

Learn how...

You can...

- Blast aliens to dust
- Learn backgammon

You could...

- Idle away the hours
- Have some fun

XP features...

- Advanced graphics and multimedia handling

xpert tip!

More free games

If all this free stuff isn't enough, there are two old stalwarts that you can turn to when you're bored. Both Yahoo! and MSN (and AOL if you're a subscriber) have free games sections. The Yahoo! site (<http://games.yahoo.com>) features card and arcade games as well as premium content for you to download. Again, many of these games are multi-player over the Net.

MSN's site is called the Zone (<http://zone.msn.com>) and is well presented. There are trivia quizzes, word games and software to purchase and download. There's also a community section where you can share your tips with other Zone players.



Play the game

Using Windows XP need not be all spreadsheets and databases and hours wasted surfing the Internet. You can have some real fun too – like playing computer games. Darren Lock blows the dust from his gamepad...

Are you bored with just using your computer to do dull things like word processing and shopping on the Internet? In the good old days, home computers were used primarily for playing games and having fun, but in the 21st Century it seems your average computer user has lost sight of the true purpose of home computers – we jest, of course.

The really great thing about home computers these days is the sheer amount of games that are out there for your entertainment. All manner of tastes are now catered for; from sports simulations to *Space Invaders*, there truly is something for everyone. But not only is there a rich diverse stream of computer games, but the advent of the Internet now means that people can play against each other online too. There really is a plethora of computer-aided entertainment just waiting for you to dive in.

Gaming for free

But what if you don't have the cash to go out and buy the very latest computer games? Well that's no disadvantage anymore because there are a plethora of free games out there and that's without all the demos you can download too. If you don't fancy the walk to the shops, you can even purchase games online and download them straight to your PC. It certainly beats waiting in that endless queue in your local Woolies, doesn't it?

One of the main disadvantages of playing computer games

on a PC over a console is that very often the speed and quality of the game is proportionate to the speed and age of your PC. But don't let this put you off – most games these days will work on computers that are under three years old. Of course, most commercial titles have been programmed with the latest computers in mind, but there's still fun to be had even if you do own a steam-powered shunter from the late 1990s!

In this tutorial, we will be looking at the Microsoft Games Advisor, a service that lets you input the kind of games you like before offering a list of software that might take your fancy. We will also be popping along to the RealArcade with our

The RealArcade site gives you the chance to play 200 games online and many of them are free

The Windows XP Game Advisor

Confused by the sheer number of game titles on offer? Perhaps you don't know what you're looking for in a game? This is where Microsoft's Windows XP Game Advisor Web site comes in pretty useful...



1 Get Some Advice

To use the Windows XP Game Advisor, first point your browser at www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/games/gameadvisor/default.asp. To begin the process, click on the link in the middle of the screen that activates the advisor.

2 Within range

In the window that appears you will need to enter your age range (to protect youngsters from unsuitable games) and the type of game that you like. There's a link at the side of each drop-down menu that explains the terminology for you.

3 Do a test

When you've entered your age and game genre a list of games will appear. If you are wondering if your PC can handle these games, click on the 'Will it run on my PC?' link. This will run a test to see if your computer is powerful enough.

virtual ten-penny pieces clutched firmly in our hands for some arcade fun, before checking out what free demos are available at Microsoft. For all you tightwads out there, we will also be paying a visit to the Freeloader site to see what free games are on offer on the Internet.

But that's not all. We'll also be looking at some of the games that come built in to Windows XP and then taking a look at the entertainment that's current being offered by Web sites such as Yahoo!. That's without looking at some of the more popular online games too. So what are you waiting for? Hunt out that old joystick and let's get gaming!

Down the arcade

One of the best Web sites if you're looking for simple but fun games for XP is RealArcade (www.realarcade.com/). If you visit the site and then download and install the 5Mb RealArcade application, you can play along with popular games such as *Scrabble* and *Pool*. There are a many free games to play on RealArcade that will not stretch your processor or your wallet. However, if you want to play some of the premium content in the RealArcade, you will need to sign up and pay for a monthly gaming pass, which costs \$6.95. This will enable you one free game a month and access to all the premium games.

