

SimplyMepis 6.5 - Simply Wonderful

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☒ [4]After an interesting development cycle, SimplyMepis 6.5 [was delivered](#) [5] to the anxiously awaiting community yesterday. Having started out as an update to the 6.0 release, it soon grew to encompass several highly desired features. As a result, it was given a bump in version number and delivers one of the most enjoyable computing experiences available at this time.

As you may know, SimplyMepis started out as one of the first livecds available. Based on Debian, it offered the user a very stable yet user-friendly alternative to the install-before-you-try distros of the time. Just about its only rivals were Knoppix and Damn Small Linux. Knoppix was nice, but Mepis (as it was known then) was prettier, offered more boot/run-time flexibility and included a hard drive installer. It evolved and improved over the years until its most dramatic change last fall when Warren announced that SimplyMepis would no longer be based on Debian but Ubuntu. Reasons for this were mainly the faster developmental cycle of Ubuntu and newer underlying/base code.

I for one was a bit apprehensive of this decision, fearing another Ubuntu clone. Afterall, there already existed Kubuntu. Fortunately on the surface SimplyMepis remained true to its legacy and one can hardly tell the difference. The most significant visual change has been the incorporation of the Kubuntu settings:/ application. However, the KDE Control Center is still available, even if it's not in the menu.

The boot screen has looked very much the same for quite some time. This release we find the proprietary NVIDIA graphical drivers available as an option. If one has an NVIDIA chip and wishes to use the new 3D desktop, they should choose this option. This was my choice and I was whisked away by means of a lovely revamped boot splash. The splash is part of the overall new theme found in this release featuring a more tasteful blue background with an update Mepis pyramid logo in the lower right corner. In the splash, this logo is centered over a small progress bar. Hitting escape will take one to the verbose boot output that can be useful if any issues with your hardware appear.

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I had no problems with the boot and all of my hardware was detected and configured properly. I was taken to a (my desired) 1280x800 resolution gui, a nice KDE startup sound greeted me, and my touchpad worked out of the box smoothly, responsively, and accurately.

I was quite impressed with SimplyMepis' ability to automagically configure my wireless connection last test, but this time it encountered a new wpa option enabled on my router. So, it wasn't able to connect without my input. However, SimplyMepis ships with a version of the needed windows driver for my Broadcom 4311 (later v4) wireless chipset. I exclaimed in a short [blog entry](#) [8] when testing release candidate 3 that this was the only distro I've ever tested on that [HP laptop](#) [9] that could offer the connection enabled out-of-the-box. It still would have yesterday had I not enabled wpa. With other distros, in which it works at all, I must install the windows driver myself.

As it was, all I had to do was open [the MEPIS Network Assistant](#) [10] from the menu and input my wpa key/passphrase and it connected then and from then on at boot. It is still one of the easiest set ups I've experienced. This is a major leap forward in hardware support.

I'm afraid I didn't have as good of luck with suspend. Neither the suspend to ram or suspend to disk would work here. ...out-of-the-box. Both went to sleep rather quickly, but neither would wake completely up. It tried, but it seemed to get stuck trying to turn the graphics back on. The backlight came on, but no graphics appeared. I heard a little "something's happening" KDE notification, but I couldn't see anything but a black screen. To be honest, I don't use that feature much at this time anyway, but I understand it's of major importance to other people. Perhaps this is hardware specific and it would work fine on your laptop.

The area of applications is another of SimplyMepis' strong points. They seem to be able to deliver an amazing amount of applications in a regular cdrom-sized iso. Some other distros can barely ship KDE and the KDE apps in 700mb, but SimplyMepis manages to squeeze in so much more. Another remarkable thing is the choice of applications included. They ship some applications not seen in the majority of systems and a few I've seen no where else. These encompass a large variety as well. From security applications like Guarddog and KlamAV, to communications with Skype and Gaim. Connectivity includes NX, Groupware, and different samba tools. Surf the web with [Firefox and Konqueror](#) [11] and email with Thunderbird or Kmail. Multimedia includes RealPlayer, Kmpayer, K3b, and Amarok. Gaming includes Patience, KSudoku, Mahjongg, Ksirtet, and [Planet Penguin Racer](#) [12]. Graphics are handled by Gimp, showFoto, digiKam, Kooka, and [Xara Xtreme](#) [13]. And your office needs can be amply serviced by [OpenOffice.org](#) [14]. There are also many graphical applications for system configuration and monitoring, including [Mepis' own Assistants](#) [15]. These include the MEPIS Network Assistant, MEPIS System Assistant, MEPIS User Assistant, and MEPIS X-Windows Assistant. There is a full [package list here](#) [16].

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I found each application tested to be stable, functional, and fast. I had no problems with any of them. My video files played out of the box with Kmpayer and I could even watch steaming trailers from apple.com. Youtube and Google videos were no problem with the included browser plugins. There wasn't java support included as I assume there are still issues with java and 64-bit systems. I've found java included and operative in the 32-bit systems previously.

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All this runs wonderfully responsive from a livecd, but if you'd like to install this system to hard drive, SimplyMepis

has a really nice and user-friendly installer. Its basic steps didn't change much this release. In a few steps one configures the install to their wishes and it installs in little time. System settings and configurations from the livecd are retained for the hard drive install. I had no problems here. These steps include:

- [Accepting the Terms of Use](#) [23]
- [Selecting harddrive and optionally configuring partitions](#) [24]
- [Choosing install partitions and filesystem \(reiserfs or ext3\)](#) [25]
- [Confirming](#) [26]
- [Waiting](#) [27]
- [Installing Grub](#) [28]
- [\(Dis\)Enabling some services](#) [29]
- [Setting Host & Domain Name and Samba workgroup name](#) [30]
- [Localization](#) [31]
- [User account & root password](#) [32]
- [Reboot](#) [32]

Once on the hard drive, one can use Synaptic to install other applications or upgrade their current packages or system. Synaptic is the package manager and it's being used by more and more distros. It's safe and reliable, easy and efficient. The SimplyMepis team have provided some preconfigured repositories for us including mepis and ubuntu mirrors. It works really well.

 [33]  [34]  [35]

I found [SimplyMepis 6.0 lacking](#) [36] in functionality and showing some negative results of the then recent migration and underlying code change. But now with 6.5 most all the kinks have been straightened and nearly all the wrinkles have been smoothed. The only problems I had were the [3D desktop black windows](#) [37] and the laptop suspend issues. For the most part, the system worked like the Mepis I remember from the 3.x days while being modern with an updated appearance.

Some folks say SimplyMepis is just a remaster, a psuedo-distro not worthy of being included in DistroWatch's Top 10 distro list. This is a fairly uninformed opinion I think. Surely they've never tested SimplyMepis. This is like saying Mandriva is simply a remastered Red Hat or openSUSE is a remastered Slackware. SimplyMepis has always been an original system design to which few could even come close. When it arrived on the scene, it was the newcomer's answer to "can I run Debian?" It was a pioneer in the area of user-friendly and it continues to improve and offer one of the best systems available today.

Previous coverage:

- [SimplyMepis 6.0-4 Beta 2](#) [38]
- [SimplyMEPIS 6.5 Beta 5](#) [39]

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