and iPad. I tested it on an iPhone. The app is useful for both browsing files you already uploaded and uploading files directly. You have the option to sync any files or folders to be available on your device offline. It's also possible to lock down access to the application using either a PIN or biometric tools like a fingerprint scanner or FaceID.

The mobile app also supports backing up photos, meaning you could use Proton Drive as an encrypted alternative to Apple and Google's photo backup service. OneDrive, iDrive, Google Drive, and [Dropbox](#), among others, all have an option to automatically back up photos and videos from your mobile devices, so it's great to see that Proton Drive does, too.

How Fast Is Proton Drive With Uploading?

How fast is Proton Drive? It depends on your computer's processing power. I uploaded 284GB of files from a Windows 11 computer with a 13th Gen Intel Core i7-13700 2.10 GHz processor. The process took 10 hours and 33 minutes, which works out to 1GB of data uploaded every 2 minutes and 12 seconds. It's much faster than the results I got in 2022 using a much older computer with a cheap, old processor—back then, 1GB took 8 minutes and 16 seconds.

It makes sense that I got much faster times using a newer processor because Proton Drive encrypts files locally before uploading them, meaning the better the processor, the faster the upload process. Since encryption is core to the entire idea behind Proton Drive, keep this in mind.

For context, the Windows 11 computer I use has a mechanical hard drive and is attached to my local network via Ethernet. My home upload speed is 100Mbps. I live on the West Coast of the United States, far from Proton's European servers, which may also be a factor. Your speeds may vary for a variety of reasons.

Verdict: Steady and Safe

Proton has been deliberate about rolling out its storage service, slowly adding features and improving it over time. In the two years since PCMag first reviewed Proton Drive, the service has added file-sharing options and a Mac client. This slow and steady development, combined with the security and privacy advantages, make Proton Drive an excellent alternative for those willing to pay more for storage and who don't need every feature under the sun. If you're more concerned with price, try Editors' Choice winner [iDrive](#). The best overall cloud storage and file-syncing service for most people is [Microsoft OneDrive](#), and [Google Drive](#) is the top option for people who primarily stick to the Google ecosystem.

Sync

Secure file syncing



(Credit: Sync)

4.0 Excellent

Bottom Line

Sync's consumer-end cloud storage offers a simple set-and-forget experience, zero file size limitations, and excellent security highlighted by client-side encryption.

- **Pros**
 - Extremely easy to use
 - Client-side encryption means Sync can't access your files
 - Multiple sync and download options
 - No file size limits
- **Cons**
 - Lacks local area network syncing
 - Only offers annual plans

Sync Specs

Android App	
Emphasis	Simplicity, Ease of Use
File Size Limit	Unlimited
File Versioning	
Free Storage	5GB
iOS App	
Windows App	

Sync is a [cloud storage and file-sharing service](#) that recalls the earliest days of [Dropbox](#). Whereas the latter keeps adding features, the former focuses on one thing: syncing files. It works quietly in the background, without notifications or constant upgrade prompts, which every rival should duplicate,

including [Google Drive](#), [iDrive](#), and [Microsoft OneDrive](#). While all of those services are Editors' Choice winners, Sync offers a compelling service in a competitive marketplace, with a free account for individuals and paid accounts if you want additional storage, as well as end-to-end encryption.

Sync's Cloud Storage and Plans

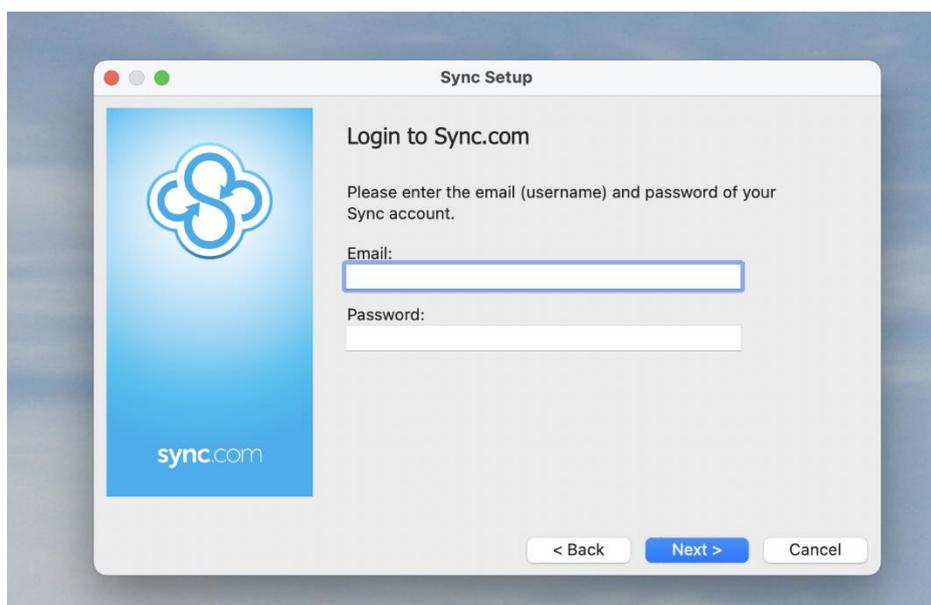
Sync offers a free 5GB plan for individual users, the same storage amount as [Apple iCloud](#), and 3GB more than Dropbox (2GB). There are many competing free services with more generous storage options, though, such as Google Drive (15GB), iDrive (10GB), and OneDrive (15GB). Google Drive and OneDrive splits the storage between cloud storage and email.

The service has two paid consumer plans: Solo Basic and Solo Professional. Solo Basic (\$96 per year) increases the cloud storage to 2TB, and is slightly cheaper than Apple iCloud and [Google One](#) (\$9.99 per month for the same storage). Dropbox charges \$11.99 per month. Solo Professional (\$288 per year) ups the storage to 6TB.

Team Standard and Teams+Unlimited are the business-end options for companies that internally share files. Standard (\$72 per person, billed annually) includes 1TB of storage and an administrator panel, while Teams+ Unlimited (\$180 per person, billed annually) adds unlimited storage, custom branding, phone support, and administrative delegation tools.

Sync's business plans have competitive pricing, but [Google Drive for Business](#) offers more bang for the buck. Google Drive for Business' 2TB Business Standard plan costs \$12 per person per month. That's \$144 per year, but you pay *monthly*, which isn't the case with many other cloud storage and file-sharing services. We like that flexibility. In addition, Google Drive for Business is part of the Google Workspace suite that includes email hosting, [video conferencing](#), and the rest of Google's office ecosystem. Likewise, [OneDrive for Business](#) costs less than Sync at \$60 per person per year.

However, Sync edges out Dropbox's entry-level Business plan (\$180 per person per year, with a minimum of three people), which includes 9TB of storage.



(Credit: Sync/PCMag)

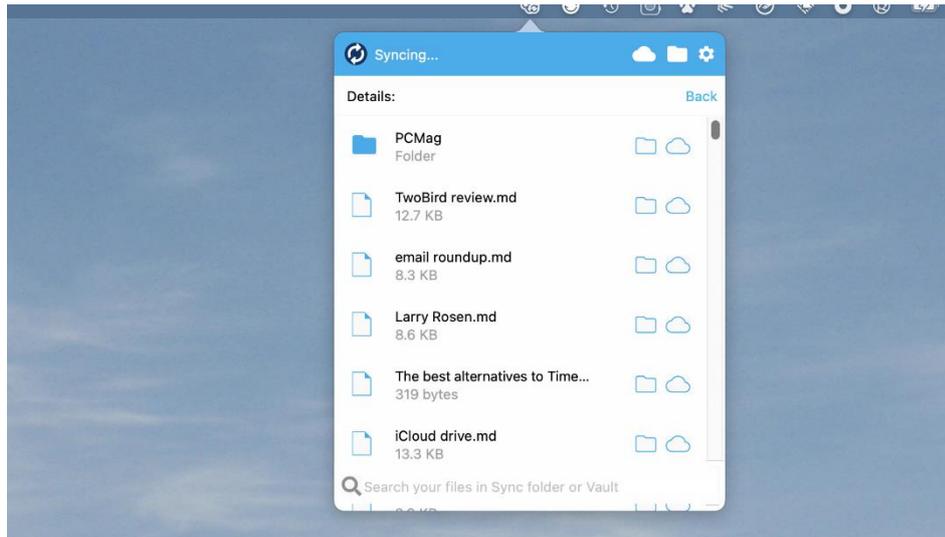
Getting Started With Sync

Sync offers desktop clients for macOS (10.9 and newer) and Windows (XP through 11). Note that older computers may have to install a legacy software version. Sync also has a mobile app for

Android and iPhone (more on that in a bit). Sync's web version works in Chrome, Edge, Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Safari. The only thing missing is a Linux client. In 2022, Sync told us it planned to make one, but it hasn't materialized.

You must create an account before installing Sync, though no credit card is required. After signing in, the web dashboard prompts you to install the Sync application on your devices.

From there, you launch the program, sign in, and choose where the main Sync folder will live. This folder, which you cannot rename, is where you put files to sync them to the cloud and your other devices. There are no options to sync files outside this folder. A workaround lets you use [symbolic links](#) to sync other folders, but this method is not officially supported—we don't recommend it.



(Credit: Sync/PCMag)

Simple Syncing and File Sharing

We tested Sync on a macOS laptop, a [Windows 11](#) desktop, and an [iPhone](#). After setting it up, we dragged files to the Sync folder, which uploaded them to the cloud. It was that easy.

