Customizing OS X

Chapter

1

*A*pple is rightfully proud of the user interface design incorporated into the Macintosh OS X family of operating systems. The interface is easy to use, and it's also easy to customize so that your Mac looks and behaves the way you want.

This chapter shows you how to customize various parts of the OS X interface, including

➡ **Desktop:** You can change the color scheme of your desktop or use a picture as your background.

➡ **Display:** You can also change the size of the desktop display, use a custom screen saver, and adjust the way the clock appears.

➡ **Dock:** The OS X Dock normally resides at the bottom of the screen and gives quick access to your most commonly used programs. You can move the Dock, add or remove items, and change the way the Dock appears.

➡ **Keyboard and Accessibility:** Mac OS X can accommodate most accessibility needs, and common keyboard shortcuts can be changed, too.

➡ **Exposé:** Switch quickly between programs with this OS X tool.

➡ **Spaces:** If you're tired of constantly re-arranging your desktop, create and easily move between multiple virtual workspaces using Leopard's new Spaces feature.

Get ready to . . .

Access System Preferences

1. Open the Apple menu by clicking the Apple icon in the upper-left corner of the screen.

2. Choose System Preferences from the Apple menu to reveal the System Preferences screen, as shown in Figure 1-1.

   > You can also open System Preferences from the Dock.

3. Click a preference icon to open a group of settings.

   > To return to the main System Preferences window, click the Show All button at the top of any individual settings screen.

Modify the Desktop Appearance

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Appearance icon.

2. Click the Appearance menu and then choose a color scheme for the overall appearance of the interface (see Figure 1-2).

3. Click the Highlight Color menu and choose a highlight color for selected text.

4. Use the Place Scroll Arrows radio buttons to choose whether you want scroll arrows right next to each other or placed at the top and bottom of scroll bars.

5. Select other scroll bar options as desired.

   > If you find that your computer freezes momentarily or responds slowly when scrolling through documents, deselect the Use Smooth Scrolling option.
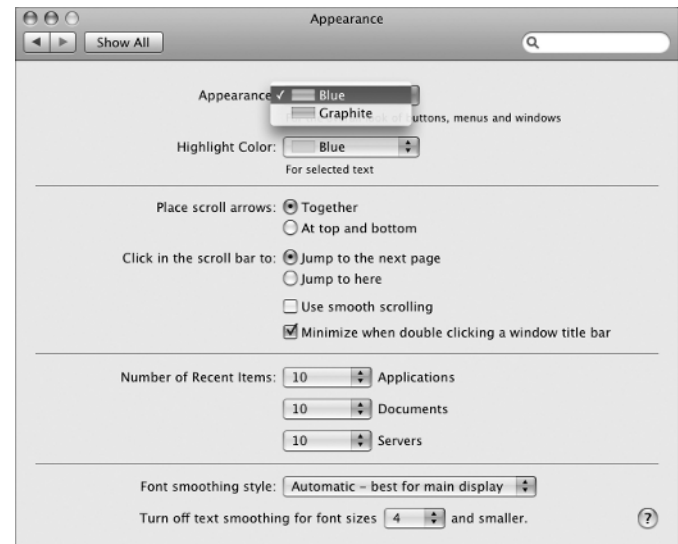
Figure 1-1: Start with the System Preferences window to change OS X settings.

Figure 1-2: Change the color and other appearance settings.

6. Choose the maximum number of items that are displayed in Recent Items menus for Applications, Documents, and Servers.

7. Click Show All to return to the main System Preferences screen.

8. Click the Desktop & Screen Saver icon.

9. In the Desktop & Screen Saver settings window that appears, click the Desktop button to bring Desktop settings to the front (see Figure 1-3), if they aren't shown already.

10. Click an image folder on the left side of the settings window and then choose a picture or swatch on the right to use as your desktop background. Choices include

- **Apple Images:** These are standard background graphics supplied with OS X.

- **Themed images:** OS X also includes stock photos of nature scenes, plants, and other things, which can be used as desktop backgrounds.

- **Solid Colors:** Choose a color swatch to make your desktop background a solid color.

- **Pictures Folder:** Click this to use any image from your Pictures folder, as shown in Figure 1-4.

