A Month With Fluxbox - Part 1

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[2]In anticipation of the April Gentoo Monthly Screenshots thread on my favorite forum [3], I've been working on beautifying my desktop for the last several days.

This month I wanted to post something a little different. I've been using KDE for many moons now [4] so my desktops, and the screenshots of it, always look [5] basically the same [6]. The icons, wallpaper, colors, and window decorations have changed, but being a creature of habit and having found what works for me, I never changed the layout much. I had hoped to do that this month. And in keeping with the spirit of the thread, I'm going to run fluxbox all April long and post my thoughts on using it here at tuxmachines at the end. I've been running fluxbox fulltime for not quite a week now as I type this (if you don't count my occasional look around and use of my laptop [7]), which is why this article is entitled "Part 1".

The Setup

- The Theme

I started with my Plain Jane v. 0.9.12 fluxbox desktop [8] posted last month and the first thing I did was set a new wallpaper. The most fundamental aspect of any desktop is the wallpaper. You can get a glimpse into the personality of folks by the wallpaper they choose. (I'm going to leave that topic there as I could, and might, write an entire article on that.) The wallpaper is the foundation of any theme, it's the basis on which everything should be built. It shapes the colors, the mood, the icons sometimes, and the window decorations. It is also one of the easiest aspects to change in fluxbox.

One has several choices in their method of setting a wallpaper. Fluxbox's own fbsetbg is a popular choice. Although as much as I can tell, it's a wrapper that probably calls to xsetbg to actually do the background. But if you're running fluxbox you should already have those two elements installed. Other options include wmsetbg, Esetroot, and feh.

I chose feh because of some of it's nice features. It can do a simple background set, but it can also do a slideshow, multiple images on the one screen, filelist sorting and loading, loading images via http, montage/collage creation and much much more. So one simply adds their command to the ~/.fluxbox/init file and wha-la > a nice background. For now mine looks like this:

```
session.screen0.rootCommand: feh
--bg-scale /mnt/oldhome/s/wallpapers/Fleur1280.jpg
```
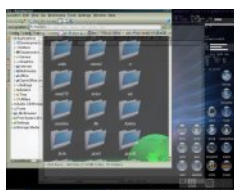
 [9]

For the colors I relied upon the theme manager of fluxbox at this time. I installed gentoo's fluxbox-theme package from an ebuild and had a nice large list of themes to choose from. I chose Nuevat3k-Bluenight. It's a nice bluish-darkgreenish style with small discrete window decorations and great looking menu effects.

 [10]

I'm primarily using KDE apps, as all my mail is in kde maildir format in my KDE .Mail folder and all my browser bookmarks are in my ~/.kde folder. I'm using the provided Atlas Green color theme that been included with KDE forever. Although my wallpaper has very little (if any real) green in it, the understated green seems to blend well with the aqua in it and the greenish blue of the menus. It's a nice combination I think. My gtk apps are using the default gray color and style for now.

 [11]

I tried out fluxconf/fluxmenu to try and add entries to my menu. It seemed to work good, but at some point it deleted the main line at the beginning of my .fluxbox/menu file and left the menu crippled. Fortunately I had a backup and just copied and pasted the missing line back. I used it to add the kde apps submenu and openoffice.org to the Office submenu. Fluxmenu seems to be a nice little application for adding menu entries. I installed it using ebuilds, but you can get it and more information here [12]. Then I finished editing the file manually for a couple other entries.

 [13]
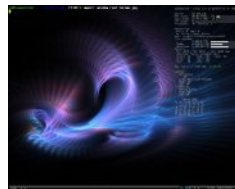
- **Monitoring**

Gkrellm used to be the greatest thing since Hershey's kisses, but last year or so it's been quite unstable for me. It seem to freeze up and crash out often. So, I really quit using it. I tried torsmo [14] in kde, but it interfered with the desktop rendering causing blinking and the icons would disappear. However, none of that is a problem in fluxbox. I'm using torsmo most happily in fluxbox now. That configuration was a bit more tedious than gkrellm, but the docs [15] are fairly complete and easy to understand, and there were quite a few examples on *the* forum to consult. Actually, weather support is supposed to be included in the newest torsmo, but I didn't see too much about it in the gentoo ebuild version (ok, I didn't look too hard). So, I just went with {exec /some/script}.

I actually saw many methods for accomplishing this task, but the one I used was here [16]. I usually like to pull weather info from our local airport and that's what I did in gkrellm. This method pulls from yahoo which in turn pulls from weather.com. I may play with this some more and try other methods, but for now I like the output formatting of Arainach's script.

 [17]

In addition, I found a tip on how to set a calender in that same thread. I was hunting around looking for an applet to do that, but this method saves on system resources and gives a consistant uncluttered look - as does the date/time string for which I was also originally looking for an applet to display.
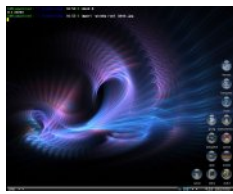
That's a wonderful thread if you want some good tips for configuring your torsmo. In fact that entire forum is a wonder resource for just about anything Linux! I've found it indispensable.

