

02-19-2023, Mac Basics/Beginners SIG – Changing the Default App

Note: This discussion is based on macOS, 13.2.1 (Ventura). Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS. Most illustrations are from screenshots on my iMac or MacBook Pro. Credit: See the credits at the end of this presentation.

Occasionally, I prefer to use a different app instead of the default app used by macOS to open a file. This is because a third-party app has a feature or option that I want to use. Rather than switching to this app each time to open a particular file type, I change the default application that my Mac uses. It's all a matter of personal preference. If you find yourself in this situation, there are several ways to do it.

You likely have multiple apps on your Mac that do the same thing. For example, you may have **Adobe Acrobat Reader** and Apple's **Preview** installed (both of which can be used for opening, reading, and editing PDF files), or perhaps you want to use a different app for email or web browsing.

In my case, I've set a preferred reader (Acrobat) for opening all PDF files on my Mac. (It's subjective, but I prefer Acrobat because I like the way that PDFs are displayed and especially the somewhat finer control that I have over the level of zooming. Also, Acrobat Reader has a Presentation mode that I like to use for my Beginners/Mac Basics presentations.)

If Acrobat Reader wasn't installed, then Preview would automatically be used to open a PDF. For this presentation, I've set the default app for PDFs back to Preview. However, due to my previous setting, PDFs still use the Acrobat icon.

Here are several ways to set a default application.

Use a Different App to Open Files.

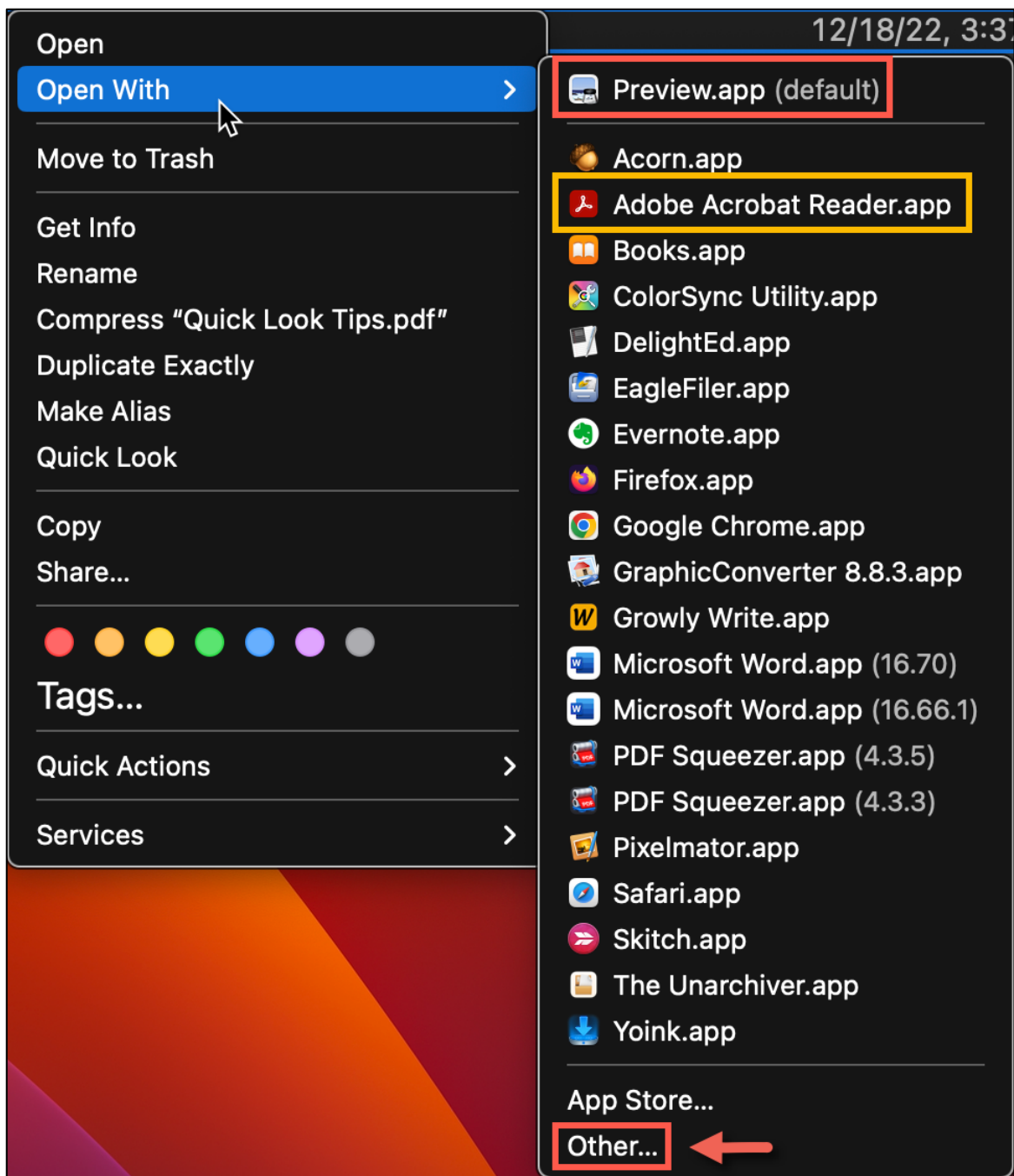
Right-Click (Control-Click) in the Finder – Choose **Open With**

