

Online Help for



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Introduction

Welcome to Columns Max, the fast-paced falling blocks game!

Columns Max is a fast-paced falling-blocks game with 256-color graphics, sound effects, and background music which add a pleasant twist to an apparently common game.

The rules of Columns Max are simple. Pieces, consisting of three colored blocks appear at the top of the pit and drop toward the bottom. When a piece reaches the bottom, it stops moving and a new piece appears at the top. When pieces are dropping, the order of their colored blocks may be changed, and the pieces themselves can be moved left or right. By manipulating pieces as they fall, you can control the place where they land, and their final color pattern. The object of the game is to drop pieces so that sets of matching colored blocks are formed. These sets must be at least three blocks in a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal direction. When such a formation of colored blocks is formed after a piece is dropped, all blocks in the formation will disappear and the blocks in the rows above will drop down to take their place. The game ends when the pit is entirely filled with colored blocks, so the more blocks you remove, the more pieces you'll have room for, and the longer you'll be able to play.

System Requirements

Columns Max has been beta tested on Pentium systems with 16-32MB of memory. At least 4 MB RAM is required for play, with 8MB recommended. The memory requirements are quite steep because Columns Max needs to load large music and graphics files. To enjoy the background music and sound effects, you will need to have a sound card with wave playing ability supported by Windows (such as Microsoft Sound System or Creative Labs Sound Blaster compatibles).

See [troubleshooting](#) for advice with common problems.

Related Topics:

[How to play a Game](#)

[Controls](#)

[Scoring](#)

[AutoPlay](#)

Scoring



You receive points for dropping blocks, and for forming sets of colored squares.

The number of points you receive for forming sets of colored blocks increases as the number of blocks involved increases. The minimum set is three blocks, with five being the maximum in any single direction. You receive more points when cascades occur. Cascades occur when the blocks which fall as a result of blocks disappearing earlier, cause more sets of three or more blocks to form in a single round.

You also receive 1 point for each row that a block falls when you drop it. In addition, there are ways of scoring large bonuses by making special plays, but you'll have to discover them for yourself!

Related Topics:

[How to play a Game](#)

[Controls](#)

[AutoPlay](#)

How to Play A Game

To quickly get started, select *Begin Game* from the *File* menu, or just use the key sequence Control-B. If you are just starting out, you will begin playing on Level 1. Use the default J, K, and L keys to move the falling piece left, rotate its colored blocks, or move it to the right, respectively. To drop the piece, press the SPACE key. You can change the key bindings for these actions by selecting the *Change Controls* option from the *Options* menu.

To play a two-player game, select *Two Player Game* from the *File* menu. To play a two-player game against a computer opponent, select *Play Against Computer* from the *File* menu.

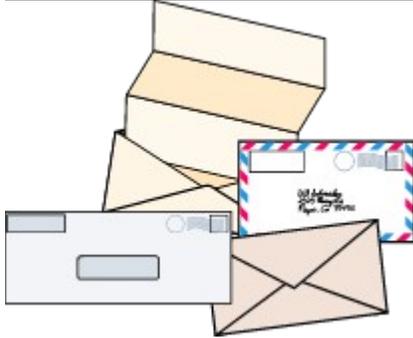
Related Topics:

[Controls](#)

[Scoring](#)

[AutoPlay](#)

Registering



Columns Max is \$15 shareware and free for those people who've paid for previous versions.

Registered users may order a *Bonus Disk Set* either at the time of registration, or at a later date. Registered users of Bricklayer may register at a reduced rate.

If you enjoy and play Columns Max, please send in the \$15 shareware fee.

It is not very much compared to the cost of a commercial game, and it motivates me to keep improving Columns Max as well as to work on new games. *If you play, please pay.* Upgrades to new versions of Columns Max are always free for registered users. Those who register will also be kept informed of new version releases, as well as the releases of any new products.