The RealArcade has its own browser software that enables you to surf through all the categories of games (imagine RealPlayer but for games) and play them right in the browser. Many of the games aren't that particularly sophisticated, but they are good fun. The premium content is naturally more enhanced and can be downloaded onto your PC.

EA games

There are many other sites out there like RealArcade. For example, Electronic Arts has its own games site called Pogo (www.pogo.com). There are loads of free games to play on this site and if you are willing to part with the cash, you can even win cash. Like RealArcade, Pogo asks you to sign up for



RealArcade enables you to download its very own games browser allowing you to search for games to your heart's content

membership before you can begin to access all these gaming goodies – so have that email address handy.

Because the site is part of the Electronic Arts stable, you get the chance to play cut-down versions of all your favourite EA games, such as *The Need for Speed* and *The Sims Pinball*, so much fun is to be had. There are many different genres of game to choose from and you can even download certain titles, but most of the games are played online, so you will need to be connected to the Internet. Unlike RealArcade, you don't need to download any extra software and all the games are played inside a regular Internet browser window. If you have a broadband connection, the games will only take a minute or so to download before the action starts.

So these are two Web sites for you to investigate in your search for Windows XP gaming

Electronic Arts has a games site called Pogo and you can play cut-down versions of EA favourites



Getting to grips with RealArcade

Want to try out some free games? Then pay a visit to the RealArcade site, which is packed full of downloadable games of all kinds – you're bound to find something that takes your fancy – plus there's a host of reviews and guides for you to browse



1 Using RealArcade

For some great game action, head over to the RealArcade site at www.realarcade.com and download the RealArcade browser. Just follow the instruction on screen and when the software is installed, RealArcade will start.



2 Finding games

On the main Game Guide screen, you can see all the recommended entertainment on offer from the RealArcade. Click 'Download Games' to see all the software. Select a title to find out how much it costs and whether there's a demo available.



3 Free stuff

Of course, everyone likes a freebie and there are plenty of free games to play using RealArcade. Just click on the 'Web Games' tab and there will be a list of games that cost nothing to play online. If you click on the 'Game Channels' for commercial titles.

xpert tip!**Take control**

If you want to get the most from these games then you might want to invest in a controller. Luckily, Microsoft has produced a range of excellent peripherals that will enable you to zap the baddies. Its range of SideWinder controllers have been one of the best. Head over to www.microsoft.com/hardware/sidewinder/.

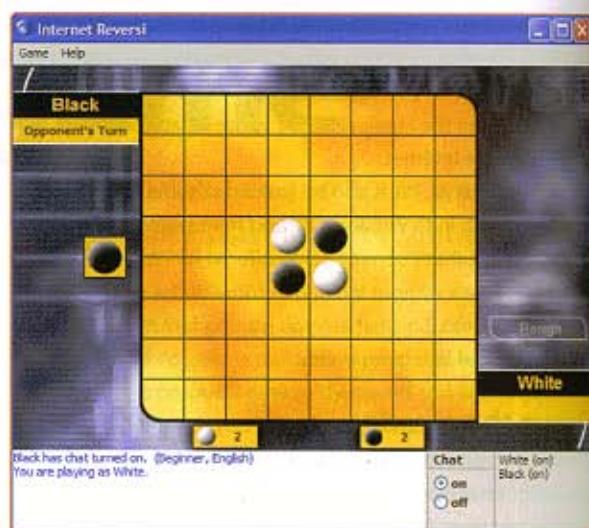


Get a grip – buy yourself a decent controller for your PC

fun and in our opinion, these are two of the best sites for free gaming. Of course, there are many other similar sites out there, but check these out first to get a taste of how a good games site should work.

It's all well and good wandering around the Internet looking for gaming fun, but with Windows XP you actually have a number of games pre-installed. Everyone remembers the small bundle of time-wasting fun that was *Solitaire* that came with earlier versions of the Windows. Well this game has been given a quick lick of virtual paint and now there are 11 games in total that are installed as an option with Windows XP.

