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Introduction

Dropper is a small program which allows you to perform drag and drop to the Windows desktop. It is similar in many ways to the NeXT style "icon dock" programs around at the moment. Rather than requiring that drag and drop is performed to a strip along one side of the screen however, Dropper allows any part of the desktop to be used as a target. Dropper requires Windows 3.1.

Dropper is free to all "personal" users. It may be distributed to anyone that takes your fancy, as long as only reasonable distribution costs are charged. Commercial, governmental or other institutions who wish to make use of Dropper should contact the author for licensing details. Source code is also available from the author on request.

Dropper is supplied "as is" with no warranty of any kind. The author has done his best to make sure the program is bug free and works as intended, but if it trashes your hard disc, that's your problem (it is free after all).

Installation

Using Dropper

Installation

Dropper's executable is called "drop16.exe". The "16" stands for 16-bit (NT versions of Dropper will be known as "drop32.exe"). Users of earlier versions of Dropper should note that the old "drop16e" has been merged with drop16.

To install drop16.exe, simply copy it together with the files "dropper.hlp", "drop_dll.dll" and "ctl3d.dll" to your hard disc. Dropper does not need to be on the path; the only restriction is that dropper.hlp and drop_dll.dll and ctl3d.dll must be in one of the following places;

- The directory from which you start Dropper.
- Your Windows directory.
- Your Windows\System directory.
- Somewhere on your path.

The file ctl3d.dll is a Dynamic-Link Library supplied by Microsoft. If you already have Microsoft Excel or any other program that uses this library, you need not install the version supplied with Dropper (it will probably be in your Windows\System directory). If you have two copies with different dates, install the one with the most recent date.

You may, if you wish, install Dropper in Program Manager in the usual way. You will probably want to place the program in either the "Load=" or "Run=" lines in win.ini or in Program Manager's startup group. Alternatively, Dropper may be configured as your Shell.

Deinstallation

Known Problems and Limitations

Using Dropper

When Dropper starts up, nothing apparently happens. Dropper does not display an icon on the desktop and as a result does not appear in the Windows task list. Go into File Manager, select an executable (e.g. notepad.exe) and drag it onto the desktop. You should get a small window containing the Notepad icon with a raised border. This window may be moved by dragging it using the left mouse button. Double clicking on it will result in Notepad executing in the usual way.

Now select a text file (e.g. c:\autoexec.bat) and drop it onto the newly created window. You should get a copy of Notepad running with autoexec.bat loaded. Notice that you need not drop files onto the programs they are associated with; you may, for instance, drop a Windows Write (.wri) file onto a Word for Windows icon.

To kill Dropper, run the program for a second time and click on the "Kill Dropper" button.

As well as programs, you can also drop files onto the desktop. The icon displayed will be the icon of the program associated with that file (with a slightly different border to show that it won't accept dropped files). Double clicking on the icon results in the relevant program starting with that file loaded.

Dropper can also print files - double clicking on an icon with the shift key held down will print the file. Note that to do this, the file must be registered in the Windows registration database and must have a print command defined.

[The Global Dialog Box](#)

[The Properties Dialog Box](#)

Using Dropper as the Shell

Dropper includes limited support for being used as the Windows shell. To install Dropper as the shell, edit the "shell=" line in system.ini. If Dropper detects that it is running as the shell, it will parse the "run=" and "load=" lines in win.ini and the "startup.grp" file, running any programs here in the same manner as the Program Manager. The only other difference is that killing Dropper will result in Windows exiting (the "Kill Dropper" button in the global dialog box is renamed "Exit Windows" to reflect this).

Setting the Icon for DOS Programs

Early versions of Dropper didn't set the icon for DOS programs. This was because the API for doing so requires the data in one format, and the function for extracting icons from executables provides the data in another. Needless to say, there is no function to translate from one to the other. I've got the translation worked out for *some* systems (it seems to be video driver dependent), however this code will cause a protection violation on those systems on which it doesn't work (as many users of Dropper version 0.3 will tell you). As a result, this feature is disabled by default.