The tray icon displays recently synced files and settings. From here, you can decide whether the icon overlays appear in File Explorer or Finder, cap network speed, and choose which folders should and should not sync to the current device.

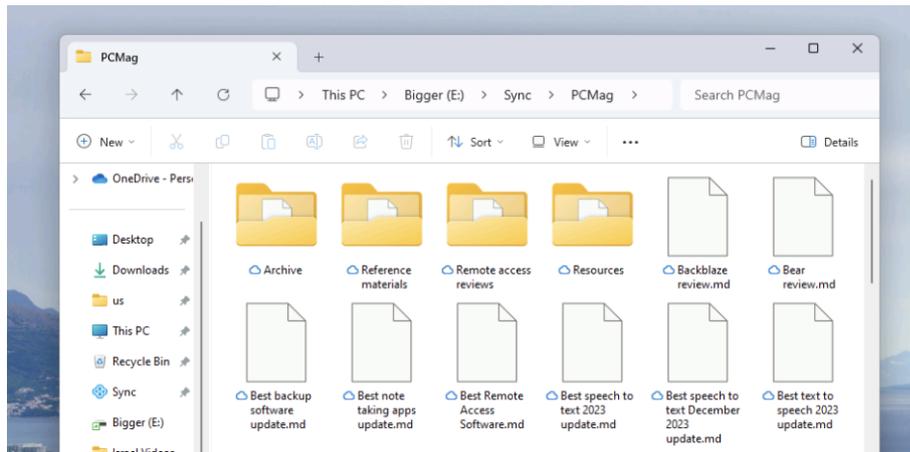
Likewise, you can select whether uploaded files sync or are available for download. This new feature aligns Sync with how Dropbox, iCloud, OneDrive, and other applications operate.

One missing feature is the ability to sync files directly between devices over LAN. Instead, everything you want to sync must be uploaded to the cloud before it downloads to other devices, even if those devices are on the same network. This is a disappointing omission, because Dropbox does this well.

Sharing is handled from the web version, which you can log into at [Sync.com](#). There are two kinds of sharing: creating a link and inviting other Sync users to collaborate. Creating a link means anyone can open a file or folder regardless of whether they have a Sync account. Sharing with a collaborator works if the person you share with has a Sync account. You can decide whether those users can edit or only view the files and include an optional message.

You manage file access via the Sync website. There, you can add password protection and determine who can download files. These options give you a lot of flexibility. Dropbox offers these same sharing

controls, but only for the Essentials plan (\$199 per year) and higher. Microsoft OneDrive and Google Drive have link-sharing controls, but not as many. Sync's free and paid tiers both have link controls.



(Credit: Sync/PCMag)

Size Limits, Online Editing, and Other Features

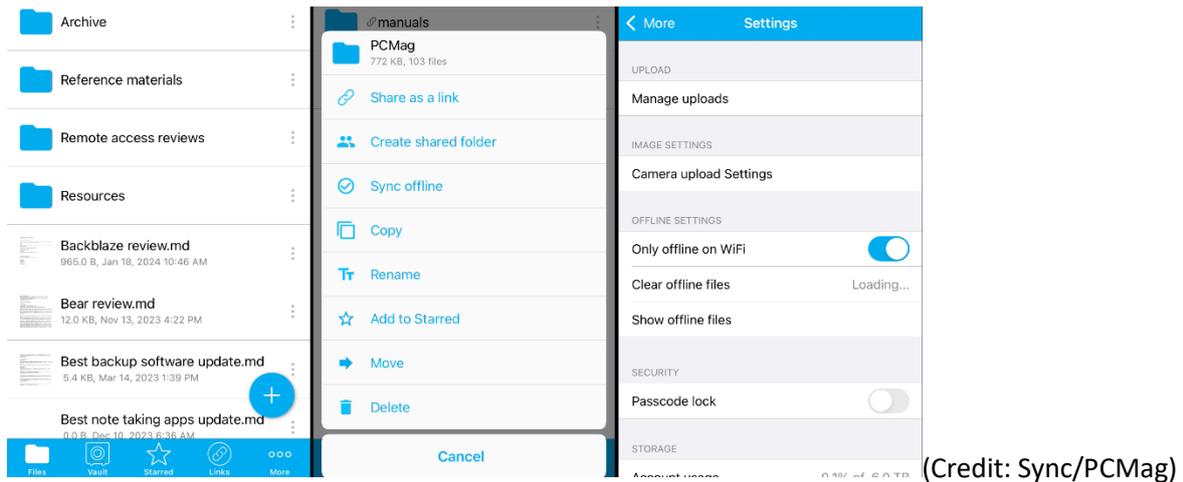
If a file fits in your available Sync storage, you can upload it. [The company's documentation](#) mentions that uploading a file larger than 40GB might slow the applications. Sync does not recommend uploading large files using the web client, but there's no formal limit. This puts Sync in the same class as Dropbox and Google Drive, which also don't limit file sizes. Meanwhile, iCloud limits files to 50GB, while OneDrive limits files to 250GB. Sync's useful Vault lets you store files online that you don't want to sync between devices.

One advantage of using an online cloud storage and file syncing service from Google or Microsoft is that all the editing tools you need for your files are tightly embedded into the system and support collaborative editing. Sync doesn't offer integrated online editing, though you can [connect Sync to a Microsoft account](#) to make editing in Word, Excel, and other online Office apps closer to seamless. [Box](#), another consumer-end cloud storage service, lets you connect to office apps, too, as does Dropbox.

Sync on Android and iOS

Sync's [Android](#) and [iOS](#) apps let you browse and download files, just as you can from the Sync web portal. Installing the apps mainly lets you download files for offline access. Unlike the desktop client, which syncs all files by default, the mobile app only syncs files you specify, which is how competing cloud storage and file-sharing apps work.

A handy, optional setting lets you upload photos from your device like Dropbox, Google Drive, and other competitors. With Sync, however, you don't get annoying prompts encouraging you to enable photo syncing, which makes it even nicer. Another mobile feature you'll appreciate is the ability to lock down the app with a four-digit passcode or biometrics—an added level of security for anyone who stores sensitive files in their cloud services.



Is Sync Safe and Secure?

All Sync file transfers are encrypted on your device before being uploaded, meaning the company lacks access to your files and their metadata. Even the web version decrypts files locally, which adds to the app's security. [Sync claims](#) that its zero-knowledge storage platform sets it apart from Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, and OneDrive, services allowing backdoor file access.

Sync complies with SOC 2 Type 1, GDPR, and PIPEDA, which is important for international businesses. Most paid plans comply with HIPAA, which is essential for American healthcare businesses.

Verdict: Simple and Secure Cloud Storage

Sync's consumer version is a terrific alternative to Dropbox, an increasingly complex cloud storage and file-sharing service. It offers 5GB of free storage, strong security (including welcome client-side encryption), and no file size limitations. However, you can't directly sync across a LAN, and you must pay for a year's worth of service up front if you decide to upgrade to a premium plan. If you're willing to pay for cloud storage, check out Editors' Choice Microsoft OneDrive, which has more storage for less money (plus, it's a no-brainer option if you're already paying for Microsoft 365). Google Drive, another Editors' Choice, is better if you're a die-hard Google user, while iDrive has the best price per gigabyte.



Best Free Cloud Storage 2025: 7 Services That Are REALLY Free!



© 01net.com

If you've ever caught yourself deleting valuable photos, music, or videos from your phone or PC because of a lack of space, you're in dire need of cloud storage. Cloud storage or online storage acts as an extended arm of your already available storage space.

Once you sign up for this service, you'll get more space for storing all of your important files online. Recently, we talked about the [best cloud service providers](#) in 2025. Today, our task is to give you their free counterparts that you can use without spending ANY money.

And if you think there aren't a lot of good choices, I think you're right. Thus, we narrowed our list to the 7 best REALLY free cloud services in 2025 that we think are the go-to options in terms of storage, performance, and security.

7 Best Free Cloud Storage Services in 2025

1. [pCloud](#) – Best free cloud storage overall in 2025
2. [NordLocker](#) – The most secure free cloud storage
3. [Icedrive](#) – a solid all-rounder with good-looking apps
4. [MEGA](#) – Most generous free cloud storage (20 GB)
5. [Google Drive](#) – The best option for collaboration

6. **Microsoft OneDrive** – Reliable and secure option
7. **Sync.com** – Best for ease of use

Best Free Cloud Storage Services of 2025

Having a cloud service at your disposal is always useful and comes with no risks. Best of all, you can do it free of charge, albeit, with some limits when compared to paid plans.

Nevertheless, our list of the best free online storage providers is below, so read on:

1. pCloud (10 GB free cloud storage)

In my long-lasting experience with free cloud storage providers, I've never found a better choice than pCloud. Sure, its paid plans are better but in the free plan, you can get up to 10 GB of space, which isn't all that bad, as you'll most likely have enough space for photos, videos, or music.

pCloud is extremely easy to set up, as well. If you opt for its free version, you just need to sign up using your email and password and you're good to go. Not to mention that it's based in Switzerland, which guarantees an extreme level of security and privacy.