So, the ubiquitous *Solitaire* is there in the line-up as well as a variation of the popular card game called *Spider Solitaire*. In fact, card games feature heavily in the Windows XP games collection with no less than six games to choose from including *Freecell* and *Hearts*. Old favourite *Minesweeper* is also back in the collection and there is a 3-D Pinball game that was included to show off how well XP handles 3-D graphics. The 3-D Pinball game is really good fun, complete with loud arcade noises and is our recommendation to take over from *Solitaire* as a 21st century timewaster.



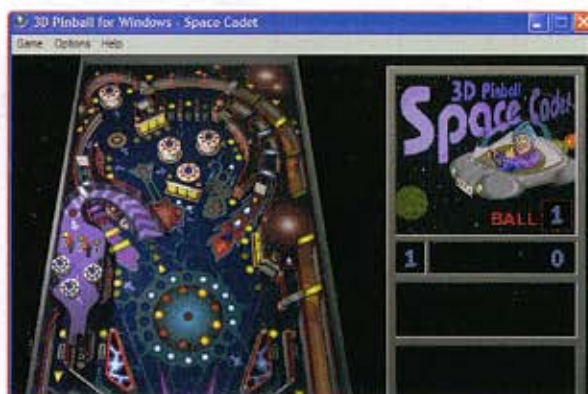
Is it black or white? Get online and beat a complete stranger to the old favourite, Reversi

you are online and scrapping with someone you are never likely to meet. Great stuff, especially if you fancy yourself as a *Reversi* champion. You don't need to subscribe to a service or even log in, you just fire up the game and click 'Play'. It really is that easy. If you are a worried parent and are anxious about your children playing online, these games are great because there is a limited chat function and gameplay is as anonymous as you can get.

The games come pre-installed, but if they aren't on your system, have your Windows XP system CD-ROM handy and press 'Start', 'Control Panel', 'Install/Uninstall Applications'. From this menu, select 'Add/Remove Windows Components' and check 'Accessories' and 'Utilities' and then check 'Games'. Press 'OK' twice and these games will be installed on your PC.

Downloading demos

So, we've covered all the free gaming that's to be had using Windows XP, but what if you want to splash that cash and get



Let 3D Pinball take you back to those adolescent days of hanging around smoky arcades playing the silver ball

Online games

There are a couple of games in the collection that immediately stand out because they allow you to play against complete strangers, courtesy of an Internet connection. There are interactive versions of *Backgammon*, *Checkers* and *Reversi* as well as Internet card games such as *Internet Spades* and *Hearts*. These games are a great addition to the collection because in a matter of seconds

Windows XP games in detail

So we've introduced these games to you, this is the part where we take one of the games from the list and give you the complete lowdown. Here we've chosen *Reversi* – why not give it a try and before you know it, you'll be completely addicted!

**1 Black or white?**

Reversi is a popular classic. The aim of the game is to place your counters on the board and turn all the other counters your colour. To start the game, click 'Start', 'All Programs', 'Games', 'Internet Reversi'. The game will immediately begin.

**2 Head to head**

You will be playing against someone on the Internet (if you are connected, that is). When it's your turn, click the board where you want to place your counter, but you can only place it where it turns an opponent's counter your colour.

**3 Have a chat**

The game has a Chat mode, which enables you to send simple conversational phrases to your opponent, allowing some semblance of good manners during a game. If you are the mean and silent type, you can turn this chat mode off.



If you are looking for free PC game demos, you can't go wrong by paying a visit to the Gamespot download site

yourself some commercial arcade action? Well, computer games cost anything between £25 and £40 these days, so unless you have really deep pockets or a job at the Bank of England, you could end up spending a small fortune.

A good way of dipping your toe into the water is to download a demo of the game you're thinking of buying. Luckily, the software companies have realised that a good marketing tool is to release cut-down, demonstration versions of their full-price titles. There are many Web sites out there dedicated to the hosting of these demo titles and we will run through some of these now.

