

New Windows 11 preview improves volume mixer, color management, and more

Enlarge / Windows 11 is mixing things up with an improved volume mixer, among other features.

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Microsoft released a batch of significant updates to Windows 11 earlier this week, adding tabs to the Notepad app, integrating the AI-powered “new Bing” into the taskbar’s search box, and previewing iPhone pairing, complete with rudimentary iMessage support. And Microsoft continues to test other features in public via its Windows Insider Program, particularly in the more experimental Dev channel. These builds are likely to form the basis for the operating system’s big 23H2 update later this year.

This week’s Dev channel build demonstrates a new and improved volume mixer for Windows and its apps directly from the Quick Settings menu at the bottom-right of the taskbar. The new mixer allows you to switch between output devices and control the volume of your output, and it shows per-app volume and mute settings so you can quiet down or silence an individual app. It’s an improvement over the current Quick Settings controls, which only offer system-wide volume adjustments and require multiple clicks to change output devices.

This build also expands a feature called “Auto Color Management” (ACM). ACM is hardware-accelerated, system-level color management that ensures colors in apps look the same on different displays with different capabilities, and it’s designed as a replacement for older Windows color management technologies like Image Color Management (ICM) and the Windows Color System (WCS).

Let’s briefly go over what color management is and why it’s important. Different displays have different properties. Some might support high-dynamic range (HDR) while others do not. Others might support expanded color gamuts like DCI-P3 or Adobe RGB instead of the more typical sRGB. Some support 10-bit color, while others only support 8-bit color. If you’re writing software or creating images or videos, you want to know that your content will look the same on all kinds of displays, no matter what color technologies those displays support.

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Windows 10 introduced Advanced Color to address this issue specifically for HDR displays, making sure that content designed for SDR displays would look right even on monitors with a higher dynamic range. The Windows 11 2022 Update introduced ACM, a version of Advanced Color for “select qualifying and specially provisioned SDR displays,” like those in the Surface Studio 2+ and Surface Pro 9, to ensure that apps designed for sRGB displays only use colors from the sRGB color gamut while also making more colors available to apps that could take advantage of them. This Windows 11 Insider build expands ACM support to all SDR displays connected to a compatible GPU.

ACM has specific GPU hardware requirements, though they’re mostly mild: an AMD RX 400-series GPU or newer, an Nvidia GTX 1000-series GPU or newer, or any dedicated Intel GPU (including both Arc and the weird DG1 card). All Ryzen integrated GPUs and those in 12th-generation or newer Intel

CPUs are also supported. You'll need to run a recent-ish graphics driver with WDDM 3.0 support.

Other changes in this build include a setting to always or never show the Windows touchscreen keyboard instead of letting your PC show or hide it automatically based on whether a physical keyboard is connected, a new searchable help page for voice access commands, and further testing of ads for other Microsoft services in the sign-in menu (these all take the form of backup reminders, but the cloud that the files are being backed up to is Microsoft's OneDrive service).

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