To enable this feature, check "Set Icon for DOS Programs" in the Advanced Dialog Box (a sub-dialog of the Global Dialog Box). This version of Dropper can use any one of three techniques to set the icon for a DOS program, as follows;

1. This is the most general technique and works on the widest selection of computers.
2. This uses the technique used in earlier versions of Dropper.
3. This technique was suggested by a user of Dropper. I haven't personally found a computer on which it works, but it might be worth trying if neither of the above work for you.

Known Problems and Limitations

- Subclassing the desktop window may conflict with other programs which do the same. For example, Dropper is known to work with BackMenu, however depending on the order in which the programs are started, shutting down Dropper may disable BackMenu and vice-versa.
- There is a "bug" or "feature" (depending on your point of view) in File Manager that means that it is possible to drop files "through" applications which don't accept dropped files when Dropper subclasses the desktop window. This will not occur when Dropper is overlaying the desktop window.
- When Dropper overlays a transparent window over the desktop, it needs to forward any messages that the desktop window might be interested in to the desktop (e.g. a double click so it can bring up the task manager). Most people have had no problems using this technique, but there are a couple of programs that are incompatible.
- Dropper does not store icons from invocation to invocation. Therefore, if the file from which the icon is extracted is deleted, Dropper will not be able to find the icon next time it starts.
- There is a problem if you're using Dropper as the shell - it's possible to get yourself into a situation where you can't call up Dropper's control panel (e.g. closing all programs and Dropper icons) and therefore you can't exit Windows, nor can you run any other program. I'm not sure what to do about this, or even whether I should do anything about this. Suggestions, as always, are most welcome.
- Windows places a limit on the length of a command line, which means that there is a limit to the number of files that you may drop on a Dropper icon. This may be relieved to some extent by switching off the "Full Pathnames" option, but a permanent solution rather depends on Microsoft!
- A number of Dropper users have reported an incompatibility with Adobe Type Manager (everything works OK, but Dropper doesn't detect files being dropped on the desktop). I have been unable to investigate this any further, as I do not have ATM. I will attempt to find a copy and see what's going on.
- The current implementation of the code to execute the Program Manager startup group does not set the icon for the programs created.

Planned Improvements

- The NT version of Dropper has run into some problems; specifically there seem to be a few bugs in the current version of NT which will require work-arounds. In particular, I don't think it will be possible to drop files onto the desktop with things as they stand (hence the change which allows files to be dropped onto Dropper's icon). There also seem to be problems with NT's implementation of the ExtractIcon function.

I don't know if I will be able to produce a useful version of Dropper for the current release of NT; I may wait until the release version is available.

- Support for DDE and possibly OLE.
- Support for custom colours (and possibly sizes) for the icon borders.
- Support for selecting, moving and arranging multiple icons.
- Support for multi-line captions.
- Many people have asked for some sort of "icon grouping" feature. I'm thinking about this, but am undecided about the best way to proceed. There seem to be several possible approaches;
 - I. Simply allow several "dropper.ini" files and provide a means of switching between them.
 - II. Have icons that "expand" into several icons (similar in concept to "Aporia").
 - III. Have icons that "expand" into a "bar" of icons (similar to the toolbar in Corel Draw).
 - IV. Implement a full "group" concept similar to that found in Program Manager or Norton Desktop for Windows.

I'm unsure which (if any) of the above approaches I should adopt, and would welcome any views or suggestions on the above, or any other approaches.

Revision History

1.2 The following features were added;

- General tidy-up and speed-up.
- Support for Program Manager "Start Up" group (whoever in Microsoft was responsible for cooking up the group file format should be hung, drawn and quartered; the little pieces should then be incinerated, ground to a paste and buried in a mineshaft which is then filled in with concrete and placed under permanent armed guard).
- Amalgamation of drop16 and drop16e.
- Addition of the "Advanced" dialog box.
- "Enter" and "Alt-Enter" to invoke an icon and call up its properties dialog box respectively.
- "Del" to delete a selected icon.
- Ability to turn off icon borders.
- Support for ctl3d.dll.
- Misc. bug fixes.