11. Using the menu at the top of the Desktop window, choose whether you want to tile smaller images or stretch them to fill the whole screen.

Enable the Change Picture check box at the bottom of the screen to automatically change the background image periodically. By using this feature, you can turn your desktop into a slide show.
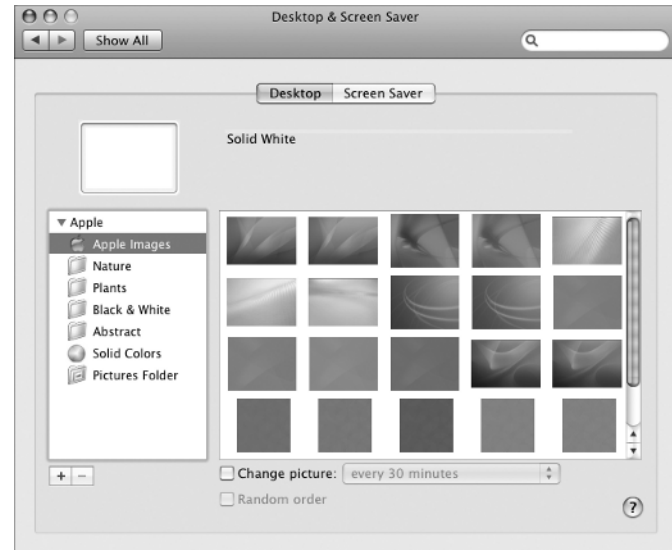

Figure 1-3: Click the Desktop button to bring desktop settings to the front.

Figure 1-4: You can use almost any picture as your desktop background.

Change the Display Size

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Displays icon.

2. In the Displays screen that appears, click the Display button to bring Display settings to the front, if they aren't shown already.

3. Choose a resolution on the left side of the screen, as shown in Figure 1-5.

4. Use the Brightness slider to adjust the display brightness.

5. Choose a Colors setting and a Refresh Rate in each respective menu.

> In general, you should use the highest available settings in the Colors and Refresh Rate menus. Reduce them only if you see distortion or other display problems.

> If you connect a second display to your computer — for example, an external monitor or a multimedia projector — open the Displays settings and then click the Detect Displays button. OS X detects the new display and allows you to adjust its settings as well.

6. Click the Color button to bring the Color settings to the front, as shown in Figure 1-6.

7. Choose a Display Profile on the left side of the screen.

> Which Display Profile you use depends primarily on your hardware. See Chapter 4 for more on choosing display profiles.
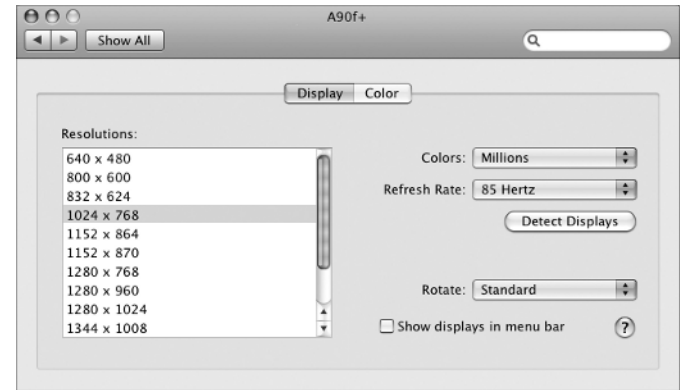
Figure 1-5: Change the display resolution and brightness here.

Figure 1-6: Choose a color profile for your display.

Customize Keyboard Shortcuts

1. Quit any open applications by using ⌘+Q.

2. Open System Preferences and then click the Keyboard & Mouse icon to open the Keyboard & Mouse settings, as shown in Figure 1-7.

3. Click the Keyboard Shortcuts button to bring Keyboard Shortcut settings to the front, as shown in Figure 1-8.

4. Scroll down the list of available commands to find the one you want to customize.

5. Double-click the shortcut you want to change. Make sure you double-click the actual shortcut listed in the Shortcut column, not the command listed in the Description column.