[Try pCloud Now](#)

The most impressive part is that you get ALL features from the premium plans. Something like this you can get on only a small number of providers. At the start, **pCloud gives you 5 GB of space, which you can extend to 10 GB by doing very simple tasks.**

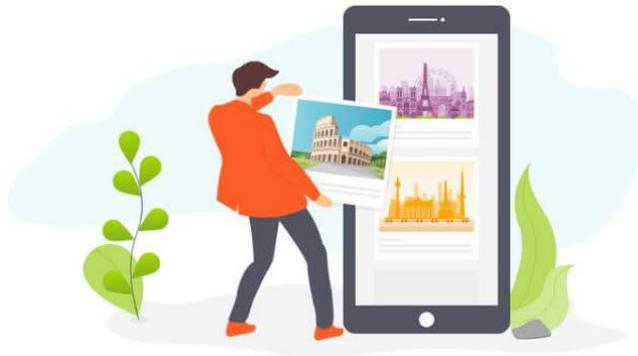
For example, if you verify your email, you get 1 GB. Then, uploading a file gives you 1 GB more, and if you install it on your mobile phone, you get awarded 1 more GB of space. Needless to say, this best free cloud storage can be used for free infinitely, without any commitment.

Albeit, [its Lifetime plans of 500 GB and 2 TB](#) will last you 99 years for a cheap price, so they're worth checking out.

Europe's most secure cloud storage

Store, share and access all your files using one simple and highly secure platform, anytime and anywhere you go.

[Get a pCloud video tour](#)



© pCloud

pCloud Features

[pCloud](#) will most likely reinvent the wheel when it comes to the best free cloud services. With features like auto-synchronization and backups, you can sync your files between the devices and back up important system files in the blink of an eye.

Furthermore, pCloud is extremely easy to use on all platforms, which is important if you're not a tech-savvy user. Speaking of platforms, it's available on macOS, Windows, Linux, iOS, and Android, offering a lightweight application that won't be taxing on your resources.

In the free cloud version of pCloud, you'll also get the ability to recover your files within 15 days. Namely, when you delete a file, it goes into Trash, which keeps the files for up to 15 or 30 days if you opt for a paid version. Thus, if you make up your mind, restoring these files is done with one click.

We should also mention that pCloud offers no transfer file size limit. This means that you don't have to "cut" your files into pieces when uploading them to the cloud. By the way, we should mention its impressive **transfer speed that makes both uploading and downloading blazing-fast.**

pCloud offers some great security features. It offers data centers in the EU and US, and stores your files on three different servers, making it impossible to lose your data if one server stops working.

It also allows you to choose where you want your files to be stored – the US or EU, depending on your location. Lastly, there's TLS encryption with an SSL standard that protects your files against all sorts of cyberattacks.

In my long-lasting experience with free cloud storage providers, I've never found a better choice.

[Try pCloud Now](#)

Join pCloud FOR FREE

Sign up now and get up to 10 GB free storage

Data region: **European Union** ▼

I Accept pCloud's [Terms & Conditions](#), [Privacy Policy](#) and [Intellectual Property Policy](#)

Create account

or continue with



2. NordLocker (3 GB free cloud storage)

The second best free cloud storage service for 2025 is NordLocker. If you've heard about NordVPN, you know that it's a product of Nord Security. Nord Security has a couple of products under its belt, one of which is NordLocker – an online storage solution.

Is NordLocker our favorite cloud storage? Obviously not. However, we think it has some great features worth talking about, and of course, its phenomenal background as a part of Nord Security. Getting free cloud storage from NordLocker is simple.

[Try NordLocker Now](#)

You have to go to its website, select the free plan, and download the app. By the way, NordLocker isn't available through the web browser and the app is mandatory. Nevertheless, once you create an account, you're ready to experience what it has to offer.



© NordLocker

NordLocker Features

Right off the bat, you'll notice that its app looks similar to a Windows Explorer screen. You get folders and files in the middle, and on the left, you get something called Lockers. Lockers are here for end-to-end encryption of your files, which isn't something you get in other free providers.

NordLocker lets you apply zero-knowledge encryption so that only you can access your files or preview them. Furthermore, this cloud storage is focused more on security rather than performance. Hence, don't expect NordLocker to be a sprinter, as its performance is not great.

However, **features like 256-bit AES encryption and the ability to add multi-factor authentication are welcome.** NordLocker also lets you easily upload files and manage your folders, but it has a critical flaw in terms of sharing.

Namely, to share a file or files via NordLocker, the recipient also must have NordLocker installed. This is not the case with pCloud where you can share your files with everyone.

NordLocker is available for Windows, iOS, Android, and macOS. These apps are fairly easy to use and they offer the same set of features. Thanks to its sync feature, all files are synced between the devices and they're accessible at any time, on all of them.

If you need more storage, NordLocker offers two 500 GB and 2 TB paid plans. However, beware that they're not cheaper or better than pCloud or Icedrive, so if you decide to expand, it's better to go for any of these two options.

To conclude about NordLocker, it's important to understand that its focus is really on securing files online. It's not the tool you would use to host your holiday pictures to share them with some friends.

NordLocker aims to provide an ultra-secure online solution to store valuable files online. If this is what you're looking for, then, this excellent free cloud storage solution might be for you.

Learn more about this provider in [our detailed NordLocker review](#).

[Try NordLocker Now](#)

3. Icedrive (10 GB of free cloud storage)

Icedrive looks like a perfect all-rounder for people who want everything in their free online cloud storage plan. The company is based in the US, which might not be the most privacy-friendly. However, that obviously doesn't impact Icedrive, as shown in practice.

This free cloud storage is very easy to use and set up – another thing we appreciate. You need to go to its website, select the free version, and download it right away. Now, create an account, sign in, and you're ready to enjoy this free cloud storage and its benefits.

Icedrive will greet you with a good-looking and smooth app. Plus, on your computer, it'll function like a virtual drive or better said, just another folder. This allows you to transfer your files by dragging and dropping them for the highest level of ease of use.



© Icedrive

Icedrive Features

When it comes to its features, Icedrive is pretty enticing. For one, users get 10 GB of FREE online storage, which is a lot compared to NordLocker or OneDrive. In fact, Icedrive can [replace iCloud](#) as well, as the latter offers just 5 GB of storage for free.

Nevertheless, Icedrive, like pCloud or NordLocker, offers zero-knowledge client-side encryption. As of recently, Icedrive started including it in every plan, so even if you buy a smaller one, it'll be there to protect your files from snoopers and hackers.

One thing to keep in mind is that the free plan has no zero-knowledge encryption but is still safe and secure. Besides, it uses **AES-256 encryption to secure files in transit and those on cloud storage**. Furthermore, Icedrive includes 180-day file versioning.

Arguably, it's not the best, as it allows you to keep only 10 versions of your document on the cloud. But the silver lining is Icedrive's solid performance, which makes transfers smooth. File sharing is here too, and users can add expiry dates/times and password protection to links.

Mobile apps are intuitive and optimized for iOS/Android really well. If you opt for an upgrade, you'll be interested in its premium plans. Well, Icedrive doesn't disappoint, thanks to the Pro X plan with 10 TB of storage and the aforementioned encryption.

Icedrive is a state-of-the-art free online storage provider – no doubt. Still, we're disappointed at the lack of a business plan. It also limits you to 50 GB of bandwidth in the free plan but hey, you get 10 GB of storage either way, so it's not a deal-breaker for us.

4. MEGA (20 GB free cloud storage)

With pCloud and NordLocker, I often used MEGA to store my extremely large files, be they system-related or just music, videos, and photos. MEGA is our number 3 choice on the list of the best free cloud storage services in 2025 but it's not the absolute best.

Why you may ask? Well, MEGA's history isn't the prettiest when compared to other cloud providers on the list. Namely, it started out as a website for downloading shows and movies illegally, which ruined its credibility on the market.

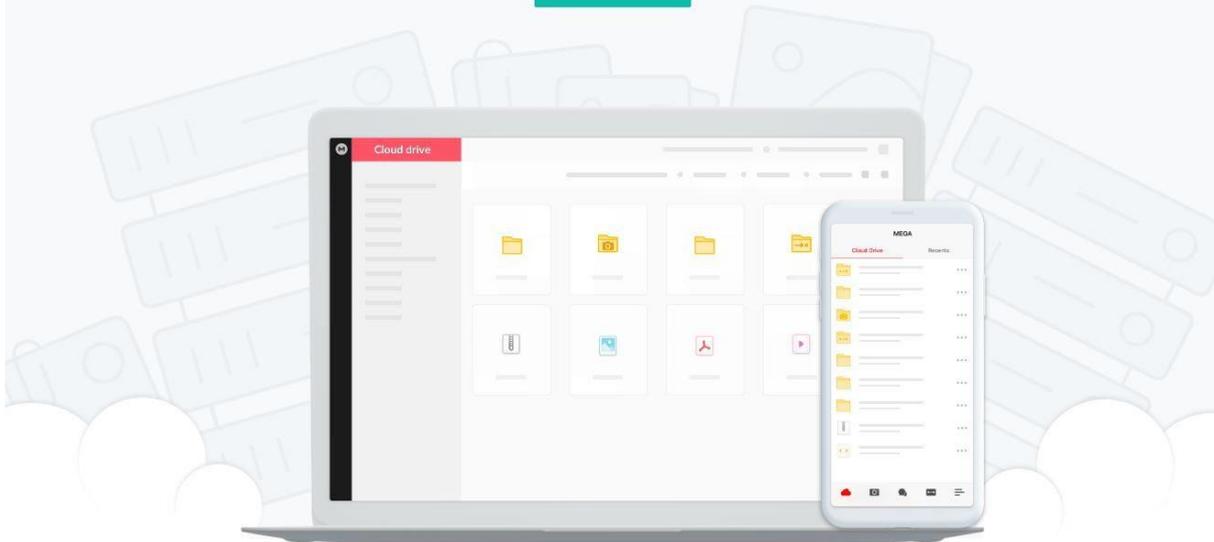
In 2025, MEGA claims to have severed every connection with this part of its history. And, the truth be told, the platform is indeed somewhat decent, offering 20 GB of free storage that you won't get anywhere else.