1.1 The following features were added;

- Added "New Icon" and "About" to the system menu.
- Changed the "print" key from control to shift.
- Moving an icon with the control key down duplicates an icon.
- The Dropper icon itself now accepts dropped files.
- Reorganisation of the Global Dialog Box; hope I've improved things!
- Now pays attention to the icon font selected in the [desktop] section of win.ini.
- Visual indication of which icon has the focus.
- Cursor keys now move the icon with the focus.
- Misc. bug fixes (surprise!).

1.01 A maintenance release to cure a few serious bugs.

- Fix the terrible speed problem when "Stay in Background" isn't selected.
- Fix the grouping of radio buttons in the Arrange Icons section of the global dialog box.
- Make sure that "Save Now" really does!

1.0 Version 1 at last!

- Fixed a couple of bugs in "Snap to Grid" and "Snap to Edge" which meant that they weren't consistent with "Arrange".
- Fixed a but in Snap to Grid which resulted in icons "walking" across the screen when clicked upon.
- Finally put a keyboard interface into the dialogs (why didn't I do this ages ago?).
- Introduced an "About box".
- "Arrange" now wraps round at the end of a column and won't overlay icons over others.
- "Double Click" option.
- "Hide when Minimized" option.
- "Full Pathnames" option.
- "Browse" button in the "Run program" dialog box.
- Command line history in the "Run program" dialog box.
- "Stay in Background" option reinstated by popular demand.
- On-line help.
- Work around for a Notepad "feature" which means that opening a file without an extension results in Notepad trying to open that file with ".TXT" appended.
- More robust "HorribleHack"
- Fixed a bug with the experimental version which resulted in screen savers not working and in Windows pausing every few seconds.
- Misc. bug fixes (yes, yet more).

0.4 The following features were added;

- Various internal limits were increased allowing both more icons and more arguments to programs.
- Snap to grid and snap to edge were cleaned up. The origin of the "grid" is now the corner given in the "arrange" field and snap to edge no longer overrides snap to grid.
- "Arrange" now keeps your current arrangement as much as possible.
- "Run Once Only" option added.
- "Stay in Background" option deleted - Dropper now always stays in the background.
- "HorribleHack" now defaults to off.
- Misc. bug fixes (one day there will be a Dropper release which *doesn't* include any bug fixes).

0.3 The following new features were added;

- Default captions.
- Explicit "accepts dropped files" option.
- Slight changes to the icon borders to make them more visible on high-resolution screens.
- Faster handling of Windows exit.
- Better shell support including parsing of "run=" and "load=" lines in win.ini and "Exit Windows" button.
- Support for printing files.
- Snap to grid option.
- Stay in background option.
- Snap to edge option.
- Save settings on exit option and save now button.
- Single click launching.
- Icon arrangement.
- Setting of icon for DOS apps.
- Misc. bug fixes.

0.2 The following new features were added;

- Option to lock icons.
- Differentiation between "executables" and "files".
- Optional captions.
- Setting the caption and working directory for non-Windows programs.
- Working directory from dropped file.
- Display of the hourglass cursor while a program is starting up.
- Misc. bug fixes.

0.1 First released version

Contacting the Author

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The Global Dialog Box

Running Dropper for a second time (or double clicking on Dropper's icon if "Hide When Minimized" is not selected) will bring up the global properties dialog box. If you find yourself using this dialog box often, you might find it useful to either drag the dropper.exe file itself onto the desktop or deselect "Hide When Minimized".

Snap To Grid

Snap To Edge

Single Click to Launch

Stay in Background

Hide When Minimized

Save Settings on Exit

Save Now

Reload

Hide When Minimized

Arranging Icons

Advanced Options

Run Program

Kill Dropper

Properties Dialog Box

Snap to Grid

Checking the "Snap to Grid" option forces Dropper's icons to be aligned to a grid, the size of which may be entered into the edit field. The grid is centred on the corner specified in the "Arrange Icons" box.

Note that it is the *centre* of a Dropper icon which is aligned with the grid.