- Browse for the file where you want to change the default app that opens it. In this example, I'll use a PDF file.
- **Right-Click** (Control-Click) on it to bring up the pop-up context menu.
Notice that this pop-up menu has a lot of other useful options including Move to Trash, Get Info, Rename, Make Alias, Tags, Quick Actions, among others.
- Select the **Open With** from the context menu. Another menu then pops up alongside with a list of several apps that macOS suggests can be used to open the file.

At this point, you'll notice that the default app is **Preview**.

Adobe Acrobat Reader is among the apps in the list. It's the one that we want to make the default app. However, if it's selected now, all that will happen is that the file will be opened with Acrobat Reader, but it won't be set as the default app.

- In order to set a default app—in this case Adobe Acrobat Reader—choose the **Other** menu item at the bottom of the list. A new window will be opened on your screen. [See the image on the next page for the **Open With** menu.]



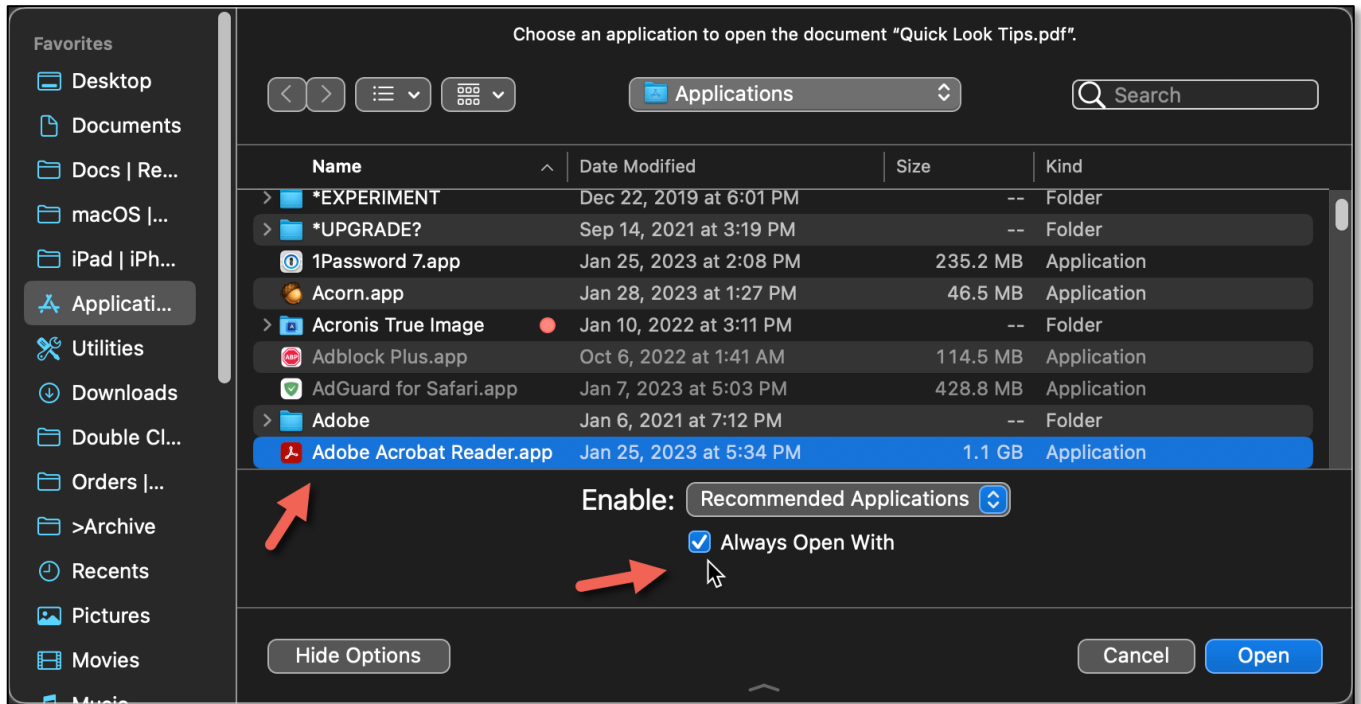
Open With Menu

Notice that there's even an option to go to the **App Store** to look for other apps to open the file.

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Select the application that you want to use for opening the file, and also be sure to check the box next to **Always Open With** as shown below. If you don't find this option, tap on the **Show Options** button to bring it up.

In the image below, I've selected **Adobe Acrobat Reader**. From now on this app will be used to open my PDF files.