6. Press the new keyboard shortcut that you want to use for the command.

   If the shortcut you want to use is assigned already to a different command, a yellow warning triangle appears next to the duplicated shortcuts. If you see the yellow warning triangles, at least one shortcut must be changed.

7. To disable a keyboard shortcut, remove the check mark next to it in the On column.

8. Close the Keyboard & Mouse preferences window to save your changes.

   If you're unhappy with the keyboard shortcuts you've customized or if you're using a pre-owned computer that was customized by someone else, open the Keyboard Shortcuts settings and click the Restore Defaults button. This restores all keyboard shortcuts back to their factory defaults.
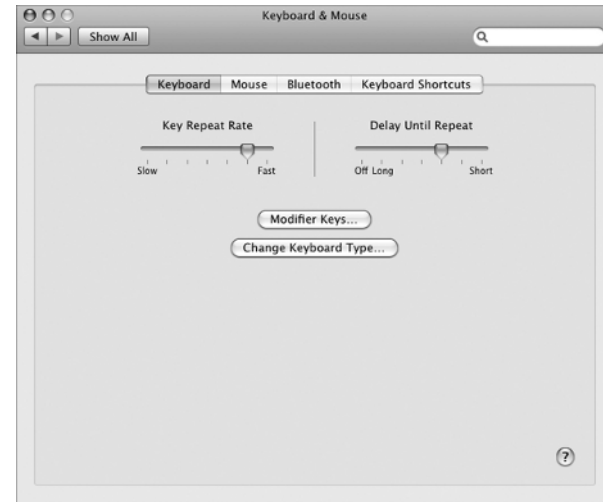

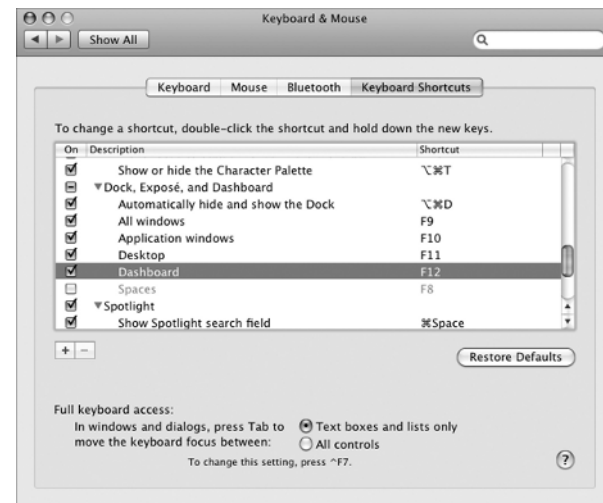**Figure 1-7:** Adjust basic keyboard settings here.

Figure 1-8: Keyboard shortcuts are customized easily.

Add and Remove Dock Items

1. Open the icon for your hard drive and then click Applications in the sidebar on the left side of the Finder window to open the Applications folder, as shown in Figure 1-9.

2. Locate the icon for the program that you want to add to the Dock.

   🎯 In some cases — such as Apple iWork or Microsoft Office applications — you may need to open a subfolder to find a program's icon. Look closely at the icon; if the icon looks like a folder, it is a folder.

3. Click and drag the program's icon to the Dock, as shown in Figure 1-9. The place where you drop the icon on the Dock will be that icon's location, so choose a location carefully.

4. To launch an application from the Dock, simply click the appropriate icon. The application launches.

5. To remove an item from the Dock, click-and-hold the mouse pointer on the item until a pop-up menu appears, as shown in Figure 1-10.

   🎯 If you're using a two-button mouse, simply right-click the Dock icon you want to remove instead of clicking-and-holding.

6. While still holding down the mouse button, move the pointer over Remove from Dock and then release the mouse button. The item disappears from the Dock.

Figure 1-9: Click and drag application icons to the Dock.

Figure 1-10: Items can be removed from the Dock as easily as they are added.

Move and Hide the Dock

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Dock icon.

2. In the Dock settings screen, as shown in Figure 1-11, move the Dock Size slider to change the Dock size.

   > You can also change the Dock size at any time by clicking and drag-ging up or down on the thin vertical line near the right side of the Dock.

3. If you want to use Dock magnification — useful if you have the Dock size set to small and it holds many icons — place a check mark next to Magnification and adjust the slider as desired.