If you want to register Columns Max:

- **send a US\$15 check** payable to Yevgeny Gurevich to the address listed below. If you live outside of the U.S., please send an international money order (preferred) or cash, since checks drawn on foreign banks are sometimes difficult to clear. Please do not send Eurocheques or credit card numbers.

If you are registering the 32-bit Windows 95 Columns Max, specify that you are registering "Columns Max32".

If you want to register Columns Max *and are a registered user of Bricklayer*:

- **send a US\$10 check** payable to Yevgeny Gurevich to the address listed below. If you live outside of the U.S., please send an international money order (preferred) or cash, since checks drawn on foreign banks are sometimes difficult to clear. Please do not send Eurocheques or credit card numbers.

Click [here](#) to view the registration form (select File/Print to print it).

Site licenses are available - please contact me for more details.

post:

Yevgeny Gurevich
Vanilla-Extract Software
P.O. Box 391
Falls Church, VA 22040-0391
U.S.A.

America Online:

Yevg

Internet email:

yevg@ao1.com

CompuServe:

76101,2317

For fast response, request to have the code mailed to you electronically.

Once you have registered, you will receive *registration information*, containing your **registration name** and **registration code**. Once you have the registration information, you should enter it into the game. There are two ways to perform this step: select *Register* from the opening shareware notice window, or select the *Register* menu item from the *Help* menu once you see the main game window.

A box asking for your registration name and code will appear. Enter your name and code exactly as they appear in your registration information (mailed to you after reception of your registration fee.) If the code is correct, you will be notified immediately that the game has been registered. From that point on, registration notices will no longer appear, and your copy will be clearly identified as registered to you or your organization. You may opt to remove the “*Registered To:*” information from the bottom of the game window through the preferences dialog box.

You may be interested in ordering the Bonus Disk Set for an additional \$10.00.

Related Topics:

[What's interesting in version 2.5](#)
[Registration Form](#)

Columns Max32 for Windows v2.5 Registration Form

[Name]

Title _____
Last Name _____
First Name _____ Initial ____

[Address]

if USA:
Address _____
City _____
State, Zip ____ - ____

if Outside USA:

Address _____

Country _____

email address _____

Would you like to be notified about
new products/releases via email ? Yes No

[Additional Information]

Where did you find Columns Max ?

Internet (FTP/WWW/Gopher) America Online
 Friend The Microsoft Network
 Software club Other online service
 book CD store-bought CD

Pricing Information

Description	Qty	Unit Price	Total
Single-User Registration		\$15.00	
Rebate for registered users of Bricklayer		- \$ 5.00	
Additional Single-User License		\$ 7.50	
10-machine site license		\$100.00	
25-machine site license		\$200.00	
Unlimited site license		\$400.00	
Latest Version on disk		\$ 3.50*	
Bonus Disk Set of Music and Graphics (includes latest version)		\$10.00*	

Total Enclosed:

* Only registered users or users registering with this order are eligible
to purchase disk sets. Price includes media and shipping charges.

Thank you for registering Columns Max32 for Windows v2.5!

Please send US\$15 for each copy of Columns Max32 to be registered to:

Yevgeny Gurevich
Vanilla Extract Software
P.O. Box 391
Falls Church, VA 22040-0391
USA

AutoPlay

The AutoPlay feature lets the computer play a game of Columns Max. The computer plays at two levels of intelligence - Quick 'n Dirty and Deep Thought.

The fast player thinks quickly but is not as good at playing the game as the slower and smarter player, which uses the Next Piece for lookahead. On systems like i486DX2-66's, the smart player is faster than the dumb player on an i486SX-33.

Related Topics:

None

Bonus Disk Set

The Bonus Disk Set is a collection of music and graphics files to make Columns Max even more varied and exciting. The disk set contains the latest version of Columns Max, and additional disks, consisting of original music compositions, background graphics modules, new piece graphic designs, and several pit graphics.

This disk set is only available to registered Columns Max users.

You may order the disk set together with your registration, or may do so separately at a later time. Users who have registered previous versions of Columns Max are welcome to purchase it.

