

It is sometimes a good idea to uninstall software that you don't use.

Why?

It may be using valuable resources on your computer that can affect performance. On the other hand, it may be annoying you because you don't like it, or it ate your doctoral thesis, or was installed without permission by a 13 year old and now keeps insisting on checking for updates.

What does it mean to uninstall a program?

When you put a new program on your computer it is not just a case of copying the program files to a place where you can find them. The operating system (Windows) needs to put the files in a logical place, take note of where they are, make the program accessible, record information about the program so that it knows what to do with it each time you run it, and so forth. All of this is taken care of by the process of "installing" the program.

This means that if you subsequently wish to remove a program you need to set in motion a process that will "back-track" or "unpick" all of these steps. This includes, but is by no means limited to, deleting the files that were copied onto your computer when you installed the program. Note, by the way, that I refer to "files" in the plural: a single "program" is almost always composed of many individual files. This process of removing the files, settings, and other traces that make up a program is called "uninstalling".

What you must not do

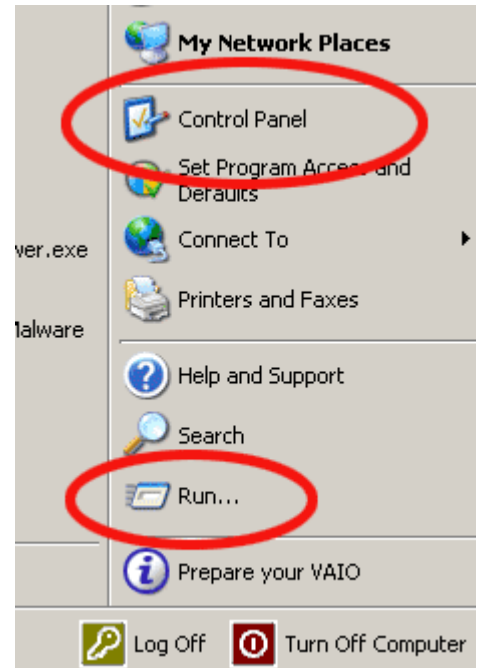
You must not just look on your computer for any files with the name of the program you want to remove and delete it/them. This would almost certainly leave you in a worse position than you were in before. There could be many situations in which Windows goes looking for a program file you have deleted and won't know what to do when it can't find it. At best you will see an error message and at worst your whole system will freeze. And what makes this worse is that you may also have broken the normal method for removing that program properly.

Another thing that it is tempting to do is to delete the icon on the desktop that launches the program. By all means do this if you just wish to reclaim some space on your desktop, but be aware that deleting a shortcut does not in any way delete or uninstall the program to which it is connected. Deleting a shortcut does just that - the program itself is left intact and the shortcut could be re-created at any time.

Correctly Removing (Uninstalling) Programs

The term usually used for removing a computer programs is "uninstalling". Without hesitation, I would recommend that the first - and probably only - method you use is the Windows uninstall routine. This varies slightly depending on the version of Windows you are using.

Windows XP



Windows XP Control Panel and Run buttons

1. Click on the “Start” button and launch “Add or Remove Programs” by either of the two following methods:
 - Click on the “Run” option.
 - Type `appwiz.cpl` into the box and press the Enter key.
- or
- Click on the “Control Panel” option.
 - Double-click on “Add or Remove Programs”.
2. Find the program you wish to remove by searching through the alphabetical list.
 3. Click on the program name.
 4. Click on the “Remove” button or “Change/Remove” button that will appear to the right of the selected program name.
 5. Follow the prompts.

Windows Vista

1. Click on the “Start” button and launch “Add or Remove Programs” by either of the two following methods:

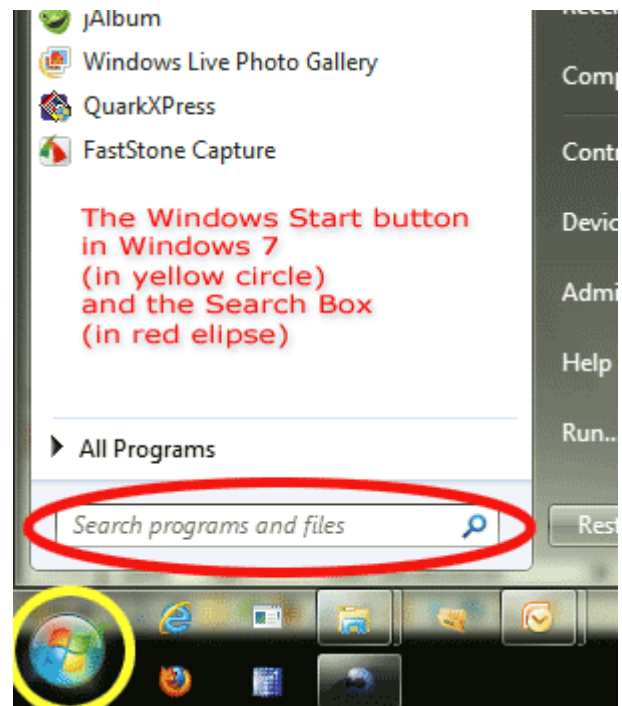
- Type appwiz.cpl into the “search” box and press the “Enter” key.

or

- Click on the “Control Panel” option.
- Click on “Classic View” (at the top lefthand side of the screen).
- Double-click on “Programs and Features”.

2. Find the program you wish to remove by searching through the alphabetical list.
3. Click on the program name.
4. Click on the “Uninstall” button that is above the list of program names.
5. Follow the prompts.

Windows 7



Windows 7 Start Button and Search box

1. Click on the “Start” button and launch “Add or Remove Programs” by either of the two following methods:

- Type `appwiz.cpl` into the “search” box and press the “Enter” key.

or

- Click on the “Control Panel” option.
 - Click on the triangle next to “View by” (at the top righthand side of the screen) and select either “Small icons” or “Large icons”.
 - Double-click on “Programs and Features”.
2. Find the program you wish to remove by searching through the alphabetical list.
 3. Click on the program name.
 4. Click on the “Uninstall” button that is above the list of program names.
 5. Follow the prompts.

What if it doesn't work?

Sometimes a program will not appear on the list, or clicking on the button to remove it will result in an error message indicating that the program can not be uninstalled. In that case, the next thing to try is to locate the “unwise” file in the program folder in which the program resides. This is getting slightly more hazardous as you need to be sure you are in the right folder (so that the right program will be uninstalled) and it is also possible that the uninstallation process will remove one or more files that are shared with other programs.

If there is no “unwise” file associated with the program, then the next step would be to install and run a utility such as [Revo Uninstaller](#). To be honest, though, unless the program that you are trying to remove is definitely causing problems to the rest of the system, it may be better to leave it installed than to try these last two methods – unless you want to take the risk of learning more about computers (the hard way) than you had bargained for.

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