Add more features with extensions

Learn new languages, make photo albums, version control documents and more – extensions help you get the most from OpenOffice.org at no extra cost!
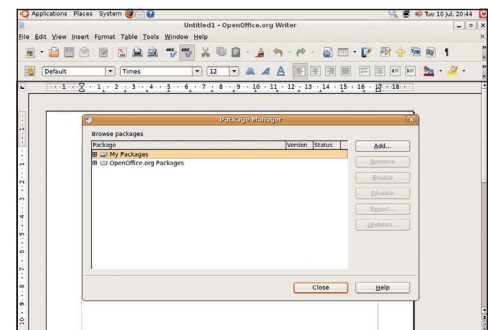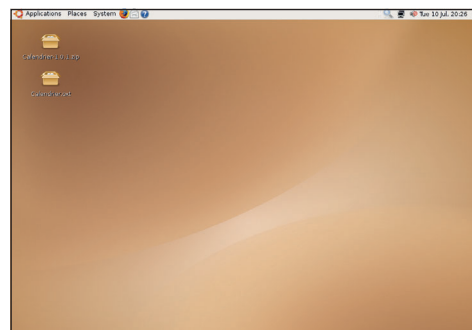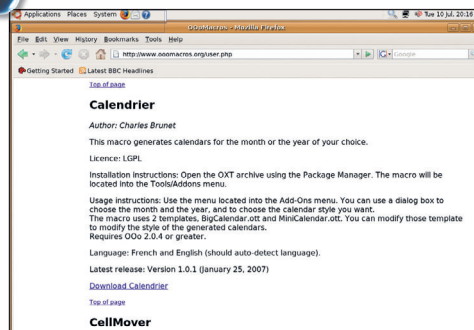
If you've made it this far in the magazine, you'll already be familiar with *OpenOffice.org*'s awesome power: it can create beautiful text documents, complex spreadsheets, attractive presentations and more, all at no cost whatsoever. But there's even more: *OOo* has a built-in programming framework so that people can create add-ons to boost its functionality. These add-ons are sometimes as simple as a quick macro to solve a particular task, but some users have managed to come up with some really excellent software to take *OOo* to new heights!

These extensions are available free from the *OOo* extensions wiki: **http://tinyurl.com/33k3x7**, and more are being added regularly so it's worth checking back to see what's new. To help you get started tutorial is split into two parts: below is a walkthrough to help you learn how to install extensions yourself, and overleaf is a brief introduction to two top extensions: *Calendrier* and *OpenCards*. Keep in mind that *OOo* extensions are separate to the main *OOo* build: they aren't supported by the *OOo* developers, which means they might not be quite as stable as the rest of the programs. However, if you find one that doesn't work too well, you can just remove it and you're back to where you started – nothing lost.

How to install and manage your extensions
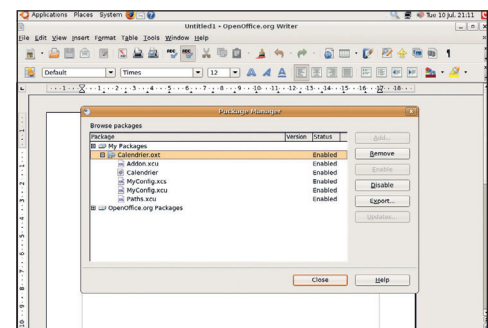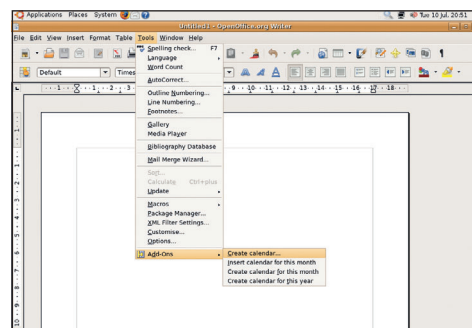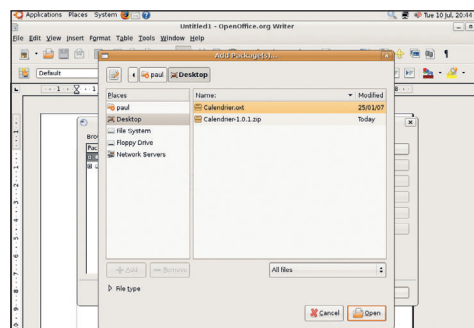
1 Download an extension
Find an extension that you like, and download it. *OOo* extensions have the file extension **.oxt**, but are often packaged inside **.zip** files. As our example, we chose the *Calendrier* extension, which generates calendars automatically.