The price is *just \$10.00* (this is in addition to the registration fee) which already includes the shipping and media costs.

If you have Columns Max32, please specify that you are ordering the Bonus Disk Set for Columns Max32, as music and graphics modules are not interchangeable between Columns Max and Columns Max32.

If you are a registered Bricklayer user who has purchased the Bricklayer Bonus Disk Set, please don't purchase the Columns Max Bonus Disk Set, as it contains the same bonus modules. Instead, you can use these modules with Columns Max, just as you use them with Bricklayer.

Related Topics:

[Registering](#)

What's interesting in version 2.5 ?



Version 2.5 of Columns Max includes more tuned control of the game graphics and animated pieces.

This version of Columns Max has support for selecting entire directories of modules at a time.

Pit graphics are changed once per level, while backgrounds and piece graphics are changed once per game. These options are available through the preferences dialog box, and by right-clicking to get a **Properties** menu (see next item).

Graphics modules can be selected simply by right-clicking in the main game window. Right-click in the pit to change pit graphics, right-click on a piece inside the pit to change piece graphics, or right-click outside of the pit over the background to change background graphics.

The list of available files is taken from the directory where the currently-selected graphic resides. Most likely, this is the directory where Columns Max is installed. You can select individual files or the entire directory. If you select the directory, you can opt to have sequential selection of files (default) or select Randomize Directory to have Columns Max choose modules at random.

Piece size can be changed from the piece properties menu.

The size of game pieces can be selected directly from the piece graphics properties menu (right-click on a piece in the game window to see this menu).

Music modules can be selected simply by right-clicking in the main game window over the music selection status window.

This window appears in the lower-lefthand corner of the screen and denotes the name of the music module that is currently loaded. Right-click on the status window to select from a list of available files in the current directory. You can remove this status window from the Music Preferences. The list of available files is taken from the directory where the currently-selected music module resides. Most likely, this is the directory where Columns Max is installed. You can select individual files or the entire directory. If you select the directory, you can opt to have sequential selection of files (default) or select Randomize Directory to have Columns Max choose modules at random.

You can play Columns Max against a human or computer opponent. More details are provided in the two-player

page.

The game duration (in minutes:seconds form) is now recorded for each game that you play.

This duration is stored in the high-scores table if you get a high score.

The size of the game pit can be changed with sliders in the General Preferences dialog box.

You can change the number of rows and columns in the game pit independently. The default values are 7 columns by 14 rows.

You can maximize the game window.

You can enable **smooth dropping** of pieces.

Smooth dropping draws pieces more smoothly as they descend through the game pit.

You can enable **smooth animation**.

If an animated piece file is selected, smooth animation will animate the piece “real-time” instead of relying on the animation to occur only when the piece drops.

High Color pieces modules are provided.

Two modules which can take advantage of 16-bit color video cards are provided. These modules, **CMDEF_HI** and **BURST_HI**, should be selected only if you are in high-color (16-bit color) mode.

Your high scores can be uploaded to the Microsoft Kid’s Space.

When you enable this option in the game Preferences, Columns Max32 will attempt to contact the space and send your high scores (or they may be sent later if you are not logged on). You can view your current ‘space high scores by selecting “Game Space High Scores” from the Options menu. Only scores from default games (no decaying pieces or heavy blocks enabled , and a pit size of 7 by 14) will be eligible for uploads.

Related Topics:

[Registering Columns Max](#)

Changing Background Graphics

Background graphics are bitmaps which are tiled in the main game window, usually different for each level in the game. You may select alternate graphics modules in the “Graphics” sheet of the preferences dialog box, or by right-clicking on the main game window background to bring up the **Background Properties** menu.

You can select a file or an entire directory of modules. If you select a directory, Columns Max will select a new backgrounds module each time you start a new game. By default, Columns Max will cycle through the modules sequentially. You can also direct Columns Max to select modules randomly by selecting *Randomize Directory* from the background properties menu.