Although its speeds are not great and its paid plans are a bit more expensive, MEGA successfully carved its place on our list of the best free cloud storage services because of other things. But what about its features? Well, let's discuss them briefly...

Secure Cloud Storage and Communication Privacy by Design

Create a MEGA account to get **20 GB FREE** storage

Create Account



© MEGA

MEGA Features

If you decide to use MEGA, you can enjoy its great ease of use and security. Starting with ease of use, MEGA offers an intuitive interface in both its app and the web version. I prefer the web version, to be honest, where it's easy to upload a file by dragging it to the browser window.

Moreover, MEGA lets you create new folders and sub-folders, and there's a special Gallery section. Here, you can add new photos and [videos from your device](#), as well as automatically upload each photo/video you take on your mobile phone.

MEGA allows for seamless file sharing. This is possible with shareable links that you can password-protect and add an expiration date even in the free version. Most notably, I want to mention the addition of Conversations.

This menu **lets you enjoy an encrypted chat session with your friends, share files, or engage in audio/video calls**. It functions like WhatsApp or Viber, for example, and it's really smooth, which makes collaboration much easier.

Moreover, the Rubbish Bin, as it's called here, is customizable in terms of cleaning. This means that you can clean it whenever you want and it's not automatically cleaned after 15 or 30 days. As a result, you can restore files at any time.

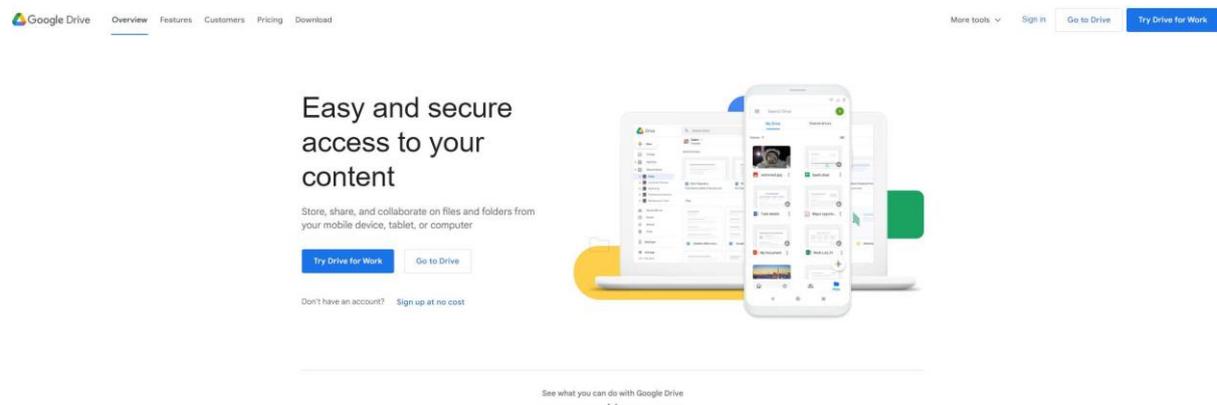
Finally, MEGA indeed comes with a transfer file size limit of at least 12 TB, which applies to the cheapest paid plan. But having in mind its slow speeds, I doubt you'll be patient enough to wait for such a large group of files to transfer – it'll take ages!

5. Google Drive (15 GB free cloud storage)

Google Drive is another great really free cloud storage in 2025. Even if you live under a rock, you've heard of Google Drive and its 15 GB of forever free cloud storage. The best thing about it is the easy setup that requires you only to have a Google account.

Once you sign up for Gmail, you'll get your 15 GB, along with tools like Google Sheets, Slides, Docs, and many more. Beware that, in Google Drive, your Gmail emails also take up space on your Google Drive storage.

This means that you'll have to clean up your email folder often if you don't want to fill up your cloud storage quickly. And if that's an issue, you can upgrade to some of its paid plans but be aware that they're a lot more expensive than pCloud or NordLocker's equivalents.



© Google Drive

Google Drive Features

People who use Google Drive often praise the addition of its office apps. With Google Docs, it's easy to open documents, while Slides and Sheets lets you make/edit presentations and tables, like in PowerPoint or Excel.

Overall, Google Drive is easy to use and is similar to other Google tools. Needless to say, you can create new folders, rename them, and sort your files depending on their type – documents, photos, audio, etc, etc.

While sharing and uploading is a walk in the park, Google Drive imposes a transfer limit of 100 MB and 50 MB for presentations and docs files. On the brighter side, deleting a file sends it to Trash, where it spends 30 days, unlike the 15 days you get in pCloud.

Google Drive is accessible through Windows, macOS, iOS, and Android apps but also through the good, old web browser. In this case, I prefer the web browser version since I don't like having too many apps on my device.

It's worth mentioning that its transfer speeds aren't the best – surprisingly. However, Google offers many data centers worldwide, spread across Europe, Asia, and the USA. Offering 256-bit encryption, you'll surely enjoy the rock-solid security that Google Drive offers.

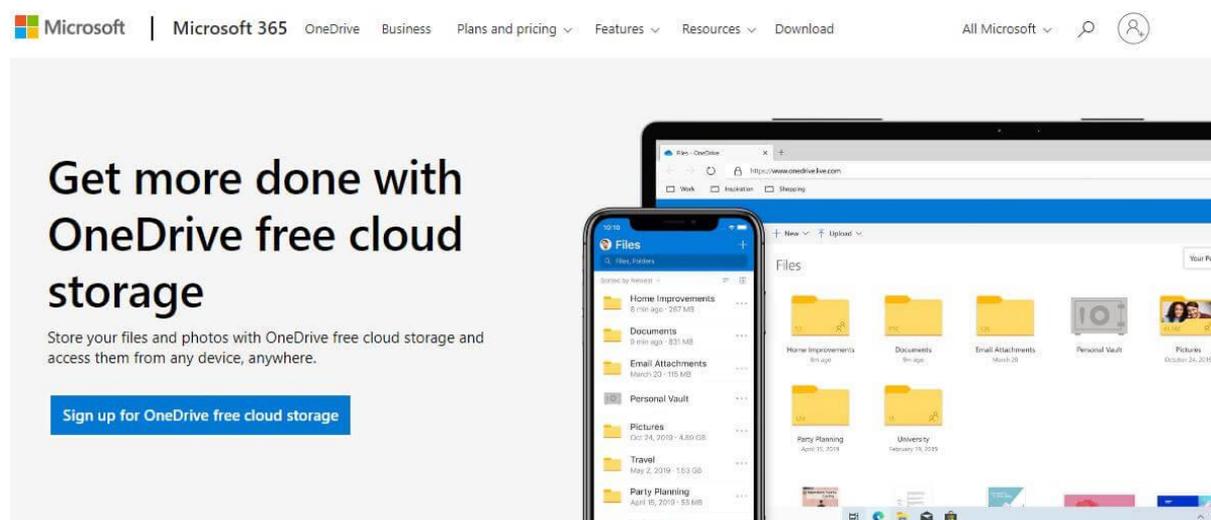
Sadly, that's not the case with privacy. Google itself isn't a company that values your privacy above all. If I'm being brutally honest, it undermines it with its extreme logging practices. For that reason, [I don't see Google as particularly trustworthy](#), hence its place on the list.

6. OneDrive (5 GB free cloud storage)

But what about Microsoft? Well, this company has its own OneDrive solution that gives you 5 GB of free online storage. That's not much but it's more than what NordLocker offers, for instance. If you're using Windows, chances are that you already know what OneDrive is.

That is because Microsoft goes out of its way to push it as hard as possible by giving you a OneDrive folder on your Windows PC. Besides, it is that easy to get it, as you only need to have a Microsoft account to access your free cloud storage from Microsoft – no need to use Windows.

Overall, OneDrive is your average cloud service provider. It's not going to set the world on fire with its offering but because it's free, reliable, and secure, its place on this list of the best free cloud storage providers is justified.



© OneDrive

OneDrive Features

OneDrive functions and looks similar to the Windows interface on computers and laptops. Folder icons are very similar, with the ability to create new folders and sub-folders on the cloud storage. Moreover, Microsoft lets you preview all types of media files, as you would do on your PC or any other device.

The great thing is that the OneDrive apps are pretty much the same between the platforms. Whether you're using it on iOS, Android, or Windows, it's going to be the same experience. That same experience has one flaw, which is performance.

OneDrive is far from being the fastest provider here, offering slow upload and download speeds. However, this is easily forgotten with native support for PowerPoint, Word, Excel, and other useful office tools.

This is why it's a great free online storage. Within its interface, it's possible to create and edit documents, presentations, and tables, making OneDrive a decent business solution as well. Furthermore, we should point out its Personal Vault feature.

It's useful for files that you want to protect additionally. The only way to access them is to verify your identity through a fingerprint scan on your phone or by entering your credentials. While it is available in the free version, you can store only up to 3 files here.

All in all, OneDrive is safe, secure, and offers a great user experience. You get pretty much everything you have in pCloud or NordLocker, for example, with a few shortcomings we mentioned. It's an average free online storage that's great for not-so-demanding users.