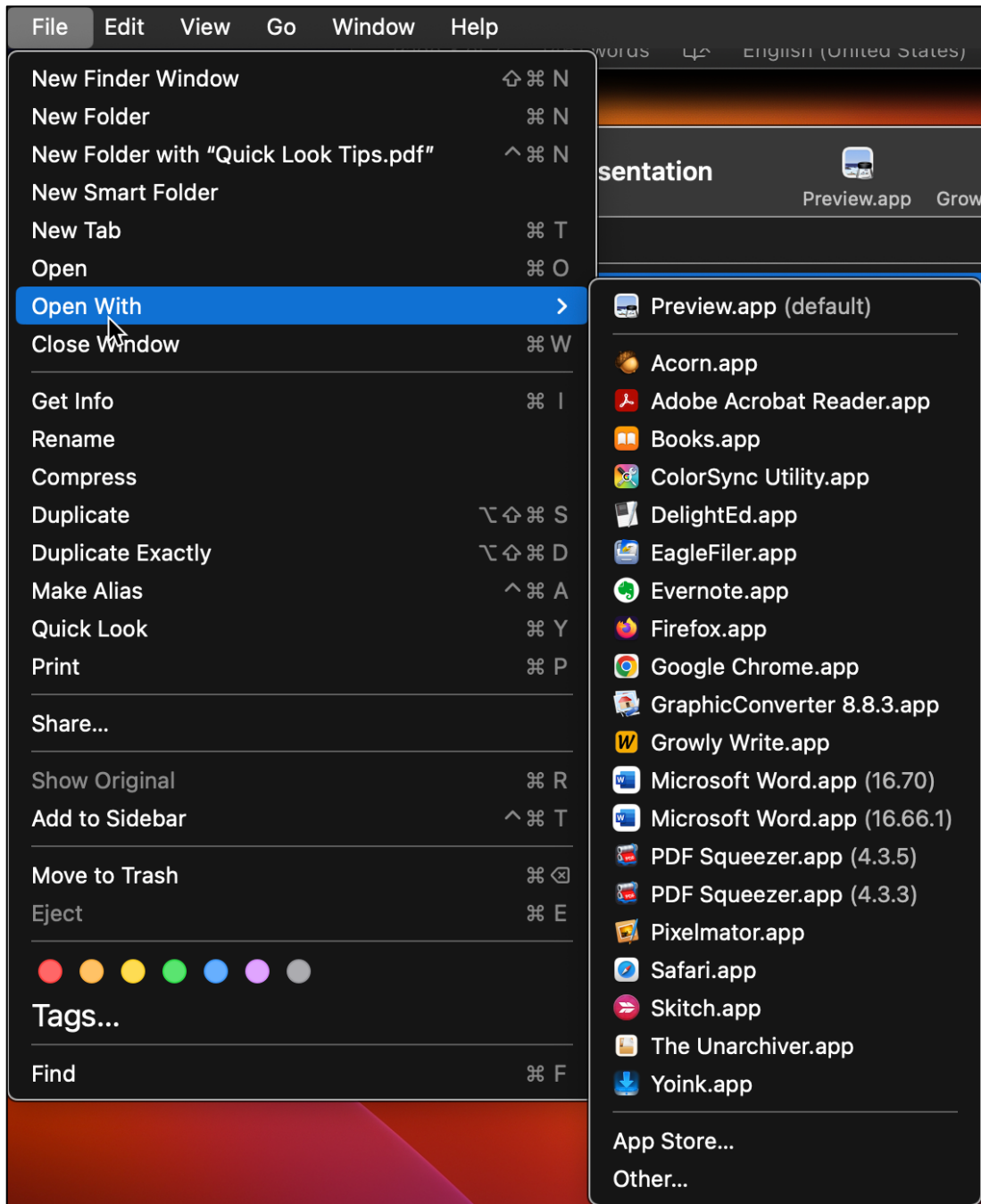


Open With > Other > App Selection Menu

Note: The **Show Options** button toggles to **Hide Options** as shown in the image above.

Another Way to Choose **Open With** in the Finder

- Again, browse for the file where you want to change the default app.
- Go to the Finder's **File menu** and select the **Open With** menu item.
- Proceed as described in the preceding section.



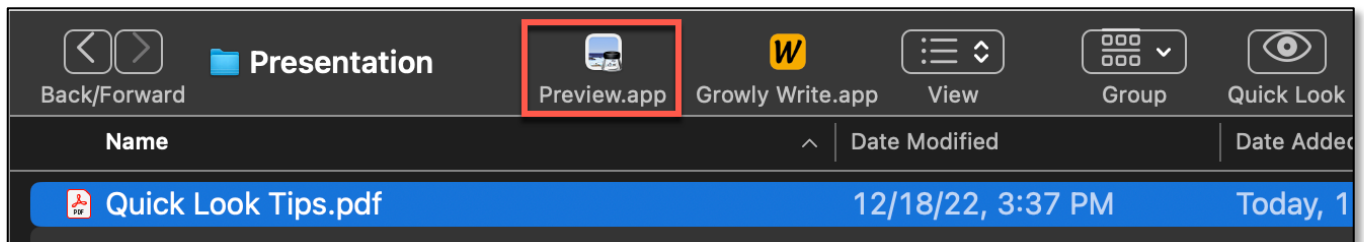
Open With Menu (File > Open With Menu Item)