2 Locate the file
Remember where on your system the zip file was downloaded to, then extract it. You should find a **.oxt** file inside, which is the *OOo* extension.

3 Package manager
Launch any of the *OOo* applications, then go to Tools > Package Manager from the menu bar. This is where packages are installed and uninstalled.

4 Select the package
Click Add, and your operating system's file browser window will appear. Navigate to where you extracted the **.oxt** file, and select it. Note: don't choose the **.zip** file!

5 Macro in the interface
Now close any *OpenOffice.org* programs so they are all gone, then start up a program. You should now find your macro is installed, either on the Tools menu or the Tools > Add-Ons menu.

6 Active or disabled
Back in the Package Manager, you can disable an extension (leave it installed but stop it working) or remove any extensions you no longer want.
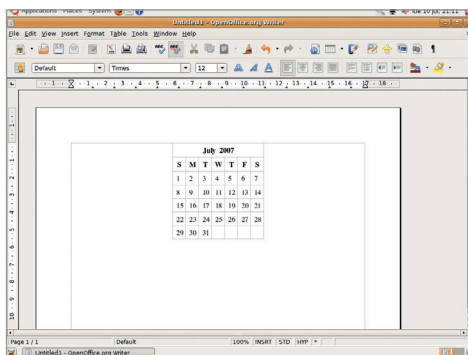
Model extensions: Calendrier and OpenCards

They may just be OpenOffice.org extensions, but Calendrier and OpenCards show how quick tools can add a lot of functionality.

Calendrier

Calendars are seen in all sorts of programs, and quite rightly: even if you struggle with sending emails, fight with files and wrangle with word processors, the last your computer can do for you is store the proper time and date. Yes, all too many computers out there serve only as highly accurate digital clocks, but *Calendrier* actually makes all this date-keeping useful: it lets you embed calendars into your documents. In fact, it puts together calendars so quickly and easily that you might be tempted to set up a calendar shop – you just provide the date and range (*eg* just this month, or a whole year), as well as specify the size, and *Calendrier* will create it for you.

Once you have *Calendrier* installed and enabled, its options will appear at the bottom of the Tools menu, under Add-Ons. The four basic options are:

» Create Calendar lets you create a custom calendar for a specific month or year.

» Insert Calendar For This Month creates a small month-view calendar and puts it neatly into your current document.

» Create Calendar For This Month – same as above, except the new calendar gets pasted into a new document.

» Create Calendar For This Year – creates a page-sized calendar showing all the days and months for the current year.
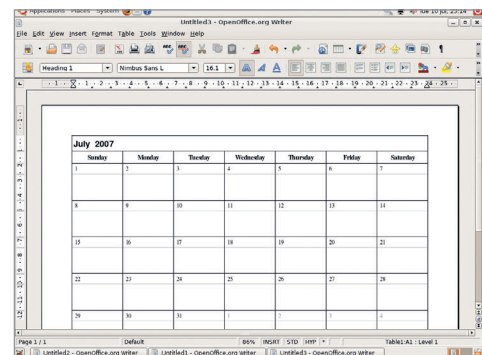

› *Calendrier* can create small calendars, like this...

› ...or full-page calendars like this. It's your choice!

And that's it: no fussy options, no complicated setup, and certainly no learning curve – *Calendrier* is fast and light, making it the perfect little addition to *OpenOffice.org* to make organising your life just that little bit easier...

