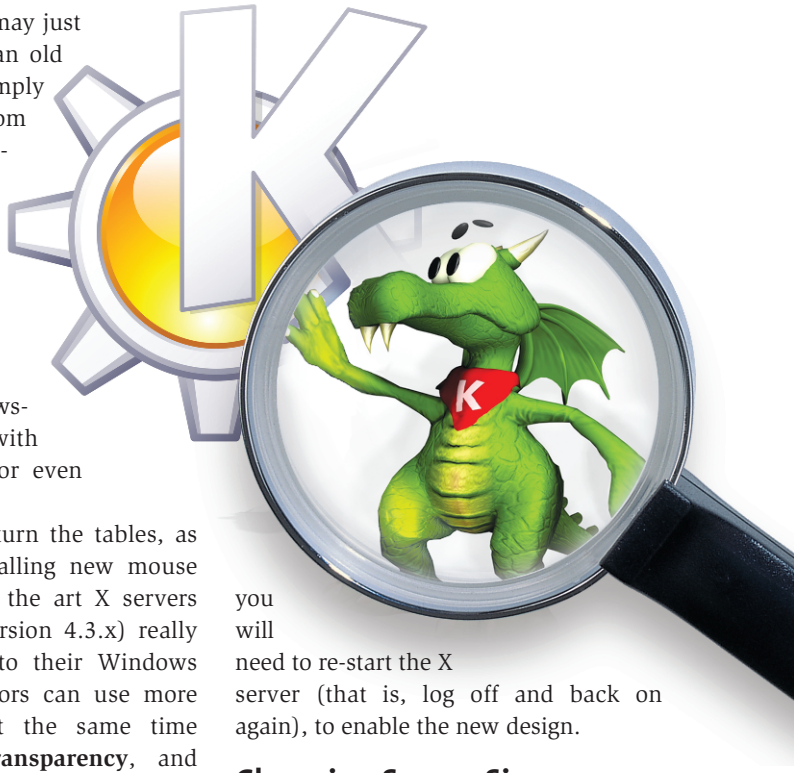
Tips on using KDE 3.2

Feature Hunting Trip

Just like any new KDE version, KDE 3.2 has the usual selection of new functions, bugfixes, and enhancements to previously existing features. You need to look really close to discover some of the improvements.

BY DANIEL MOLKENTIN



Transparent toolbars, cursor shadow, point & click screen resolution switching – many of KDE 3.2's new features are not apparent on initial inspection. They do make life with the desktop, and the daily grind, easier – or at least prettier – so it's worth tracking those new features down, rather than hoping to stumble across them some day.

Font Wizardry

The KDE team has made a major contribution to font management, which is one of the normal Linux user's worst nightmares, as it involves digging down into the depths of the X server, finding the right directory, copying the files to that directory, and then running a few scripts on the directories. This is child's play on KDE 3.2.

The new approach uses a special **KIO slave** – with apologies to KDE experts, who may find this too obvious. The slave is launched directly from within Konqueror. Typing *fonts:/* in the location box displays two folders: *System* for globally installed fonts, and *Personal* for fonts used by the user account you are working with. To install new TrueType fonts, that you may just have discovered on an old Corel Draw CD, simply drag the *.ttf* files from the disk to the appropriate folder. You will need the *root* password to drop font files into the *System* folder.

Pointer Worlds

Jealous of Windows-based colleagues with colored, shadowed, or even animated cursors?

If so, it's time to turn the tables, as KDE 3.2 makes installing new mouse pointers for state of the art X servers (such as XFree86 Version 4.3.x) really simple. In contrast to their Windows counterparts, X cursors can use more than 256 colors, at the same time providing **Alpha transparency**, and shadowing.

You can decide how garish a setup you want, by selecting *Peripherals / Mouse* in the Control Center. The new *Cursor Theme* tab has a selection of cursor themes (see Figure 1), and additional designs are available from KDE Look (*http://www.kde-look.org/*). However, you will need to re-start the X server (that is, log off and back on again), to enable the new design.

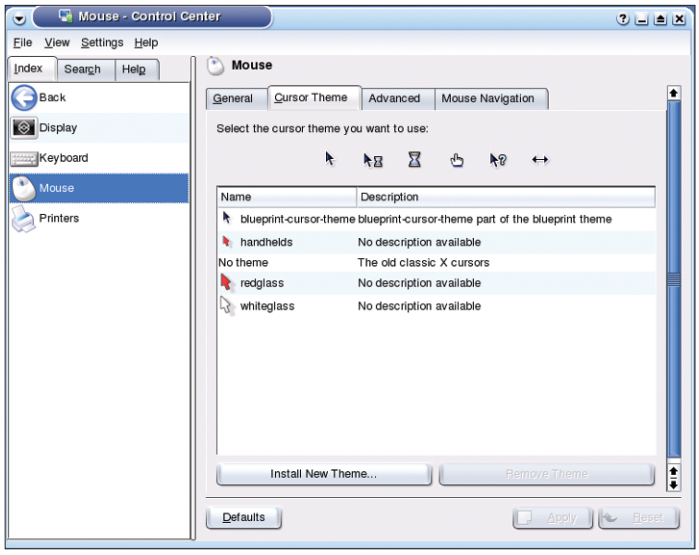


Figure 1: Changing the appearance of the cursor.