Once a new module is selected, it is loaded instantly and loads by default the next time that Columns Max is started.

If you are selecting alternate graphics modules by selecting *Browse* from the “Graphics” sheet of the preferences dialog box, the File-Open dialog box may not show the drive where Columns Max is installed. In this case, you will need to change to the directory where the alternate graphics modules are installed.

Related Topics:

[Changing Piece Graphics](#)

[Changing Music Modules](#) [Changing Pit Modules](#)

Changing Pit Graphics

Pit graphics are bitmaps which are drawn over the black pit area of the game. By default, no graphics are shown to improve game performance. You may select graphics modules to be drawn in the pit area (and enable them being shown) from the “Graphics” sheet of the preferences dialog box, or by right-clicking on the game pit to bring up the **Pit Properties** menu.

You can select a file or an entire directory of modules. If you select a directory, Columns Max will select a new pit module each time you start a new game. By default, Columns Max will cycle through the modules sequentially. You can also direct Columns Max to select modules randomly by selecting *Randomize Directory* from the pit properties menu.

Once a new module is selected, it is loaded instantly and loads by default the next time that Columns Max is started.

Make sure to enable the drawing of the graphics by selecting the *Show Pit Graphic* checkbox in the Graphics sheet of the Preferences dialog box, or by selecting *Show Pit Graphic* from the pit properties menu. Once this option is enabled, all future games will use pit graphics.

A new type of pit module is a *multi-pit module*. This type of module is similar to a normal pit graphic, except that there are several graphics grouped into a single file. As you play a game which uses a multi-pit module, a new graphic starts to inch its way up the game board to replace the previous graphic, controlled by the number of rows that you clear.

Please note that when playing with larger than normal blocks, the game performance can suffer heavily on machines with slow graphics cards.

Related Topics:

[Changing Piece Graphics](#)

[Change Music Modules](#)

[Change Background Graphics](#)

Changing Music Modules

Music modules are used as the source of the background music which plays during a Columns Max game. You may select alternate music modules from the Music sheet of the preferences dialog box, or by right-clicking on the Music Selection field at the bottom of the game window to bring up the **Music Properties** menu.

Once a new module is selected, it is loaded instantly and loads by default the next time that Columns Max is started.

The easiest way to select alternate music modules is to click on the Browse button in the Music sheet of the Preferences dialog box and double click on available .BM2 files. If the File-Open dialog box does not show the drive where Columns Max is installed, you will need to change to the directory to one where the alternate music modules are installed.

Artists or programers may contact me for specification of the .BM2 file format so that they may develop third-party music modules for use with the game. If you would like to have your music included in future distributions or bonus disk sets, please contact me. Please ONLY send material which you have rights to distribute.

Related Topics:

[Changing Piece Graphics](#)

[Changing Background Graphics](#)

[Changing Pit Modules](#)

Changing Piece Graphics

Piece graphics are the little bitmaps which are drawn to represent each of the colored squares in Columns Max blocks. You may select alternate graphics modules in the “Graphics” sheet of the preferences dialog box, or by right-clicking on the main game window background to bring up the **Piece Properties** menu.

You can select an file or an entire directory of modules. If you select a directory, Columns Max will select a new piece module each time you start a new game. By default, Columns Max will cycle through the modules sequentially. You can also direct Columns Max to select modules randomly by selecting *Randomize Directory* from the piece properties menu.

Once a new module is selected, it is loaded instantly, and loads by default the next time that Columns Max is started.

Related Topics:

[Changing Background Graphics](#)

[Changing Music Modules](#)

[Changing Pit Modules](#)

Music and Sound



Columns Max contains terrific sound effects and background music. Through the Options menu, you can elect to hear just the background music, just sound effects, or both.

Sound effects and background music can be individually toggled using the *Music* and *Sound Effects* menu items in the *Options* menu. A check mark next to each of the items means that it is active for the current and all following games.