First up is the brains behind Windows XP, Microsoft. The company is also producing computer games now and it has a very good download site for you to check out. If you aim your browser at www.microsoft.com/insider/trials/default.asp, you can see the great demo games that are on offer. One of the most popular console games, *Halo* from the Microsoft Xbox, recently made an appearance on the PC and you can download a great demo level of this. The 134Mb download also features a multiplayer map for you to get to grips with 16 other players. Not bad for now!

A pretty definitive games download site can be found at Gamespot (<http://dlx.gamespot.com/>). Here you can find demos of all the latest PC games, as well as an archive of old games, just in case there were some you missed. But it doesn't stop there, you can also download game movies, mods (modifications to you and me) for existing games and custom maps. So there's a lot to see and play around with here.



One of the most eagerly-anticipated games of the year is *Half-Life 2* from Sierra – order your copy in advance from Amazon and other outlets

The Sims website features a navigation menu with options like 'Home', 'About Us', 'Contact Us', 'FAQ', 'Help', 'Privacy Policy', 'Terms of Service', 'Site Map', 'Feedback', 'Links', 'Partners', 'Sponsors', 'Press', 'Media', 'Careers', 'Investors', 'Partners', 'Sponsors', 'Press', 'Media', 'Careers', 'Investors'. A search bar is located at the top right. The main content area includes a 'Mayoral Tip #32' banner, a 'SIMCITY 4' banner, and a 'FEATURE SIMS GAMES' section. The 'FEATURE SIMS GAMES' section highlights 'The Sims 2' and 'The Sims Bustin' Out'. Below this, there is a 'NOW AVAILABLE!' banner for 'Makin' Magic'. On the right side, there is an 'ORDER ONLINE' section with links to purchase 'Makin' Magic™ (PC)', 'The Sims™ (PlayStation2, Xbox™, Nintendo GameCube™)', 'The Sims Online™ (PC)', and 'The Sims™ Double Deluxe (PC)'. A 'EA GAMES' logo is also present.

It might be an old game, but *The Sims* is still holding its own in the chart thanks to the many upgrade packs available



Halo: Combat Evolved was a big game on the Xbox and now you can download the demo from Microsoft

Yahoo! also has its very own demo downloads section at <http://gamesdomain.yahoo.com/>, which features gaming movies and demos too. If you're having trouble finding a particular demo or the servers are busy then you'll find what you want at CNET's Download site (www.download.com).

Games to look out for

But what are the top commercial games around for the PC at the moment? Well, one perennial favourite that seems to have almost eternal shelf-life thanks to regular update packs is *The Sims* (<http://thesims.ea.com/>). It's a title that you'll always find riding high in the charts in some form or other.

Another old favourite that gets a regular makeover is *Unreal Tournament 2004* (www.unrealtournament.com/) – the latest version features new game modes and maps and really pushes your PC to the limit in the graphics stakes. For those of you who like more gentle pursuits, you can always take refuge in football and stats with *Championship Manager 03/04*.

One of the most eagerly awaited games for the PC is *Half-Life 2* (www.sierra.com). This much-hyped sequel is part adventure game, part action-movie with you as the lead role. Not due for release until the summer, it features some awe-inspiring graphics and is well worth saving your pennies for. □

xpert tip!

Give me steam

One of the most popular online games for the PC is *Counter-Strike*. Based on the *Half-Life* game engine, this online game divides the players into two teams, a team of terrorists and a team of counter-terrorists. Depending on the map or scenario, you tend to either have to bomb a target or rescue hostages and your opponents are naturally out to stop you. Despite being a little bit old in the tooth, the game is still very popular and there are many different maps to play.

In the past, you used to be able to simply download the software but developer Valve decided to bring out an online software delivery system called Steam. With this installed on your PC, you can easily download and play many games using the system. To get playing, pay a visit to www.steampowered.com/. You will need a broadband connection to get the most from this service.



Fancy playing *Counter-Strike* and *Counter-Strike:Condition Zero*? Well head over to the Steam Web site to catch up on all the action