4. Choose a Dock position by clicking the Left, Bottom, or Right radio buttons. Figure 1-12 shows the Dock on the left side of the screen.

   > If you have a widescreen monitor, you may find that putting the Dock on the left or right side of the screen makes more efficient use of screen real estate.

5. If you don't like the bouncy feedback provided by Dock icons when you launch a program, remove the check mark next to Animate Opening Applications. An arrow still shows you when the program is launching.

6. To automatically hide the Dock when it isn't in use, place a check mark next to Automatically Hide and Show the Dock. To reveal the hidden Dock, simply move the mouse pointer to the bottom (or left or right, as appropriate) of the screen.
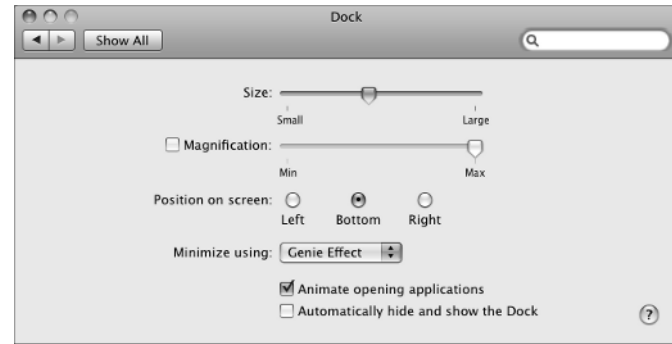

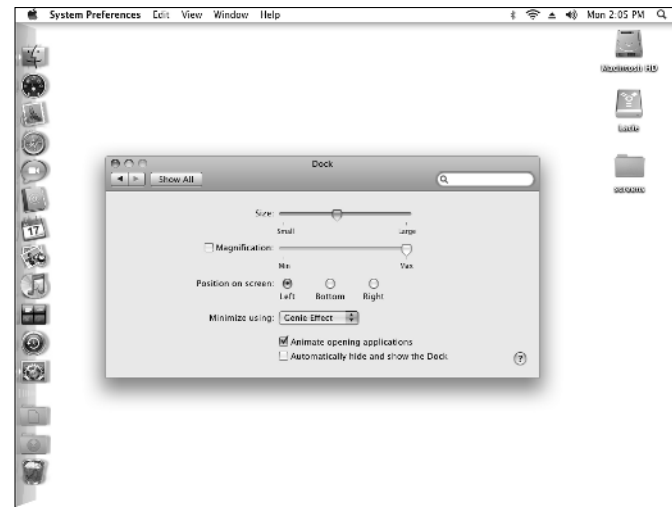**Figure 1-11:** You can customize many aspects of the Dock.

Figure 1-12: If you have a widescreen monitor, you may want to move your Dock to the side.

Make OS X Accessible

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Universal Access icon.

2. To adjust settings for visual impairments, click the Seeing tab to reveal the Seeing settings, as shown in Figure 1-13.

3. To enable *VoiceOver* — a basic screen reader program built-in to OS X — select the On radio button below VoiceOver.

   If you aren't happy with how VoiceOver sounds, click the Open VoiceOver Utility button. There you can change the voice, pitch, speed, and other characteristics of VoiceOver.

4. To enable screen zooming, select the On radio button below Zoom. Press Option+⌘+= to zoom in on an area of the screen, and press Option+⌘+- to zoom back out.

5. Use the settings below Display to change the appearance and use of color onscreen.

6. Click the Hearing button to reveal audio options, as shown in Figure 1-14.

7. If you can't hear alert sounds from the computer, place a check mark next to Flash the Screen When an Alert Sound Occurs.