Control over whether background music and sound effects are loaded each time Columns Max is executed is handled by the *Load Music* check box in the Music sheet of the preferences dialog box. For users who do not have wave-output sound support, the *Load Music* option can be deselected (no check mark). This will prevent Columns Max from loading the background music and speed the total load time. All sound and music options will be disabled for future loads as well. This option may be checked off to enable loading music at any time.

Wave Mixing

This version of Columns Max, 2.5, uses the Microsoft DirectSound library. You must have DirectX installed for the music and sound to work. DirectX can be installed from DirectX distributions with the `DXSETUP.EXE` program.

The music `.WAV` files and `.BM2` modules are Copyright Opinicus Microtechnologies, and may be freely distributed only as part of the Columns Max for Windows game for use by the Columns Max program. See the distribution information for more details.

Sound Quality

If you experience poor sound quality while playing Columns Max, please try to turn off Sound Effects and see if the background music is smoother. If you prefer, you can toggle either sound effects or music off, and leave the other on.

Related Topics:

[Changing Music Modules](#)

Controls

Columns Max may be played using keyboard controls or a joystick. The default are keyboard controls shown below:

j	Move Left
k	Rotate Colors
l	Move Right
SPACE	Drop
a	Push Down

The numeric keypad keys are always active as control keys in addition to any user-selectable settings. On the numeric keypad, the 4, 5, 6, and 0 act the same as the j, k, l, and space.

Keyboard control is customizable with the *Change Controls* item in the *Options* menu. When you select *Change Controls* a dialog box lets you select the player for whom you are changing the controls, and the type of control (keyboard or joystick) that player will use. For single-player games, the controls for Player 1 are used.

If you select Keyboard controls, five edit fields allow you to edit the keys that will be used to control the pieces. These keys are saved in the Columns Max preferences file and are active in the current game of Columns Max, and all future games as well. In addition to the alphanumeric keys, you can specify the cursor four keys, nine numeric keypad keys, or the special insert/delete/home/end/pageup/pagedown keys. Controls may be identical for both players in a two-player game.

If joystick controls is selected, you should select the *Calibrate Joystick* button to calibrate your joystick for use with Columns Max. Joystick control of pieces is as follows:

Move the piece left or right by moving the joystick left or right.

Rotate a piece by pressing button #1 on your joystick.

Drop a piece of pressing button #2 on your joystick.

Push a piece by moving the joystick down.

Related Topics:

[How To Play A Game](#)

[Scoring](#)

Comments, Suggestions, Bug Reports

I look forward to hearing from you. If you encounter problems while playing Columns Max, I would appreciate any information that you can provide, such as your system configuration and a detailed description of the problem. Suggestions for improvements are also welcome.

Send general Internet email to

yevg@aol.com

or, via CompuServe to

76101,2317

or, via America Online to

Yevg

Postal mail is welcome at

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Vanilla-Extract Software

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Falls Church, VA 22040-0391

Columns Max Preferences

Columns Max has many options which you can set to customize the game to fit your taste. Select *Preferences* from the *Options* menu. A preferences properties dialog box appears with tabs for different sheets. Click on the tabs to select among general options, graphics options, and music options. Sheets contain check boxes to toggle system settings, and Browse buttons to select alternate graphics and music files. The options available through these sheets are summarized below:

Fast Left/Right Motion	If this option is on, holding down the move left or right key continuously will move pieces faster.
Pause on Lose Focus	If this option is on, the game automatically pauses when you switch from Columns Max to another program or window. With this option off, the game continues even if you move on to another program. Unselecting this option is useful if you want to see the computer play in the background. The music will not play once you switch from Columns Max so as not to hog the sound resources.
Force 16-Color Mode	On some 16-color-only systems may speed up the game.
Load Music on startup	By default this option is on and tells Columns Max to load music files each time the program is loaded. Setting this option off will prevent music from being loaded, speeding load time but preventing you from listening to the background music.
Blocks Size	Specifies the size of the game blocks and the corresponding game window. The slider ranges from “normal” to 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% (double size) larger. The game window will be scaled according to this setting. If the game window will be larger than can be displayed on your system, a warning dialog box will come up, letting you cancel the size-change. Larger blocks and gameboards are useful for systems with high-resolution displays. They’re easier for some children to play with as well.
Remove Notice	If checked, gets rid of the “Registered To:” status box at the bottom of the game window.
Show Pit Graphic	Enables the display of the pit graphic in the game board. When larger than normal-size blocks are also set, using this feature can heavily impact graphics performance.