Note: If you only occasionally want to use an app other than the default app (whether you've changed the default app or just don't want to use the one set by macOS), you can simply stop at **Open With**.

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Use the Toolbar

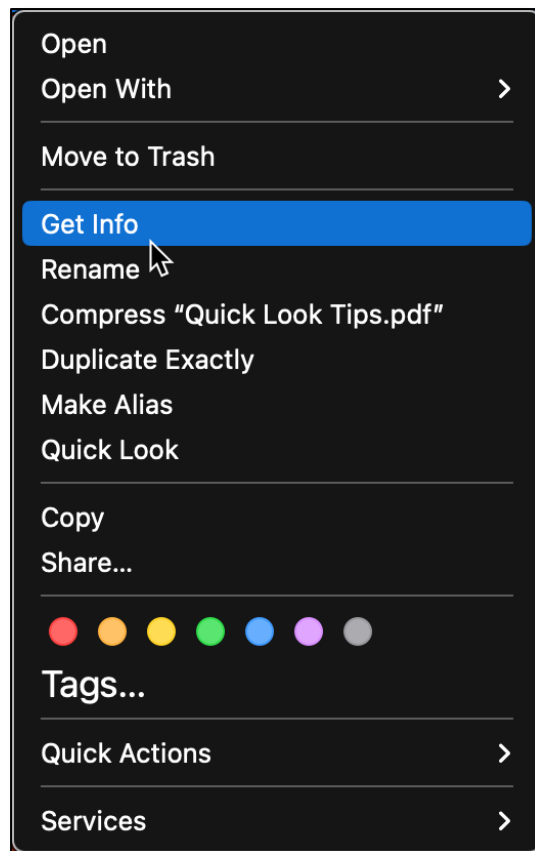
Another way to use a different app in the Finder is to add it to the **Toolbar** of a Finder window. Then select the file and drag it to the app in the Toolbar. As you can see below, I've added the Preview app to my Toolbar:



Toolbar (Preview App Added)

Right-Click (Control-Click) in the Finder – Choose **Get Info**

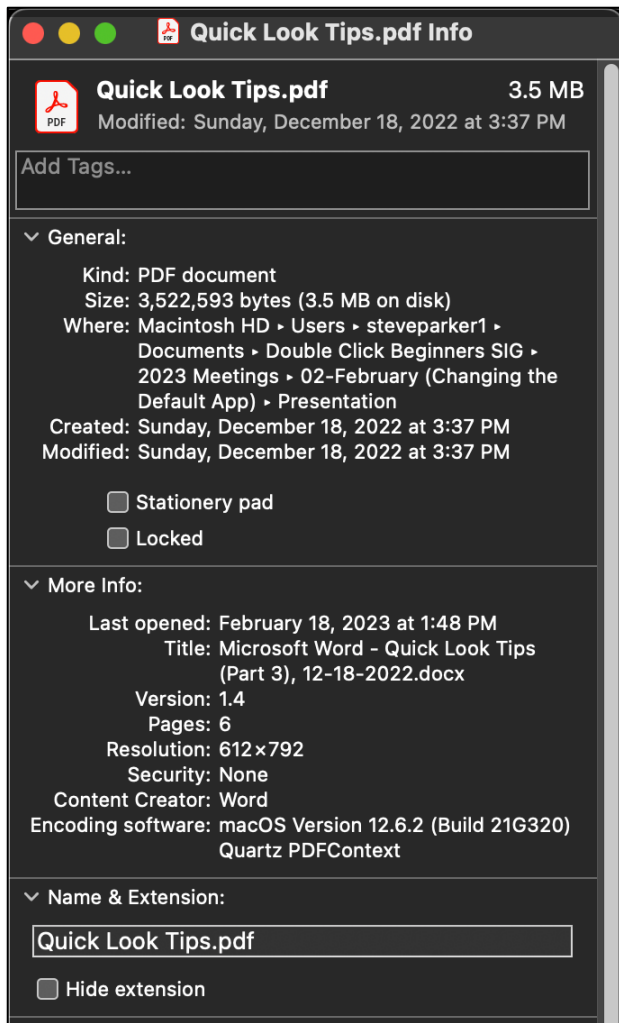
- As before, browse for the file where you want to change the default app.
- **Right-Click** (Control-Click) on it to bring up the pop-up context menu.



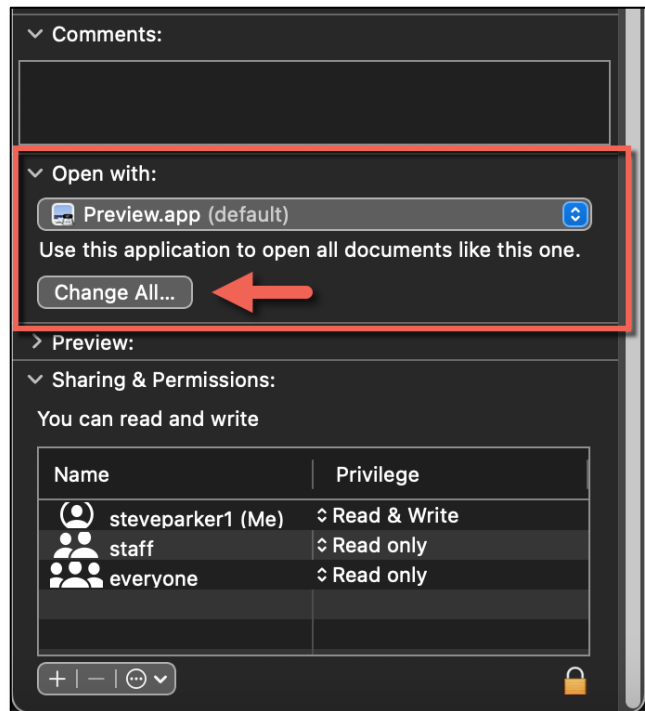
Get Info Menu Item (Right-Click)