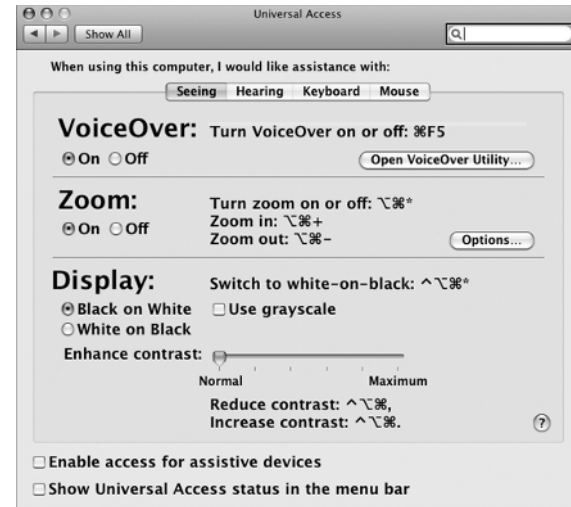   Click the Flash Screen button to test the screen flash.

Figure 1-13: Use these settings if you need help seeing your Mac.

Figure 1-14: If you can't hear audio alerts, you can enable a screen flash instead.

8. Click the Keyboard button to adjust keyboard options, as shown in Figure 1-15.

9. To enable Sticky Keys, select the On radio button next to Sticky Keys. Sticky Keys allows you to use modifier keys, such as Shift, Function, Control, Option, and ⌘, without simultaneously pressing multiple keys.

> If you need Sticky Keys only occasionally, place a check mark next to Press the Shift Key Five Times to Turn Sticky Keys On or Off. This option gives you an easy way to quickly enable or disable Sticky Keys.

10. To create a delay between when a key is first pressed and when it's accepted by the computer, click On next to Slow Keys. Use the Acceptance Delay slider to change the length of the delay.

11. Click Mouse & Trackpad to open pointer device settings, as shown in Figure 1-16.

12. If you wish to use a numeric keypad in place of a mouse, click On next to Mouse Keys.

> If your keyboard doesn't include a dedicated keypad — this is usually the case with laptops — you can purchase a USB (Universal Series Bus) keypad at most computer and office supply stores.

13. Use the Initial Delay and Maximum Speed sliders to fine-tune the behavior of Mouse Keys.

14. If the mouse cursor is too small, use the Cursor Size slider to change the size of the cursor. The Cursor Size slider works with Mouse Keys as well as a conventional mouse or trackpad.

> If you're giving a presentation with your Mac and a digital projector, you may want to increase the size of the mouse cursor so that the cursor can be used as an onscreen pointer during the presentation.
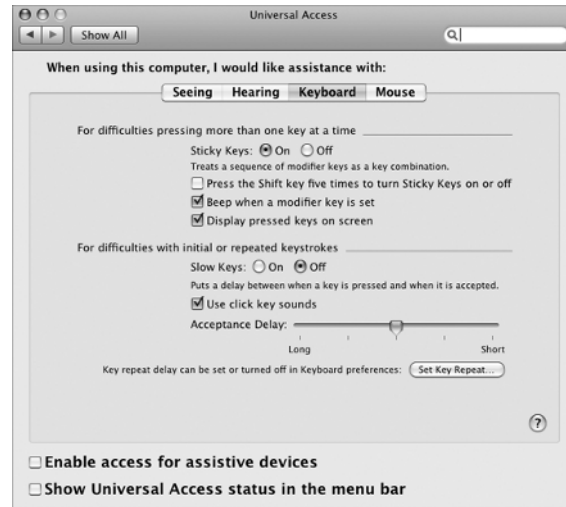

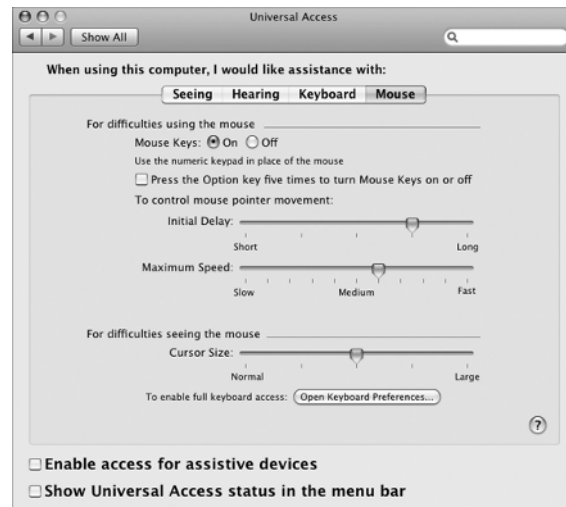**Figure 1-15:** Change the way your keyboard behaves here.