Columns	Specifies the number of columns in game pit. The default number of columns is 7.
Rows	Specifies the number of rows in game pit. The default number of rows is 14.
Show Game Time	Displays the length of the current game in minutes:seconds form.
Show Musical Selection	Displays a status window with the name of the currently-playing background music module. Right clicking on this status window will bring up the Music Properties menu.
Smooth Animation	On systems with fast processors or graphics adapters, this will enable smooth animation of animated pieces. This is a graphically-intensive setting and if your system performance is poor, you will want to unselect this option.
Smooth Dropping	Specify that pieces will appear to drop in a smoother manner. As above, this is a more graphic-intensive setting and if your system performance is poor, you will want to unselect this option.

The input box in the “General” sheet allows you to enter how many rows of debris are placed on the screen at the start of each game. You can challenge yourself or the computer by increasing the debris.

The Music, Background Graphics, Pit Graphics, and Piece Graphics **browse** buttons allow you to select alternate music and graphics modules. Just click on the appropriate browse button to get a file/directory listing dialog box.

Related Topics:

[Changing Background Graphics](#)

[Changing Piece Graphics](#)

[Changing Pit Modules](#)

[Music and Sound Options](#)

Two-Player Games

Columns Max allows two players to play together. Select **Begin Two Player Game** from the **File** menu. Players take turns on the same gameboard. Scoring is just as it is for single-player games, except that separate scores and number of rows cleared are kept track for each player. At the end of the game, either or both players may earn high scores. High scores for two player games are kept separate from single-player games.

Players may use the same keyboard bindings for movement, or use different controls. They may even have one player use a joystick while the other uses a keyboard. See [Controls](#) for instructions on how to modify keyboard and joystick settings.

A human player can also elect to compete against the computer. Select **Play Against Computer** from the **File** menu. The human player alternates controlling pieces with the computer. Scoring is just like it is for two-player games. In the high-scores table, entries for players which competed against the computer are marked with a 'C'.

Common Problems and Solutions

Due to rather steep memory and processor requirements, some users may experience problems starting, or playing with Columns Max. This section details some common problems and their solutions:

Columns Max won't start up

Often due to insufficient memory or incompatibilities with sound hardware.

Try creating a file called **CMAX.INI** in your **WINDOWS** directory and putting the following lines there:

```
[Settings]
LoadMusic=0
```

This will force Columns Max to ignore the music and sound settings and not load any music files. You will be able to play, but will have no music or sound effects.

Background music stops playing during the game

Some problems involved with mixing the sound effects and background music result in the background music sometimes stopping after a few minutes of playing. You have several options.

- If you select to have music but no sound effects, this problem does not seem to occur.
- You may press the **TAB** key to restart the music during play.

Game seems extremely slow

On some slower computers, the processing needed to play the background music and sound effects becomes the major time sink.

Try unchecking the music and/or sound options. Without background music, the game will feel snappier on slower computers.

Also, try changing to normal-size game pieces if you are using large pieces.

Audible clicks when pieces drop

The sound mixing is done in software and is not perfect. Some audible clicks may be heard when pieces drop and background music is on. This is especially evident when using AutoPlay.

If you like the background music, getting rid of the sound effects by unselecting them from the options menu will make the music sound much smoother. If you value the sound effects more, try unselecting the music option. The clicks will be less evident.

Make sure that your soundcard is supported by DirectSound for optimal performance.
