

The 2025 Android upgrade cycle has begun

Hi, friends! Welcome to *Installer* No. 68, your guide to the best and *Verge*-iest stuff in the world. (If you're new here, welcome, hope you're staying warm and sane, and also you can read all the old editions at the *Installer* homepage.)

This week, I've been reading about **Kieran Culkin** and **insomnia** and **the eBay for fancy startup stuff**, finally watching ***The Wild Robot***, thinking a lot about my shopping habits while watching ***The Mega-Brands That Built America***, adding a bunch of **Baseus retractable cables** to my travel kit, playing an amazing browser-based rendition of the Atari game ***Pitfall!***, testing out the new **Spark calendar** for Android, and trying to copy Babish's delicious-looking **breakfast sandwich**.

I also have for you the biggest new phone in the Android world, the GPU every gamer's going to want, an impossible test for AI tools, a clever Google alternative, and much more. It's been a somewhat quiet week for new stuff, honestly, since it's both post-CES doldrums and utter political chaos. But we've still got great stuff to talk about! Let's do it.

(As always, the best part of *Installer* is your ideas and tips. What are you watching / reading / cooking / downloading / building with Legos / strapping to your wrists this week? What should everyone else be into as much as you are? Tell me everything: installer@theverge.com. And if you know someone else who might enjoy *Installer*, tell them to subscribe here.)

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Every once in a while, **Mike McCue** and I jump on Google Meet and rant at each other about the future. Mike is the CEO of Flipboard, a tech executive all the way back to the Netscape days, and both a realist and a total bleeding-heart optimist about what technology can be. Recently, what we've mostly talked about is **Surf**, Flipboard's new feed-reader app.

I think Surf, or something like it, is the future. (There's also the new **Reeder** and **Project Tapestry**, which have similar ideas – but Surf is the most ambitious one I've seen yet.) It's social, but it's not controlled by any single company; it's personalized, but only in ways that *you* choose. All this stuff is still super early, but every time X changes or TikTok goes away, it becomes clear that we need something very different.

Oh, and I have fun news: if you **sign up for Surf with the code "Installer,"** you can skip the waitlist line and try the app out. Right now you need a Mastodon account to get in (which is easy enough to sign up for), but Mike says Bluesky support is coming soon, too.

Anyway! I asked Mike to share his homescreen, plus give us a glimpse into some of the feeds he's enjoying most right now. Here is his homescreen, plus some info on the apps he uses and why:

The phone: iPhone 16 Pro Max.

The wallpaper: I alternate between Apple's Earth and photos of my family. It's easy and fun to change wallpapers on iOS. The

Earth wallpaper is dynamic throughout the day. I like how it reminds me that I'm just a tiny speck in space and time.

The apps: Apple Maps, Gaia GPS, Windy, Sky Guide, Spotify, Google Calendar, Safari, Leica Fotos, Apple Photos, PixelFed, Flipboard, Threads, Ivory (a Mastodon client), Bluesky, Surf Beta.

If there's one takeaway here, it's that I'm a social web nerd, and I'm hopelessly addicted to news and social media.

My saving grace is that I do manage to get outside a fair bit. I recently switched to Apple Maps (I love the presentation when driving), and I use **Gaia** for trails when I'm hiking or mountain biking. **Windy** is the best weather app out there (I bought a premium subscription for sailing). That said, I think **MyRadar** is best at answering the question, "Is it about to rain? And for how long?" I use **Sky Guide** a surprising amount. It's especially fun to spot and track the planets and the space station with my kids.

The lower right quadrant has my most used apps because I can easily reach them one-handed. Of these, Apple Notes is where I spend by far the most time. It's where I do all of my thinking, planning, and writing for work and life. I know there are more powerful alternatives out there, but Notes is so simple and just works.

For social media, I use a mix of Mastodon (via **Ivory**), Bluesky, and Threads, three of the main apps on the social web. I also love the new **PixelFed** app. Not only is it built on ActivityPub, it's like what Instagram used to be. I stopped posting on Instagram years ago because it got so noisy. It's nice to start sharing photos again.

I also asked Mike to share a few things he's into right now on Surf. Here's what he sent back:

- **NBATHreads** by David Rushing: Real-time commentary from fans on Threads and Bluesky during games. Lots of great videos and podcasts between games.
- **FilmFeed** by David Imel: Beautiful photos from a curated list of film photographers. Like Instagram for film fans.
- **Guardians of the Fediverse** by Tim Chambers: My go-to feed for connecting with people who are building on the social web.
- **SkyTok**: Trending videos on Bluesky and videos tagged with #SkyTok. Also available **directly on Bluesky** as a custom feed.

Here's what the Installer community is into this week. I want to know what you're into right now as well! Email installer@theverge.com or message me on Signal – @davidpierce.11 – with your recommendations for anything and everything, and we'll feature some of our favorites here every week. For even more great recommendations, check out the replies to this post on Threads and this post on Bluesky.

“Nothing published a **very interesting video** about how the design of iOS & Android can have a different impact on your mental state and how different cultures approach design in general. Super interesting stuff.” – Teo

“**UFO 50!** Truly incredible compilation of 50 new retro-style indie games, built around a fictional game company in the 80s. It's all I've been playing and I've only played about 15 games so far.” – Jelly

“Watching **Unrivaled**, the new 3 on 3 women's basketball league, on TNT / TruTV / Max! So much fun to watch the best basketball players play with more space and a different format from traditional basketball.” – Renata

“I got a **Miyoo A30** this week, installed **Spruce** (a custom firmware) on it, and now I'm playing *Pokémon Yellow Legacy*

because I needed some nostalgic comfort food to deal with everything going on right now.” – Beeks

“Just finished up ***Kevin Can F**k Himself*** on Netflix. I think it’s a few years old, but man it was so good. I love the storytelling device they employ where any time Kevin is around, it’s filmed as an *All In the Family*-style sitcom, and the rest of the time it’s filmed like a dark comedy.” – JK

“Been spending a bunch of time on **Graze** building feeds for BlueSky! They’re really doing some great work for the community, and have made setting up custom feeds super quick, fun and available to pretty much anyone, techie or not.” – Kerha

“***I Love Hue Too***. It’s been out a while, but it’s beautiful, addictive and a wonderful way to distract from the crumbling world around me.” – Brad

“Last week’s ***Silo*** season finale was incredible and I’ve also started ***Wool*** (the first in the book series) and it is a really fun read. Crazy how much faster the book is paced – it’s only like 40 percent through the story that [REDACTED] happens!!” – Andy

“I’ve been playing a whole lot of ***Dragonsweeper***, which is like *Minesweeper* crossed with a dungeon crawler. It’s tricky at first, but it’s sick.” – Sophie

“This playlist of **old school Weather Channel songs** my brother sent me has been my soundtrack for the last few days. Just sit back and let the nostalgia of trying to get a forecast over basic cable wash over you.” – Mike