Figure 1-16: Your pointing device can be customized, too.

Activate a Screen Saver

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Desktop & Screen Saver icon.

2. Click the Screen Saver button to reveal screen saver settings, as shown in Figure 1-17.

3. Scroll through the list of screen savers and click a screen saver to preview it in the window to the right.

> To create a screen saver with photos from your iPhoto library, choose Library in the Screen Savers list. Alternatively, scroll down the Screen Savers list and click Choose Folder and then browse to a folder containing pictures you want to use.

4. Use the Start Screen Saver slider to change when the screen saver appears. If you choose 15, for example, the screen saver appears only after the computer is inactive for 15 minutes.

5. To configure a hot corner for activating your screen saver, click the Hot Corners button.

6. Decide which corner you want as the hot corner and then choose Start Screen Saver in that corner's menu, as shown in Figure 1-18.

7. Click OK to close the hot corner options. To test the hot corner, move the mouse pointer all the way to the corner you selected. The screen saver begins.

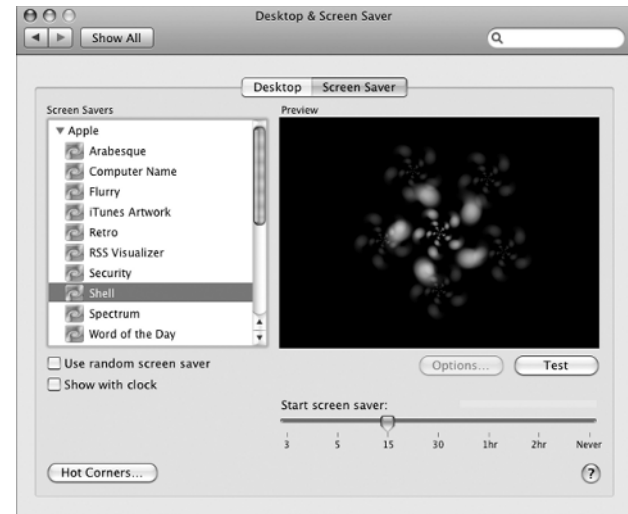> If you don't want to use a screen saver, move the Start Screen Saver slider to Never.

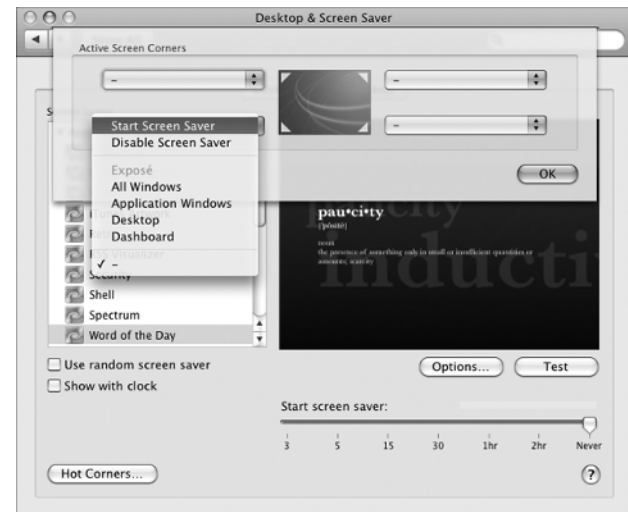**Figure 1-17:** OS X comes with some neat built-in screen savers.

Figure 1-18: Hot corners can be used to quickly activate a screen saver.

Display 24-Hour Time

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Date & Time icon.

   🎯 You can also open the Date & Time control panel by clicking-and-holding the clock in the upper-right corner of the screen and then choosing Open Date & Time from the contextual menu that appears.

2. Click the Clock button to bring Clock preferences to the front, as shown in Figure 1-19.

3. Select Use a 24-Hour Clock to display time in 24-hour format.

   🎯 If you're displaying time in 24-hour format, it makes sense to deselect the Show AM/PM option.

4. Adjust other clock options as desired and then click the Date & Time button to show the calendar and time setting options, as shown in Figure 1-20.

   🎯 Some clock options — such as Analog display — aren't compatible with a 24-hour clock.