- Select the **Get Info** from the context menu. This will open a new window with information about the file.
- In the **Get Info** window, there is an option (**Open with:**) to change the default app for that specific file. After you select a new app to open the file, make sure to click the **Change All...** button. This will change the default app for all files using the same format. [See the images on the next page.]

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Get Info Window (Top Portion)



Get Info Window (Bottom Portion)

Note: The Get Info window was too tall to fit on a page, so I split it into a top and bottom portions for display.

Use the Keyboard Shortcut in the Finder

- Again, select the file to change the default app.
- Use the keyboard shortcut (**Command-I**) to bring up the **Get Info** window. Then proceed as before to change the default app.

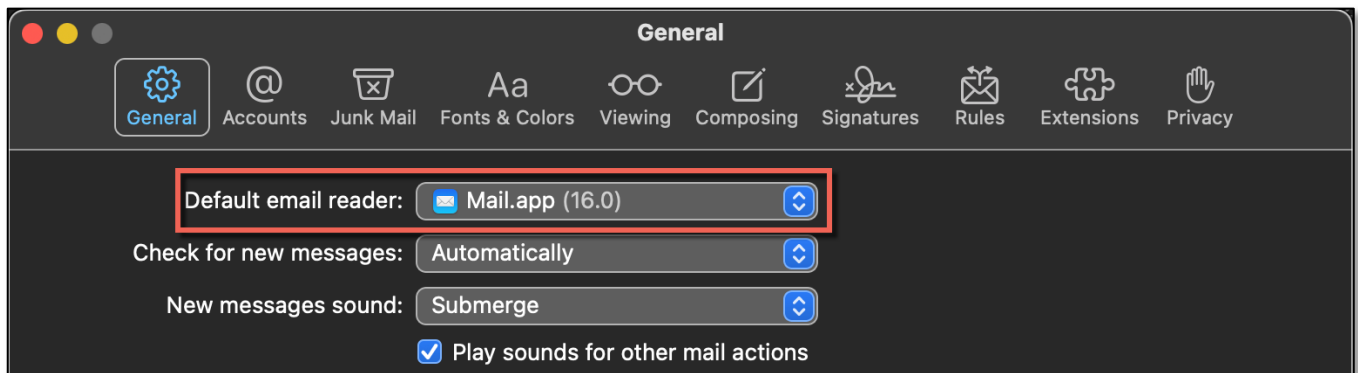
Changing the Default App for Email and Web Browsing

Changing the default app isn't limited to Finder files. Here are two others.

Change the Default App for Email

The default app for email in macOS is the **Mail** app. If you want to use a different app, you must start with **Mail** and make the default change there.

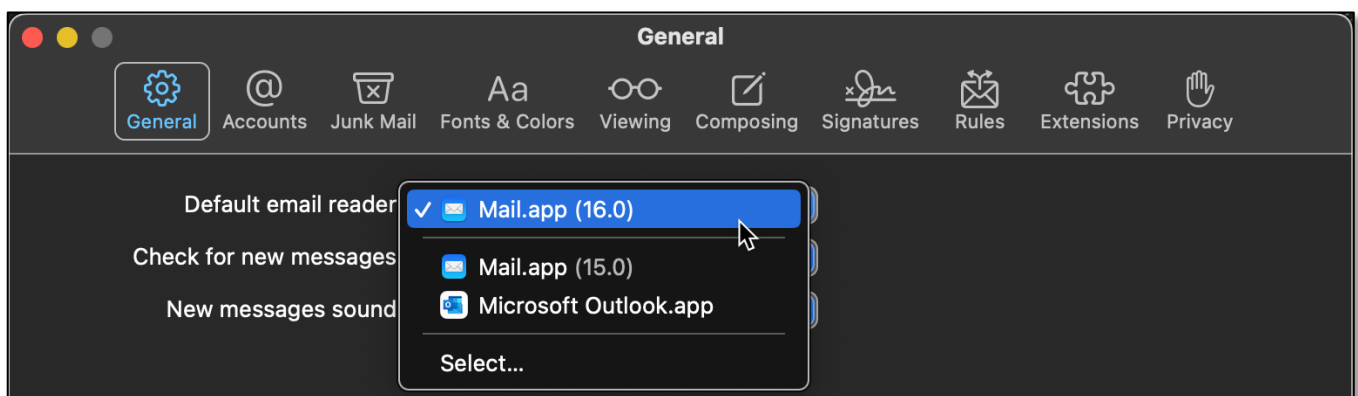
- First, open the **Mail** app.
- Choose the **Settings** menu item (used to be called **Preferences** before macOS Ventura) to bring up the Settings window. Optionally, you can use the (keyboard shortcut, **Command - ,**).
- Select the **General** tab:



Mail App > Settings (Partial View) > General Tab > Default Email Reader

- Next to the first item (**Default email reader...**) is a dropdown menu of available email apps. The default app is shown at the top of the menu.

There's also a **Select...** item in the dropdown menu in case your preferred email reader isn't on the list. This will bring up the Finder's Applications window to locate and choose your preferred email reader.



Default Email Reader (Dropdown Menu)

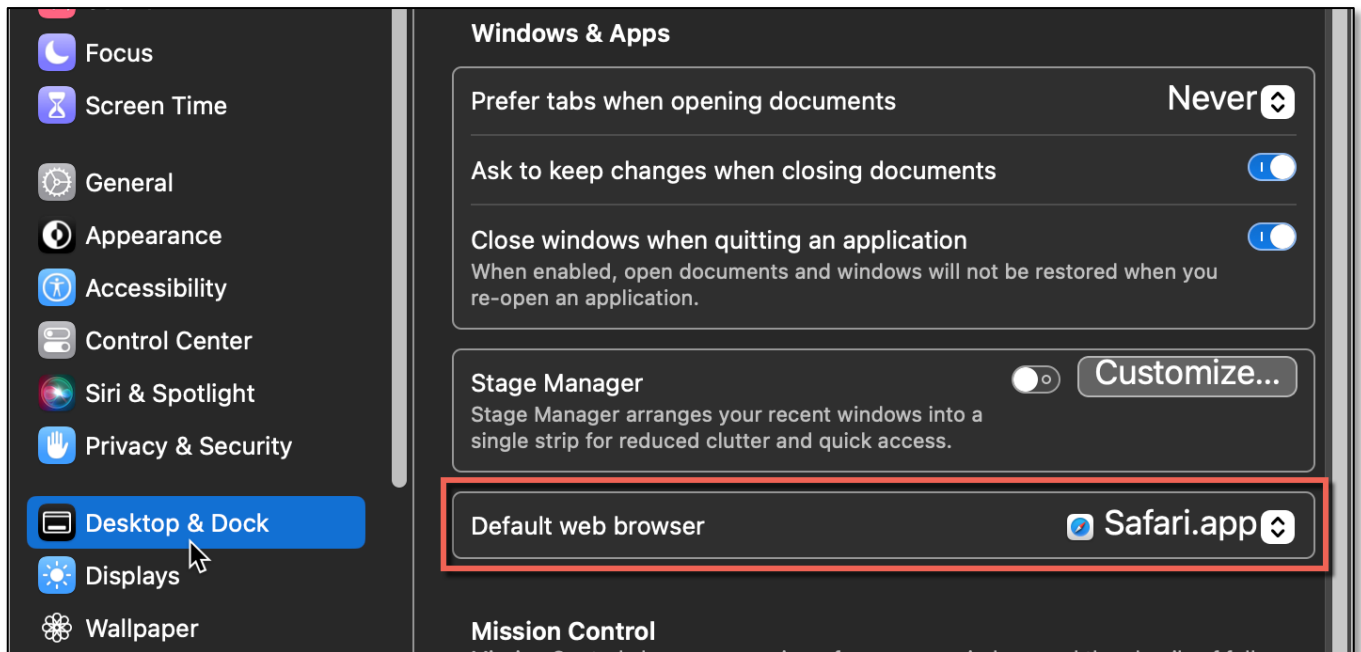
- Finally, close the Mail app so you can now use your preferred mail reader.