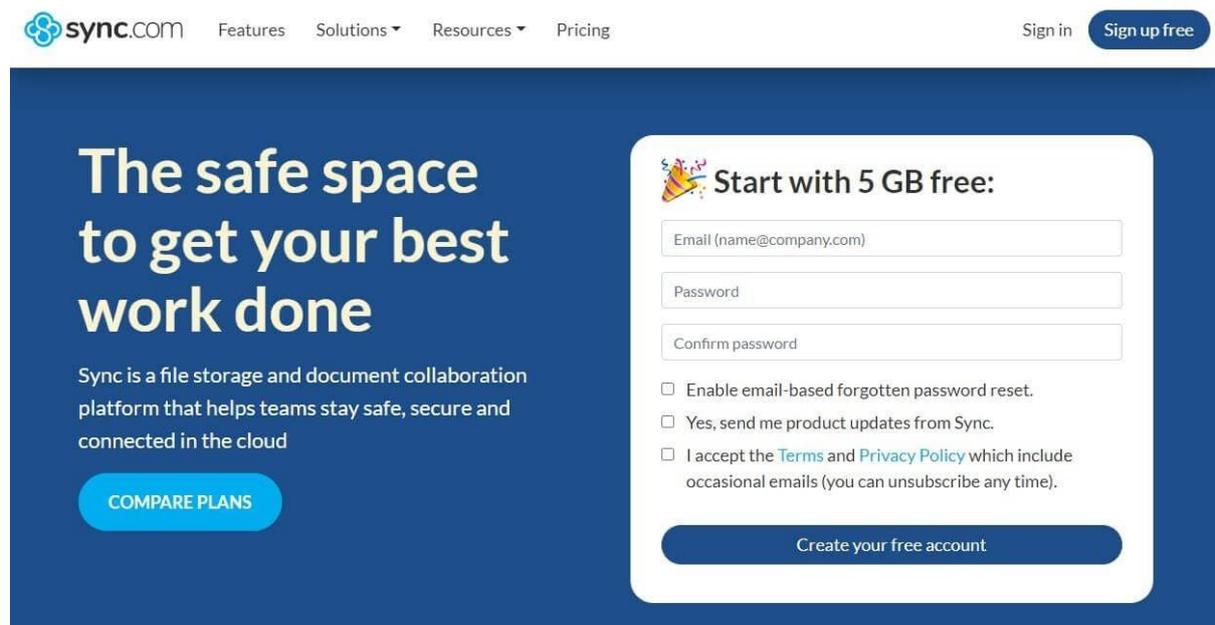
Learn more about this provider in our detailed [OneDrive review](#).

7. Sync (5 GB free cloud storage)

Sync is among the most popular options when talking about free and paid cloud storage options. It's known for its intuitive, easy-to-use interface, which helps transfer your files easily and safely. On top of that, Sync often tops the list of [encrypted cloud storage options](#).

The provider offers both desktop and mobile apps, plus the web version, which is even simpler to use. During our many tests of it, we had no issues, as it worked perfectly fine even in the free version. Plus, it offers several data centers across Canada, ensuring your data is always safe and secure.

Overall, Sync.com is a pretty reliable choice, although it doesn't offer that much cloud storage space. Free users get only 5 GB, which is barely enough for videos and high-res photos. On the good side, it can store everything you want with no transfer file size limit.



The screenshot shows the Sync.com website's sign-up page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Sync.com logo, links for Features, Solutions, Resources, and Pricing, and buttons for Sign in and Sign up free. The main content area has a dark blue background. On the left, there is a large white text block that reads "The safe space to get your best work done" followed by a sub-headline: "Sync is a file storage and document collaboration platform that helps teams stay safe, secure and connected in the cloud." Below this is a blue button labeled "COMPARE PLANS". On the right, there is a white sign-up form titled "Start with 5 GB free:". The form includes input fields for Email (name@company.com), Password, and Confirm password. Below the fields are three checkboxes: "Enable email-based forgotten password reset.", "Yes, send me product updates from Sync.", and "I accept the Terms and Privacy Policy which include occasional emails (you can unsubscribe any time)." At the bottom of the form is a blue button labeled "Create your free account".

© Sync.com

Sync.com Features

When it comes to features, Sync.com surely deserves the spot on our list of the best free cloud storage in 2025. For one, it does offer bank-grade encryption, which helps keep your files intact. We like that it comes with real-time backups and syncing, which is a thing even in the free plan.

Moreover, end-to-end encryption is here, and the provider is fully GDPR and PIPEDA-compliant, so privacy is of the utmost importance. File history and recovery are here as well, as **Sync lets you recover your files that are up to 365 days old.**

The free version supports link-sharing, albeit, it's limited compared to the premium plan where you get more advanced features and functionalities. Other than that, Sync.com lets you upgrade to the premium plan, in which case, your options are vast.

For example, the cheapest Solo Basic plan has 2 TB of cloud storage space at only \$8 per month, which isn't such a high price. Even the Solo Professional plan with 6 TB of cloud storage space at \$20 isn't so bad, as it allows for advanced sharing and custom branding.

Sync even lets you switch to Team plans, in which case, you can even get unlimited storage and better, more responsive customer support. However, since you're looking for a safe and secure free cloud storage provider, this might not suit your needs.

As a free user, the customer support service you'll get isn't the most responsive but that's normal because you're paying nothing. [We strongly recommend checking out our Sync.com review](#) to find out more about the provider.

Many refer to it as an alternative to pCloud but we beg to differ. After all, pCloud is a lot better and its free plan still gives you 10 GB of space. That's double the amount you get in Sync, along with all the other awesome features that pCloud generously offers.

How Did We Choose the Best Free Cloud Storage Providers?

Choosing the best free cloud storage provider comes down to many factors. First and foremost, we're talking about the experience with them. And, during our decade-long experience, we tested more than 30 providers, both free and premium.

For that reason, we have a special list of the most important factors that we used to create a ranking like this. Here's what we looked for:

Free Cloud Storage Capacity

Users who want a free online storage service in 2025 will most likely look for capacity first. When deciding on the #1 free cloud storage for your needs, this is perhaps the most important factor.

Undoubtedly, paid subscription plans will give you 10, 20, or even 1,000 times more storage compared to free plans. However, if you're a budget user, your expectations shouldn't be too high. Usually, we're looking at 3 to 20 GB of free cloud storage.

Storage-wise, MEGA is surely the best pick here, **offering exactly 20 GB of storage space free of charge**. On the other hand, it's not the most trustworthy company compared to pCloud or NordLocker.

With pCloud, you get up to 10 GB, which, for music, videos, and photos should be enough for the most part. NordLocker lets you use 3 GB, and if you want a bit more, Google Drive and its 15 GB of free cloud storage is a really good option.

So, before you take your pick, think about what you want to store on the cloud storage and see how much space you need. If you can get away with 10 GB of space, we strongly recommend [going for pCloud](#), as it's the most reliable choice.

Transfer Speed

Free online storage providers don't offer neck-breaking speeds compared to premium solutions. But still, you want your uploads and downloads to be reasonably fast to avoid long waiting times.

Once again, pCloud is the best choice in this case, with NordLocker following closely. We tested all of these free cloud storage providers numerous times, with file sizes not exceeding 3 GB. All of them passed our tests, with some being slower than others.

However, all of them offer stable performance, so they'll, in most cases, utilize your internet speed to the fullest. After all, transfer speed depends on your internet speed as well, so if your internet connection is slow, don't expect miracles.

Security

One of the main benefits of online storage solutions is security. [Not only can you store and share files but also do so securely.](#) All of our 7 choices use 256-bit encryption to secure your files from the moment you start uploading them.

Some of them, like NordLocker, have end-to-end encryption, making sure that only you can access your files. pCloud offers the same functionality, albeit, you need to pay for it additionally. Additionally, pCloud copies your files on three different servers.

So, if any of them stop working for some reason, the remaining servers are in place, so your files are always accessible. This means that there's virtually NO chance of losing your files. That's why pCloud is the best free online storage of 2025.

Device Compatibility

Cloud services have a big advantage over traditional hard drives in terms of accessibility. Unlike your HDD or SSD which you can use on your PC only, cloud services are available pretty much everywhere.

They come with web versions but also apps for Windows, Linux, iOS, macOS, and Android. Plus, with the addition of file sync which all of them have, you can have all of your files available on all devices, making your life much easier.

Paid Plans Prices

Surprisingly for some people, we've taken a good hard look at how much these services cost. I know that many people wouldn't pay for cloud storage but when you run out of space, you start questioning your decision.

At some point, you're going to reach the limit and you'll want more space. To do so, you'll have to upgrade your plan to a paid one and enjoy the full experience with pCloud, NordLocker, or any other cloud service on the list.

With that in mind, we made sure that these services are somewhat affordable, even for those with shallow pockets. In that case, **you can try out pCloud's Lifetime plans or enjoy NordLocker's cheap annual plan that works flawlessly.**

While Google Drive and OneDrive are a bit more expensive, they're not going to take your fortune away. For as low as \$9.99 a month, you can get 2 TB of storage with all the advanced features we mentioned.

pCloud's Lifetime plan will last you 99 years, yet, it costs less than \$390 and it's a one-time purchase! As you can see, you can get some great deals on these cloud storage providers in case you decide to significantly expand your online storage.

Conclusion

As you learned today, using the best free cloud storage in 2025 is very easy and offers some great benefits. Sure, you won't get an impressive amount of storage but at least, you can enjoy great security and ease of use.

[pCloud](#) is our favorite free cloud storage, offering 10 GB of free space, along with all of the premium features. However, you can also check out Icedrive or perhaps MEGA which gives you a whopping 20 GB of free online storage.