5. If you want the computer to automatically synchronize its clock with an online date and time source, make sure that Set Date & Time Automatically is checked. Choose a source based on your geographical location.
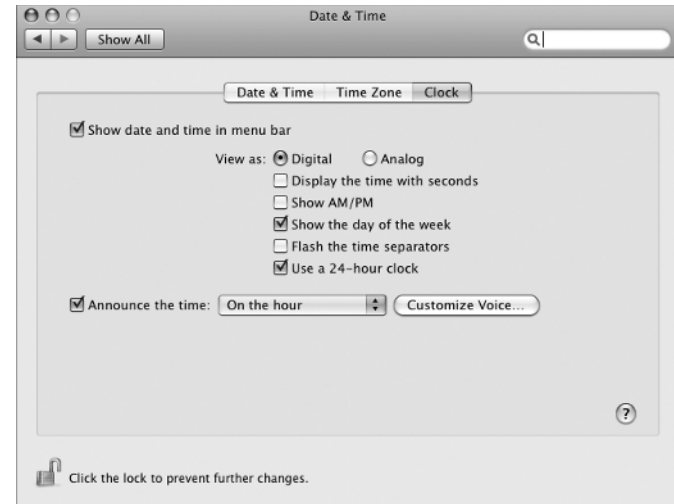

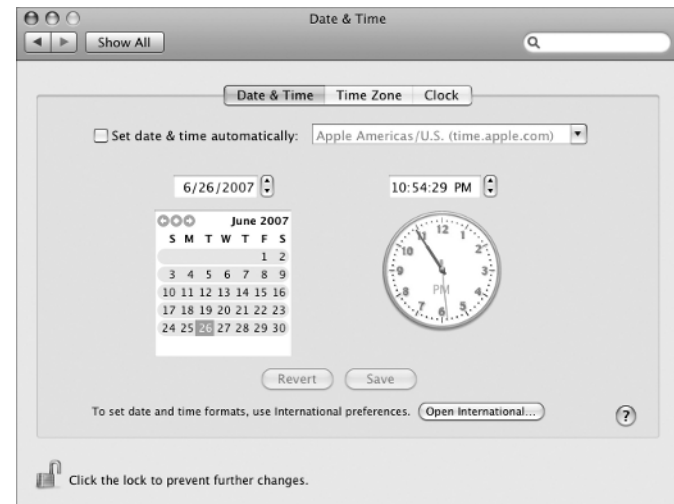**Figure 1-19:** Customize the way time is displayed on your computer.

Figure 1-20: Your computer can automatically check and set the time for you.

Access Programs Quickly with Exposé

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Exposé & Spaces button.

2. Select a hot corner that you want to use for switching between open programs and then choose All Windows in that corner's menu, as shown in Figure 1-21.

3. Close the Exposé & Spaces window.

4. Move the mouse pointer to the corner you selected as the Exposé hot corner. A window for each active program appears, as shown in Figure 1-22.

5. Click the program window you want to open. The selected program becomes active although those other programs are still running.

You can also quickly switch between open applications by holding down the ⌘ key and then pressing Tab. A small window appears in the middle of the screen with an icon for each open application. Keep pressing Tab until the desired program is highlighted and then release the ⌘ key.

Figure 1-21: Select a hot corner here.

Figure 1-22: Click the program window you want to open.

Set up Spaces

1. Open System Preferences and then click the Exposé & Spaces icon.

2. Click the Spaces button to open Spaces options, as shown in Figure 1-23.

3. Place a check mark next to Enable Spaces.

   > To switch between Spaces more easily, place a check mark next to Show Spaces in Menu Bar. A Spaces number appears in the menu bar. Click the Space number and then select a new space from the menu that appears to jump to that space.

4. To add spaces, click the plus sign next to either Column or Row. In Figure 1-23, one row has been added.

5. If you want to use only a certain program in a certain space — for example, you may set up a separate space just for the DVD player — click the plus sign under Application Bindings.

6. In the Finder window that appears, as shown in Figure 1-24, select an application and then click Add.

7. In the Application Bindings column of the Spaces window, click the Space number and choose a space to which the application should be assigned.