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Change the Default App for Your Web Browser

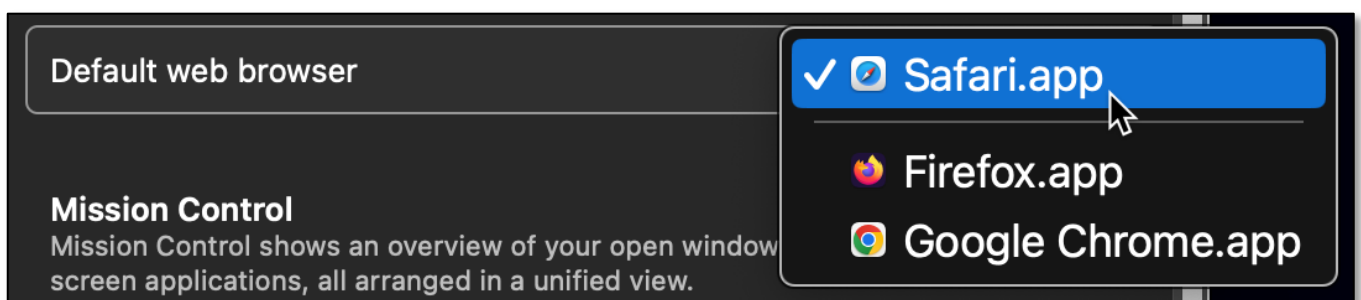
In macOS, the default app for web browsing is **Safari**. If you want to use a different app, you must use **System Settings** to make the change.

- In System Settings, select the **Desktop & Dock** menu item.
- Under the **Windows & Apps** group, is the **Default web browser** item, which includes a dropdown menu of available web browsers.



**System Settings (Partial View) - Desktop & Dock Menu Item
Windows & Apps Group (Default Web Browser)**

- From the dropdown menu, you can choose another web browser that's installed on your Mac.



Default Web Browser - Dropdown Menu

Note: If you're using a version of macOS earlier than Ventura, the process to change your default web browser is different. You need to open **System Preferences** (now called System Settings in Ventura), and then click on the **General** icon.

Summary

If you want to use a different default app for files in the Finder, for email, or for web browsing, it's a relatively straightforward process to make the change.

Files. For files, select one in the Finder, and then **Right-Click** to bring up the pop-up context menu. Then select **Open With** to choose a default app, but rather than choosing an app, select the **Other** menu item at the bottom of the list. This will open a new window with a list of apps from which to choose a default app. After making your selection, be sure to check the box next to **Always Open With**.

Another way to select **Open With** is to choose it from the Finder's **File** menu.

An alternative way to set a default app is to **Right-Click** on the file and choose **Get Info** from the pop-up context menu, or use the keyboard shortcut (**Command-I**). Then select the **Open with:** option to change the default app. Finally, click the **Change All...** button.

Email. Start with the macOS **Mail** app, and open its Settings. Select the **General** tab and go to the first item (**Default email reader...**) which has a dropdown menu of available email apps from which to choose a different default app.

Web Browser. Start with the **Desktop & Dock** menu item, in System Settings. Go to the **Windows & Apps** group and then the **Default web browser** item. From the dropdown menu here choose another web browser.

Next Presentation

For the next presentation, we'll take a look another macOS feature or utility.

Have a favorite Mac Tip or utility? Please feel free to pass it along, and I'll see if I can work it into a future presentation.

If you have any suggestions for presentation topics, including macOS utilities, please contact me at slp4668@gmail.com.

–Steve Parker

Credits:

- Creating a "Save as PDF" Keyboard Shortcut in MacOS Ventura
<https://osxdaily.com/2023/02/09/how-to-change-a-file-types-default-app-in-macos/>
- How to change the default apps used to open files in macOS
<https://appleinsider.com/articles/18/03/09/how-to-change-the-default-apps-used-to-open-files-in-macos>