Bear in mind that we recommend going for paid plans as opposed to free plans that are, as you can see, limited in terms of storage and some features. But, if you aren't a demanding user and you don't rely on cloud storage that much, these are the go-to options you should have in mind.

[Try pCloud Now](#)

FAQ

Let's wrap up everything we said about free cloud storage solutions by answering a few important questions related to the topic.

What is the best free cloud storage?

As said, the best free cloud is [pCloud](#). It offers the most features out of all other providers, giving you access to premium functionalities for free. Alas, its storage is limited to 10 GB, which is basically the only downside.

pCloud is excellent for [storing photos](#), videos, audio, and other types of files, even as a free product. However, if 10 GB isn't enough for you, we recommend checking out its Lifetime plans that give you from 500 GB to 2 TB of storage at an affordable price.

Free cloud vs paid cloud, which is better?

Obviously, paid cloud storage plans are always going to be better than their free counterparts. But what exactly is the difference between these two?

Well, there can be many differences and this depends on the service. The most obvious limit is in terms of storage, where free cloud storage plans give you, on average 3-15 GB of storage. MEGA is an exception to the rule, with its 20 GB cap.

Still, free plans will, in most cases, exclude certain security features, give you slower speeds, and have fewer functionalities. With paid plans, you'll get everything that the chosen service offers, including significantly more storage.

Thus, we think that going for a premium choice is much better given that the prices of online storage solutions aren't as expensive as they used to be.

Free unlimited cloud storage – is it legit?

The best unlimited AND free cloud storage is a fairytale. Let's face it – why would cloud storage providers give you unlimited storage and not charge you a cent? If you ever see an offer like this, we recommend staying away from it.

Offering a cloud service is very expensive for the providers. After all, these hard drives need to be maintained each day to make sure that everything works well. And for these reasons, cloud storage providers need to earn money – they're not charity organizations.

If you own a big company and need a big cloud storage solution, look for companies that offer unlimited cloud storage for a fee. Some of them include Google, Dropbox, and Microsoft.



Best Cloud Storage Services



Written by [Julia Lozanov](#) *Web Hosting Expert*

Reviewed by [Craig Raphael](#) *Technical Editor*

Updated March 26, 2024

[Cloud Hosting](#)



Over [94%](#) of businesses worldwide use cloud storage, with more than [82%](#) of their data stored online.

By 2025, it's expected that the cloud will hold over [100 zettabytes](#) (a trillion gigabytes).

This article will explore why cloud storage is so popular and highlight the top services available.

What Is Cloud Storage?

Cloud storage are services that enable users to save their data on remote servers and access it anywhere, anytime via the Internet or a private network.

Cloud storage providers manage and maintain this [storage infrastructure](#).

Cloud storage acts as a [virtual hard drive](#) on the Internet, allowing you to access your data without needing a physical device.

Are Cloud-Based Storages Secure?

Cloud storage is generally secure as leading providers use data redundancy, storing files in several places to protect against errors, disasters, and equipment failures.

Although there's a risk of hacking, it's typically more secure than storing data on your own premises.

Types of Cloud Storage Services

There are three primary types of cloud storage services, each offering distinct advantages:

Public Cloud Storage: This cloud storage allows users to access storage shared with others, provided by a cloud service. It's a type of Infrastructure as a Service ([IaaS](#)), used by about [19%](#) of businesses.

Private Cloud Storage: This cloud storage type lets users keep their data on a private server, accessible only through a private connection. Only 2% of businesses use this type of storage.

Hybrid Cloud Storage: This type of cloud storage enables users to store their data on both private and public clouds. Around [76%](#) of businesses use hybrid cloud storage.

How Does Cloud Storage Work?

Cloud storage lets you save files online, so you can access them anywhere using the internet.

When you upload a file, it goes to a [data center](#) and is kept on several servers for safety.

This way, your files are safe even if something goes wrong with one server. Companies that offer [cloud storage](#) take care of the [technology](#) and security to keep your data safe.

You can get to your files through websites, apps, or special software, making it easy to use them on any device.

Benefits of Using Cloud Storage Services

Data Backups: Cloud storage keeps multiple copies of your data in different locations, allowing easy restoration if lost or hacked.

Easily Accessible: You can [access data](#) from any device without needing physical storage like USBs or hard drives, by logging into your cloud account.

Updating and Syncing Files: Using a "Sync Client" app, you can automatically update and sync files across devices without manual transfers.

Remote Work: It simplifies remote work by storing all your files online. This makes remote work convenient as progress is saved directly to the cloud.

Enhanced Security: Cloud services protect data in multiple locations and offer encryption for protection against [cyber threats](#).

Cost Efficiency: Cloud storage offers flexible pricing plans, reducing the need for physical storage purchases and maintenance.

Superior Collaboration: Enables [real-time collaboration](#) and document sharing across locations, improving teamwork efficiency and ensuring access to the latest document versions.

Automatic Software Updates: Cloud providers manage server maintenance and software updates, enhancing security and performance with minimal user effort.

Increased Storage Space Efficiency: Cloud storage boosts storage space efficiency, eliminating the need for manual cleanup and allowing for easy expansion.

File Versioning: File versioning in cloud storage lets users recover deleted information or revert to earlier document versions, protecting work and maintaining productivity.

Scalability: Allows easy adjustment of [storage capacity](#) to meet changing needs, ensuring cost-effectiveness by paying only for utilized storage.

How to Choose a Good Cloud Storage Service

Choosing the right cloud storage provider for you or your business can be quite challenging.

Before you settle on one, you should factor in the following:

- How much storage do you require
- How much you can spend
- What types of features do you need
- How often do you need to backup your data
- Who can access the data apart from you
- The security features you need, like password protection, data encryption, etc.

Top 15 Cloud Storage Services: Our Picks

1. [Google Drive](#): Best for business and personal use

This leading cloud storage service, with over [94%](#) market share, provides a free, user-friendly, and scalable platform. It offers both free and paid plans.

Key Features:

- Multiple users can access it.
- It provides version history.
- It is compatible with Google Docs and Google Classroom.
- The free plan includes 15GB of storage

Pros

- ✓ Beginner-friendly
- ✓ Includes online office apps
- ✓ Great for international teams
- ✓ The prices for paid plans are flexible

Cons

- ✗ Doesn't have as many features as other providers
- ✗ Not good for all types of files
- ✗ Doesn't have end-to-end encryption

Best for: Storing photos, documents, and large amounts of data for both business and personal use.

☰  Google Drive

Easy and secure access to your content

Store, share, and collaborate on files and folders from your mobile device, tablet, or computer

[Try Drive for Work](#)

[Go to Drive](#)



2. [iDrive](#): Best for large data storage

iDrive is a versatile, paid cloud storage service compatible with Windows, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android.

It provides 5GB of storage for free, with additional space available through four different paid plans..

Key Features:

- The iDrive backtrack restores data to previous versions.
- It allows you to take snapshots of your files.
- It has a custom dashboard from which you can manage users and files.

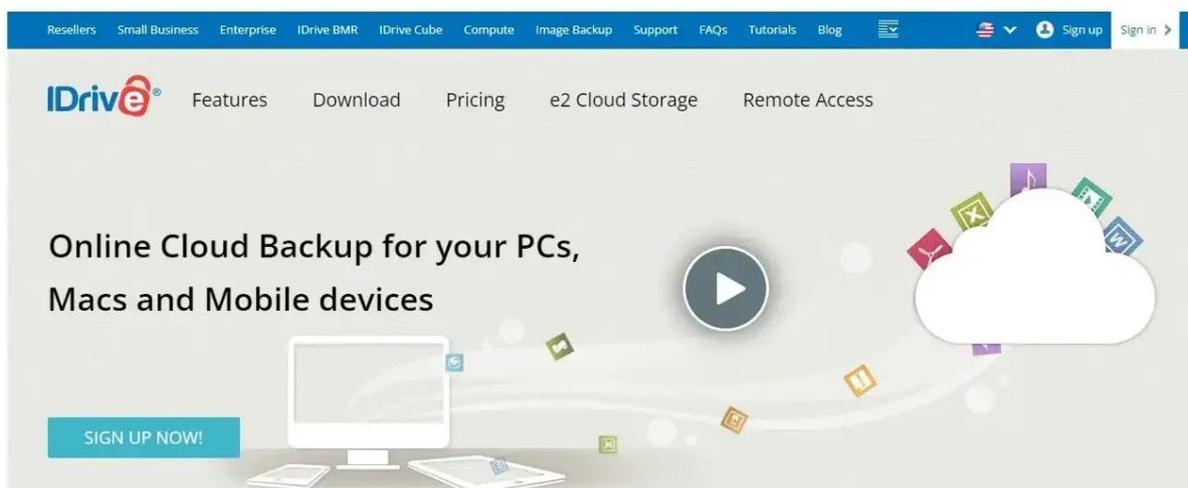
Pros

- ✓ Users can access files from anywhere
- ✓ It has an excellent user interface
- ✓ It has a great price range and discounts
- ✓ It encrypts all data

Cons

- ✗ Has issues with its customer support

Best for: Storing large amounts of data.



3. [pCloud](#): Best for lifetime plans

pCloud provides up to 10GB of storage for free and additional storage through paid plans. Unlike some competitors, it lacks office suites and video content but excels in security and is accessible on all devices.

Key Features:

- Restores data up to a month old.
- Secures files with passwords and two-factor authentication (2FA)
- Uses TLS/SSL to ensure safe data transfer and encryption.