Changing Screen Size

Users can change their screen resolution on the fly, without needing to log off and back on again. Again they need to open up *Peripherals / Display* in the Control Center to do so. The *Size & Orientation* feature allows users to rotate or mirror the screen in 90 degree steps. This might be useful for presentations.

If you need to switch screen resolutions regularly, you can add a one-click switch from the *System / More Programs / Screen Resize & Rotate* item in the *K* menu to the panel (although this feature was not included with the Suse 9.0 packages when this issue went to press).

Transparent

The gray, KDE taskbar, also known as the kicker, has often been criticized as being ugly, and for taking up too much space. KDE

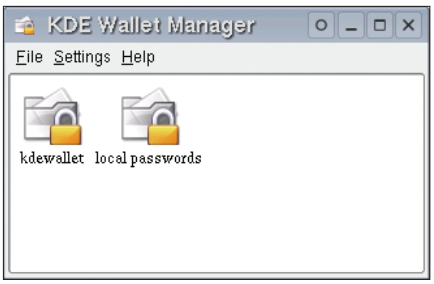


Figure 2: KWallet acts as a password safe.

3.1 managed to talk the kicker into using less space, KDE 3.2 takes this a step further, adding transparency.

To make the kicker transparent, right-click an empty space on the bar and select *Configure Panel / Appearance*. Then check the *Enable transparency* checkbox.

Wallet

Frequent Web users have a common problem: many websites are password protected, and don't always allow the user to select a password. Most people are either not prepared, or simply unable to memorize password collections. KDE 3.2 provides a safe repository for passwords in the form of the KWallet digital wallet.

KWallet uses a master password to protected the password repository that can handle website passwords for the Konqueror web browser, and passwords for other applications such as the Kopete instant messenger. KWallet uses symmetric encryption to store passwords in a user's home directory. Make sure that you choose your master password carefully. It should have at least eight characters, not be a dictionary word, and preferably contain numbers as well as letters.

It makes sense to inspect your digital wallet manually from time to time, as you can add manual password entries. The password management tool docks to the *K* menu below *Settings / Manage digital wallet*. This displays an icon in kicker that allows you to view any available wallets.

The default wallet is called *kdewallet*. Just like any other wallet, it contains a folder for form data (for the browser, for example), another folder for passwords and yet another for application specific entries. You can create a personal folder to suit your own requirements, and store other confidential data in that folder. Wallets in the management window can be closed explicitly, even if the window with the wallet folders is open. Simply select the wallet icon you need, then right-click and select *Close* in the drop-down menu (see Figure 2).

Virtual Folders for Mailers

If you need to handle large quantities of mail on a daily basis, you are bound to have implemented automatic filtering to separate your genuine mail from any spam that arrives. How do you go about monitoring messages from one person, if you have opted not to sort your mailbox by sender, but by project name, for example?

The traditional approach would be to search all your mail folders. Unfortunately, this kind of search operation can be extremely time-consuming. KMail under KDE 3.2 introduces so-called search folders that help facilitate search operations. First, perform a normal search such as *"From" "contains" "joe@example.com"*.

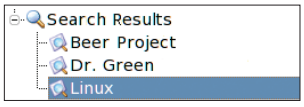


Figure 3: KMail search folders do not require any extra physical disk space.

Now for the smart bit: You can type a string in the *Search folder* field to display the results of the search in a folder of the same name below *Search results* in the KMail folder view (see Figure 3). Incoming messages that match your search criteria are automatically added. The folder is entirely virtual, however; deleting the folder will not physically remove any of the messages that you have organized below the folder from your mailbox. ■

GLOSSARY

KIO slave: *A KDE component which is responsible for data input and/or output. "KDE Input/Output Slaves" can be addressed by typing the appropriate URL, for example the http://, ftp://, or file:/ prefixes. Within an application like the Konqueror file and Web browser, KIO slaves display data in a readable form. They can also be used to "display" audio CD content (audiocd:/), or system settings (settings:/).*

Alpha transparency: *Transparent images or icons have a so-called alpha value (a.k.a. alpha channel) for each pixel on top of the values for red, green, and blue. The alpha channel specifies to what extent the background should be visible.*