OpenCards

Ever tried to learn a foreign language? Once you get past the basics of grammar, one of the hardest things to do is memorise words because you'll need at least a thousand words in your chosen language if you're going to come across as vaguely literate. To help make the load easier, *OpenCards* is a flash card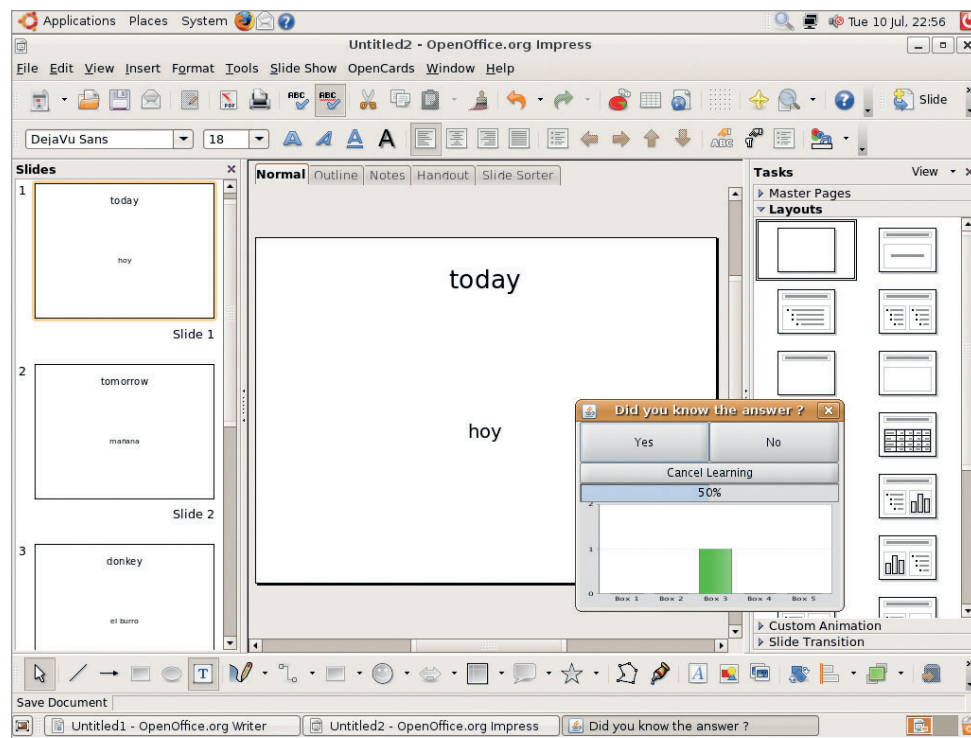 program that follows the Leitner method for learning. Flash cards are simple slips of paper or card with a word written on one side in your native language, and written on the opposite side in the language you're trying to learn. The Leitner method extends that system by having five boxes: all the words start in box 1, and as you get them right they move to box 2. If you get them wrong, you put them at the back of box 1 and continue until box 1 is empty. You then move onto box 2 – getting them right now moves them box 3, then box 4, and finally box 5. If you get any of them wrong, they go back to box 1.

It's a simple method for learning, and it works very well, so the *OpenCards* developers have applied it to Impress presentations: your slide titles are used as the native language, and your slide contents for the foreign language you're trying to learn. Once installed, *OpenCards* adds itself to your *OOo* menu bar for easy launching, and its interface is very simple: when it prompts you for an answer, you tell it whether you got it correct or not. As you answer more questions, *OpenCards* gets a better idea of your strengths and weaknesses, and will start to ask you the words you're less confident about. It will also draw a graph of your relative performance so you can check how thoroughly you have learnt your words – the more weighted the graph is to the right, the better you are doing. The default learning system keeps on going until all cards are in box 5 (learnt perfectly), but that will really tire you out if you have more than 100 words – try using the time limit instead.

Note: if you're on Windows or Linux, make sure Java is installed before trying *OpenCards*. Some Linux distributions use a special Java version called *gcj*, but this is not good enough – you need the official Java as shipped by Sun Microsystems. **LXF**

› *OpenCards* monitors your learning results, then prompts you for the words that you're worst at remembering. Evil!

> "No fussy options, complicated setup or learning curve…"