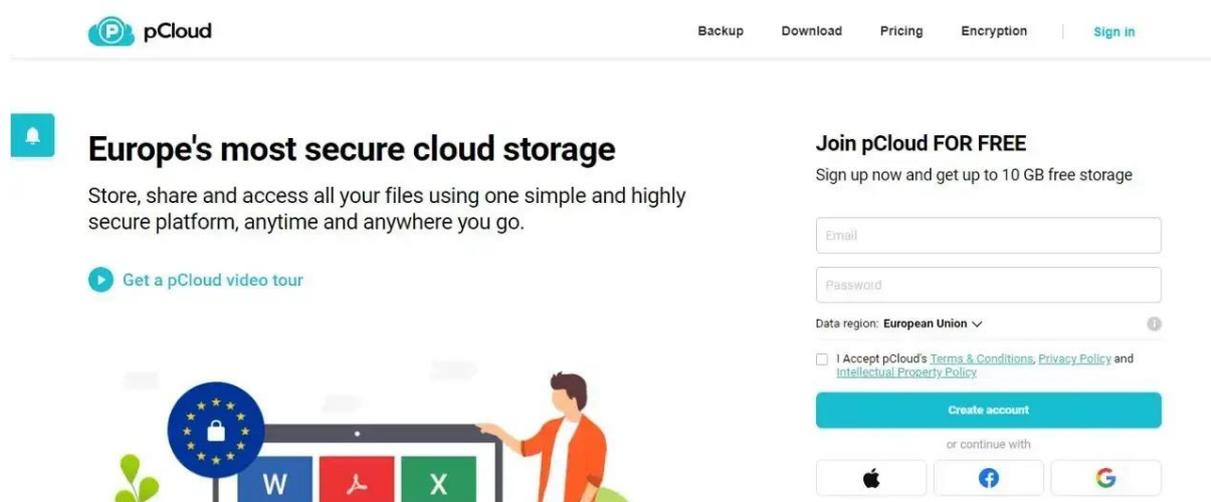
Pros

- ✓ It's GDPR compliant
- ✓ It has a great user interface
- ✓ It's excellent for team projects
- ✓ It has good-value lifetime plans

Cons

- ✗ Users have to pay for encryption
- ✗ Its plans are more expensive than those of competitors

Best for: Lifetime plans.



The screenshot shows the pCloud website's sign-up page. At the top left is the pCloud logo. The navigation menu includes 'Backup', 'Download', 'Pricing', 'Encryption', and 'Sign in'. The main heading is 'Europe's most secure cloud storage', followed by the text 'Store, share and access all your files using one simple and highly secure platform, anytime and anywhere you go.' Below this is a link to 'Get a pCloud video tour'. On the right, there is a 'Join pCloud FOR FREE' section with the text 'Sign up now and get up to 10 GB free storage'. The sign-up form includes fields for 'Email' and 'Password', a 'Data region' dropdown set to 'European Union', and a checkbox for 'I Accept pCloud's Terms & Conditions, Privacy Policy and Intellectual Property Policy'. A blue 'Create account' button is present, along with social media options for 'or continue with' Apple, Facebook, and Google. An illustration at the bottom shows a person pointing at a computer screen displaying icons for Word, PDF, and Excel, with a padlock icon and the European Union flag nearby.

4. IceDrive: Best for personal use

IceDrive is a modern service that acts like a hard drive, offering 10GB of free storage. More space is available with three paid plans.

To use it on Windows, download and drag-and-drop files. It's also compatible with Linux, Mac, Android, and iOS..

Key Features:

- Offers video and audio streaming.
- Uses Twofish algorithm encryption.
- Offers encryption for clients.
- Allows users to remove someone's access to data after a predetermined time.

Pros

- ✓ It's easy to share files
- ✓ It can back up entire devices
- ✓ It's GDPR-compliant

Cons

- ✗ It does not have any third-party integrations.

Best for: Personal use.



5. Dropbox: Best for compatibility

Dropbox, a cloud storage leader, provides 2GB of storage for free and two paid plans.

It supports various platforms (Windows, Linux, Mac, Android, iOS) and holds a 66.2% market share. Its ease of use and wide compatibility make it a popular choice.

Key Features:

- Offers real-time backup.
- Offers smart sync, which stores files online, saving local disk storage space.
- It enables users to protect files with passwords.
- Offers remote wipe.
- Provides file recovery.
- Has two-step verification.

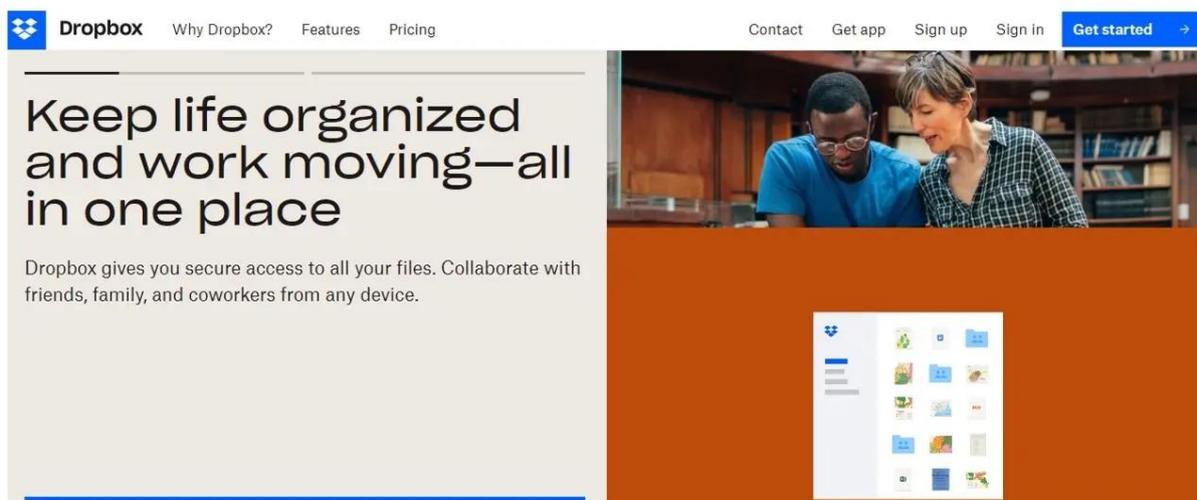
Pros

- ✓ Excellent for families that want to share files
- ✓ Excellent for storing and sharing photos and videos
- ✓ It offers great security features

Cons

- ✗ Encryption is only available on paid plans

Best for: Compatibility



The image shows a screenshot of the Dropbox website homepage. The top navigation bar includes the Dropbox logo, links for 'Why Dropbox?', 'Features', and 'Pricing', and a right-side menu with 'Contact', 'Get app', 'Sign up', 'Sign in', and a blue 'Get started' button with a right arrow. The main content area features a large headline: 'Keep life organized and work moving—all in one place'. Below the headline is a sub-headline: 'Dropbox gives you secure access to all your files. Collaborate with friends, family, and coworkers from any device.' To the right of the text is a photograph of a man and a woman looking at a laptop. Below the photo is a screenshot of the Dropbox web interface showing a grid of files and folders.

6. Microsoft OneDrive: Best for business use

Microsoft OneDrive comes with Microsoft 365 or can be bought separately via OneDrive for Business. It's compatible with Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, Xbox, and Windows Phone. With a 39.35% user base, it's among the top cloud storage services.

Key Features:

- Has expiration dates for old files.
- Provides download blocks.
- Enables custom passwords for highly sensitive data.
- Provides version history.

Pros

- ✓ Great for collaborations
- ✓ Offers fast synchronization
- ✓ It's compatible with Microsoft Office
- ✓ Easy to use

Cons

- ✗ Has limited security features
- ✗ Storage is limited

Best for: Business use

The image shows a screenshot of the Microsoft OneDrive website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Microsoft, Microsoft 365, OneDrive, Business, Plans and pricing, Features, Resources, and Download. On the right side, there are links for All Microsoft, a search icon, and a user profile icon. The main content area features a large banner for 'OneDrive Personal Cloud Storage' with the text 'Save your photos and files to OneDrive and access them from any device, anywhere.' Below this text are two buttons: 'Sign in' and 'See plans and pricing'. To the right of the text, there are three overlapping images: a smartphone displaying the OneDrive mobile app interface, a tablet displaying the OneDrive web interface, and a laptop displaying the OneDrive desktop application interface. The desktop application shows a 'My files' view with various folders and files, including 'Beautiful Design', 'Inspiration', 'Personal Vault', and 'Recycle bin'.

7. Box: Best for unlimited cloud storage

Box is geared towards medium and large businesses for document collaboration, though it also has personal plans.

It provides up to 10GB for free with a 250MB limit per file and offers three paid plans for more storage. Box holds a 4.17% market share.

Key Features:

- It offers Cloud Content Management.
- It provides version history.
- It has real-time backup.
- It offers two-factor authentication.
- Offers unlimited cloud storage.

Pros

- ✓ It integrates with over 1 500 apps
- ✓ It has excellent security features
- ✓ It's excellent for collaboration
- ✓ It has great features overall
- ✓ It has great interfaces on the desktop and mobile apps across different operating systems

Cons

- ✗ You need at least three users for the business plans
- ✗ Versioning is not available for the free plan

Best for: Unlimited cloud storage and business use.

box

Products Solutions Customers Resources Pricing Contact +44 808 189 0504

Get Started Login

Simplify how you work

Secure collaboration with anyone, anywhere, on any device

Get started Contact us

8. iCloud: Best for apple device users

iCloud, Apple's cloud storage, integrates with macOS and iOS but also works on Windows. It offers 5GB free storage and three paid options for more space. It syncs data across Apple devices instantly and holds a 38.89% market share due to Apple's large user base..