I'm still working on my voltage output values tho. I can glean the information from the /sys files as gkrellm did, but I haven't been able to get divisors to work yet. Maybe by the next report I'll have figured it out. The most important thing is to watch for consistency/stability anyway, and this'll serve that purpose for now.

Setiathome outputs seem to be a problem across systems and setups. Apparently it's broken, but at least it's included and will probably be fixed in an upcoming release. So for now I just grepped my seti/state.sah and seti/user_info.sah files.

- **Desktop Icons**

It seems idesk [18] is your best choice for desktop icons. I had trouble with gentoo's ebuild version shooting glibc errors. Utilizing several recent versions of glibc and rebuilding did not seem to fix it for me, so I downloaded the source from the site and all is well - and stable.

 [19]

The two key component here are a ~/.ideskrc file to set up your basic config and actions and an ~/.idesktop directory for all your .lnk files (icons). There's an example of an .ideskrc on idesk's site and I merely copied&pasted then changed a couple things for my use like single clicking. Also the site includes an example of an .lnk file that I used as a template to make all my others. I set the gentoo icon for use in each separate .lnk file. I had always wanted to use the gentoo icon set but they didn't come with a .theme file for easy use in kde. Here was my chance. This process was straight forward and simple, no voodoo required. idesk seems stable and is completely usable. It works. (Please forgive the surprize in my voice.)

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  The Pager

There are many pagers to choose from out there, but I chose fbpager [20]. It was available on the fluxbox site so I figured it'd probably be best for my purposes. The screenshots were nice and it supports transparency. After experimenting with different settings, I have my alpha set at 64. I set the window borders to be white and it looks good on the darker backgrounds I tend to use.

 [21]

The configuration file is simple and easy to edit. It's located in ~/.fluxbox/fbpager. There is an example on the above linked fbpager page. I just edited a few lines to my taste, ran the
command fbpager, and was in business.

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  Panel

To date I've tried at least 4 panels and have yet to find one I like. I've tried engage and kooldock to name a couple. Documentation being sorely lacking is one of the problems encountered. Engage seems a bit buggy and kooldock only seems to recognize kde apps. I just really prefer the small toolbar that comes with fluxbox myself. I'll probaby do some more experimenting over the course of April and perhaps I'll have some good new on this front next report.

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I looked at KDE's transparency when they recently released their wonderful latest version 3.4. I found it a little limited in it's present state, but look forward to their continued development in this area. However with fluxbox, transparency can be achieved using [xcompmgr](#) [22] I installed using gentoo's ebuild and wasn't expecting much. I figured if it even worked, it'd be unstable, resource hungry and completely unusable. I was wrong.

It installed with no problems. I issued the command xcompmgr and wham - instant transparency. It works nicely, looks great and doesn't present any stability issues. It hasn't crashed yet even while changing fluxbox themes over and over.

 [23]

xcompmgr is easy to set up as it don't seem to use a configuration file instead using start flags or options. Issuing a xcompmgr --help yields the options one can use. I experiment with many of them but I've found I like it best as default and just use xcompmgr &. You need to install transset to get the -o flag to work. One must edit their XFree86 or Xorg config file to enable it by inserting the following lines:

```
Section "Extensions"
Option "Composite" "Enable"
EndSection

Option "RenderAccel" "true"
```

and if you use nvidia for opengl:

```
Option "AllowGLXWithComposite" "true"
```

 [24]

Sometimes I get a little artifacting when using mplayer sometimes, but I understand I can eliminate that if I use mplayer without xv. I ran Doom3 last night, the first time since using fluxbox with all the enable eye candy, and it plays wonderfully. xcompmgr didn't seem to effect it in the least. In fact that's about the smoothest play I've had to date, and I'm still using the 6620 drivers cuz I'm having issues with the 7167 release that I haven't had time or the inclination to resolve.

Preliminary Conclusion

By itself fluxbox is a nice and capable window manager. I've used it on my laptop forever because of it's small footprint and light-weight design. Dressing it up by adding icons and other eye candy didn't seem to slow it down. It's always been my backup, but after just a week, I'm already settling in and vow to use fluxbox at least for the month of April. Please look for my report at the end of month for my final conclusions.

 [2]

[Howtos](#)

Source URL: http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/392

Links:

[1] http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/58
[2] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/clean2
[3] http://forums.gentoo.org
[4] http://www.tuxmachines.org/images/ftp/older/desktop2.jpg
[5] http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/173
[6] http://home.bellsouth.net/p/s/community.dll?ep=16&groupid=173396&ck=
[7] http://www.tuxmachines.org/screenshots.html
[8] http://www.tuxmachines.org/images/ftp/marchflux.jpg
[9] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/clean
[10] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/style
[11] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/trans1
[12] http://devaux.fabien.free.fr/flux/
[13] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/menu
[14] http://torsmo.sourceforge.net/
[15] http://torsmo.sourceforge.net/readme.php
[16] http://forums.gentoo.org/viewtopic-t-291835-highlight-torsmo+tips.html
[17] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/torsmo
[18] http://idesk.sourceforge.net/
[19] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/idesk
[20] http://fluxbox.sourceforge.net/fbpager/
[21] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/pager
[22] http://baghira.sourceforge.net/xcompmgr.htm
[23] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/trans
[24] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/fluxbox/trans3