   > You can create bindings for any application, but they're most effective for multimedia applications that might compete with each other, such as iTunes and the DVD Player. If iTunes is in Space 3, audio from iTunes goes away when you switch to the DVD Player in Space 4 and vice versa.
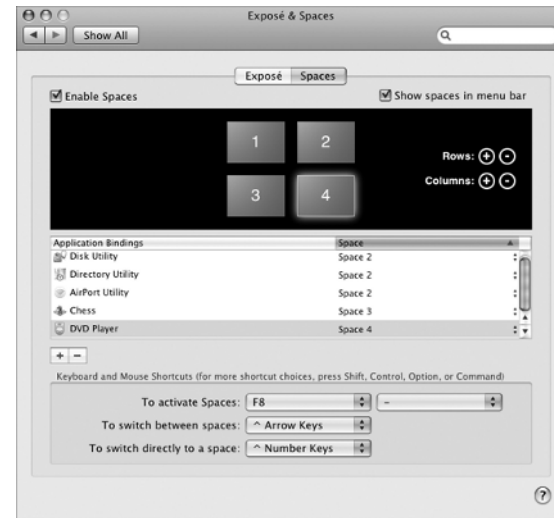

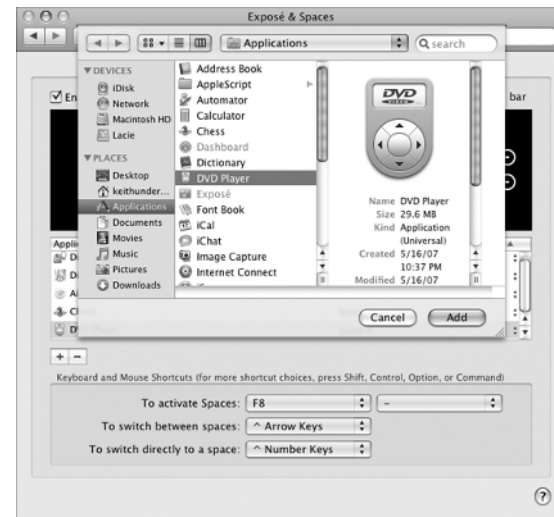**Figure 1-23:** Enable and configure different spaces for your desktop.

Figure 1-24: Applications can be assigned to specific spaces.

Switch between Spaces

1. To switch between spaces, use one of the following techniques:

   - Press F8 to activate spaces, as shown in Figure 1-25, and then click the space that you want to open.

     > You can change the Spaces hot key by opening the Spaces preferences window and selecting a different function key from the To Activate Spaces menu. F8 is the default hot key for spaces.

   - Click the Spaces number in the menu bar (if shown) and then select a Space number from the menu that appears.

   - Launch a program that has a dependency to a specific space. The previous section shows you how to set up dependencies.

2. To move an application window from one space to another, activate Spaces and then click and drag a window to a new space, as shown in Figure 1-26.
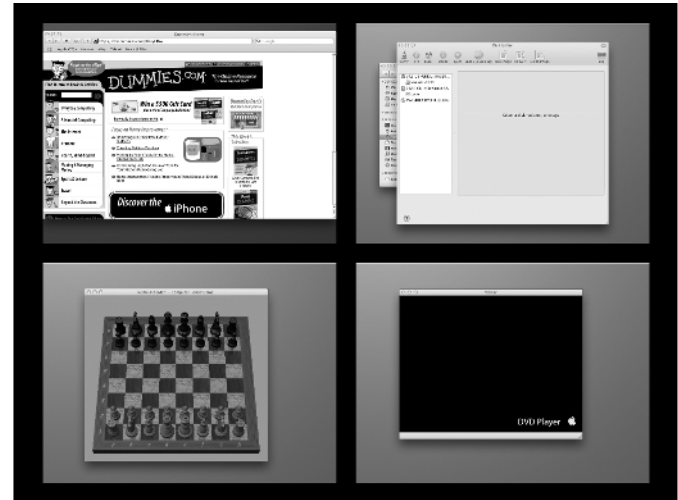

Figure 1-25: Press F8 to activate spaces and then click a space to open it.

Figure 1-26: You can click and drag application windows between Spaces.