Key Features:

- It includes the iCloud Photo Library.
- Offers Family Sharing.
- Syncs Safari data.
- Offers iCloud Keychain.

Pros

- ✓ It syncs various data like photos, videos, messages, calendars, contacts, etc.
- ✓ Backups from apps are automatic
- ✓ Synchronization is instant

Cons

- ✗ It can only be used if you have Apple devices
- ✗ Offers only 5GB of free storage

Best for: Apple device users.



iCloud+ plans and pricing

When you sign up for iCloud, you automatically get 5GB of free storage. If you need more iCloud storage or want access to premium features, you can upgrade to iCloud+ .

About iCloud+

iCloud+ is Apple's premium cloud subscription. It gives you more storage for your photos, files, and backups, and additional features* available only to subscribers:

iCloud+ with 50GB storage

- 50GB of storage
- iCloud Private Relay (Beta)
- Hide My Email

iCloud+ with 200GB storage

- 200GB of storage
- iCloud Private Relay (Beta)
- Hide My Email

iCloud+ with 2TB storage

- 2TB of storage
- iCloud Private Relay (Beta)
- Hide My Email

9. [NordLocker](#): Best for security

This cloud storage solution provides top-tier security, employing ECC, AES256, and Argon2 encryption to protect your data thoroughly. With a zero-knowledge policy, it ensures that only you have the decryption key for your files.

Key Features:

- Securely stores files on your device.
- Keeps your data safely backed up without manual effort.
- Offers up to 3GB of free storage.

Pros

- ✓ Offers advanced security features
- ✓ It is both GDPR and HIPAA-compliant
- ✓ It's easy to use

Cons

- ✗ It has no collaboration features
- ✗ It's only available on Windows and Mac computers

Best for: Security



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the NordLocker website. The header is dark with the NordLocker logo on the left and navigation links for Features, Plans, Apps, Blog, and Business in the center. On the right, there are links for Help and Log in, along with a hamburger menu icon. Below the navigation bar, the main content area has a light blue background. It features a large headline: "Your cloud. Easy. Efficient. Encrypted." followed by a sub-headline: "NordLocker is a secure and easy-to-use cloud for your files, ideas, and memories. Encrypted at all times, your data is always within reach."

10. Flickr: Best for storing photos

Flickr offers budget-friendly cloud storage for photos and videos without compromising their quality.

It provides a free plan for up to 1,000 photos and videos, along with two paid options for more storage..

Key Features:

- EXIF Data Storage
- Offers a user-friendly app for the management of your media.
- Social Media Integration

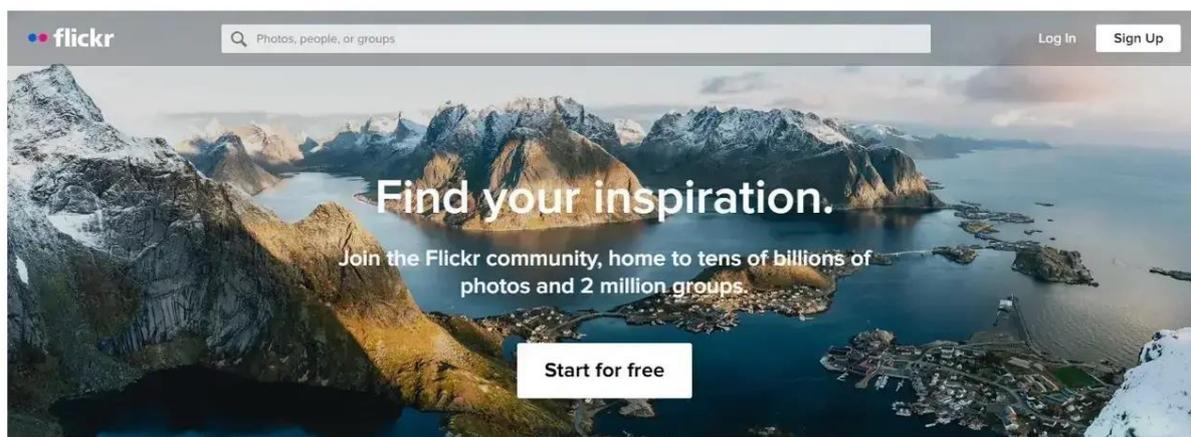
Pros

- ✓ It's really easy to use
- ✓ It preserves photo and video quality
- ✓ It's really affordable

Cons

- ✗ It doesn't offer any productivity tools
- ✗ Not good for large files
- ✗ All photos and videos are public by default

Best for: Storing photos.



11. [Amazon Web Services \(AWS\) S3](#): Best for scalability

Amazon Web Services S3 offers highly scalable object storage for businesses of all sizes.

Known for its durability, availability, and security features, AWS S3 can handle large amounts of data with ease.

It provides a pay-as-you-go model, making it ideal for companies looking to scale their storage needs.

Key Features:

- Highly durable storage infrastructure.
- Supports data lifecycle management.
- Offers detailed access controls.
- Integrates with Amazon's vast ecosystem of services.
- Supports encryption in transit and at rest.

12. [Mega](#): Best for privacy

Mega offers 20GB of free storage upon signing up and additional storage through various paid plans. Mega known for its strong emphasis on security and privacy, using end-to-end encryption to ensure that only you can access your data.

Key Features:

- End-to-end encryption.
- User-controlled encryption keys.
- Real-time file syncing.
- Secure collaboration tools.
- Offers a generous amount of free storage.

13. [Tresorit](#): Best for secure file sharing

Tresorit is a premium cloud storage service designed for professionals and businesses needing secure file-sharing and collaboration tools.

Key Features:

- End-to-end encrypted file storage.
- Secure file sharing with non-Tresorit users.
- Remote wipe capabilities.
- Two-factor authentication.
- Compliance with global data protection standards.

14. [Sync.com](#): Best for out-of-the-box security

Sync.com focuses on easy and secure file syncing for both personal and business use. It's fast and user-friendly, even if it doesn't offer as many features as others.

Sync.com is a great option for individuals and businesses concerned with maintaining the privacy of their data.

Key Features:

- End-to-end encryption.
- No third-party access to data.
- Microsoft 365 support
- Comprehensive file sharing tools
- Good multi-user deals
- Automatic backup and sync.
- Advanced sharing controls and permissions.

15. [Backblaze B2](#): Best for backup

Backblaze B2 Cloud Storage is designed for backup and archiving.

It offers the lowest cost storage in the cloud, making it ideal for businesses and individuals needing to back up large volumes of data.

Backblaze B2 provides easy access and integration with other services and platforms.

Key Features:

- Highly affordable storage options.
- Instant access to data.
- Easy integration with other apps and services.
- Robust security features.
- Designed for backup and archiving purposes.

Cloud Storage vs. Traditional Storage

Cloud storage allows you to save data online with a service provider, giving you the ability to access your files from anywhere with internet access.

This approach offers advantages over traditional methods like hard drives or USBs, which need to be physically present to access data.

Feature	Cloud Storage	Traditional Storage
Accessibility and Convenience	Accessible from anywhere with an internet connection, across all devices.	Access is limited to physical possession of the storage device.
Data Redundancy and Security	Data is stored in multiple secure locations, ensuring safety and accessibility even if one copy is compromised.	Risk of data loss or damage if the physical device fails or is lost.
Ease of Sharing	Sharing is simplified through links, without the need for physical transfer.	Requires physical copying or sending over the internet, which is time-consuming and less secure.
Cost and Space Efficiency	Cost-effective with scalable storage options, paying only for what you use without the need for physical hardware.	Involves additional costs for physical devices as storage needs grow, along with the need for physical space for storage.
Backup and Recovery	Includes automatic backup and recovery, minimizing data loss without manual intervention.	Dependent on manual backups, with recovery being challenging if the device is damaged or lost.

Bottom Line

Whether you're an individual or a business, cloud storage caters to all needs with features like easy access, file syncing, and remote work facilitation.

Choosing the right provider depends on your specific needs.

Therefore, do not forget to examine your storage, budget, and security needs against the services your cloud providers offer.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if I reach my storage allowance?

You'll need to upgrade your package. Luckily, this is an incredibly easy process and can be fixed in no time at all with a call to the customer service team.

Will cloud hosted websites be backed up?

Yes, [Verpex](#) performs daily backups of all sites hosted.

How many websites can I host in the cloud?

Our [cloud hosting packages](#) allow up to 10 websites to be hosted simultaneously.

How easy is it to increase bandwidth on cloud servers?

Incredibly easy. Since you're in a pool of other servers you can draw on those resources at any time. If you need to increase your bandwidth or storage limits just give us a call and it can be done instantly.

How do cloud services keep my files safe during upload and while stored?

Cloud services use a technology called encryption to protect your files. This means when you upload a file, it's turned into a code that only you can unlock with your password or key.

What should I do if I delete a file by mistake or need an older version of it?

Cloud services often have a recycle bin or trash folder where deleted files go before they're permanently removed. You can usually find and restore them from there.

How can I access and update my files from my phone or other devices?

You can use the cloud service's app or website. After logging in with your account, you can view, download, or upload files from anywhere. Any changes you make will automatically update across all your devices that have the app installed.