[Snap to Edge](#)
[Arranging Icons](#)

Snap to Edge

Checking "Snap to Edge" forces Dropper's icons to be aligned to the edge of the screen if they are within a certain number of pixels (or "hot zone") from the edge.

[Snap to Grid](#)

[Arranging Icons](#)

Single Click to Launch

Checking "Single Click to Launch" allows a single click on a Dropper icon to launch a program, rather than a double click.

Note that this option may be overridden for individual icons through the "Double Click" option

Stay in Background

Checking "Stay in Background" forces Dropper's icons to remain in the background, i.e. behind all other windows. If this option is not selected, then Dropper's icons will display on top of other windows whenever a Dropper icon is clicked upon.

Hide When Minimized

Checking "Hide When Minimized" results in Dropper not displaying an icon while running. If this option is not selected, Dropper displays an icon in the same way as any other program. Consider deselecting this option as a convenient way of accessing the global dialog box.

Save Settings on Exit

Checking "Save Settings on Exit" instructs Dropper to save its state when it exits. If this option is not selected, then any changes you have made during the current session will be lost when you exit Dropper.

Dropper's settings may be saved at any time with the "Save Now" button

Save Now

Clicking on "Save Now" forces Dropper to save it's current settings immediately.

[Reloading Settings](#)

[Save Settings On Exit](#)

Reload

Clicking on "Reload" reloads Dropper's options, discarding any changes made during the current session.

Save Now

Save Settings on Exit

Arranging Icons

Dropper's icons may be automatically arranged both horizontally and vertically, relative to any of the corners of the screen. Only unlocked icons are moved, and icons will not be moved so that they overlap other icons.

In the global dialog box, first select the corner relative to which icons should be arranged. The number of columns may also be selected together with the distance between icons (Delta). Then press the "Arrange Now" button. If there are enough icons to reach the "end" of the screen, Dropper will "wrap round" while arranging.

Snap to Grid

Snap to Edge

Locking Icons

Lock All

Unlock All

Arrange Now

Clicking on "Arrange Now" arranges all icons that aren't locked according to the parameters given in the "Arrange Icons" group.

[Arranging Icons](#)

Lock All

Clicking on "Lock All" locks all Dropper's icons.

[Locking Icons](#)

Unlock All

Clicking on "Unlock All" unlocks all Dropper's icons.

[Locking Icons](#)

Advanced Dialog Box

Clicking on "Advanced..." in the [Global Dialog Box](#) brings up the Advanced Dialog Box. This allows various esoteric properties of Dropper to be controlled.

[Setting the Icon for DOS Programs](#)

[Controlling display of Icon borders](#)

[Detecting Dropped Files](#)

[Controlling 3D-look](#)

Controlling Display of Icon Borders

Dropper usually displays a 4-pixel border around each icon on the desktop. These borders may be switched off by deslecting the "Icon Borders" option in the Advanced Dialog Box. Dropper must be restarted for this option to take effect.

Detecting Dropped Files

Dropper can use two methods to detect files dropped on the desktop, called "subclassing" and "overlaying". The first technique involves intercepting all messages sent to the desktop window and filtering out any to do with files being dropped. The second involves overlaying a transparent window immediately above the desktop which (because it is on top of the desktop) receives any dropped files instead. Neither method is perfect (see [Known Problems and Limitations](#)), and one or other may have to be selected for compatibility reasons.

Which one of these two methods to use may be selected from the [Advanced Dialog Box](#). Alternatively, Dropper may be instructed not to intercept such messages at all.

Controlling 3D-Look

Dropper can make use of Microsoft's new "3D" look for dialog boxes. The "ctl3d.dll" Dynamic Link Library must be installed for this option to be available. Dropper must be restarted for this option to take effect.

Run Program

Clicking on "Run Program" brings up a dialog box in which a command line may be entered to be executed. The last 20 command lines are remembered, and may be accessed by clicking on the down arrow. The "Browse" button opens up a file selection dialog box.

Kill Dropper

Clicking on "Kill Dropper" kills the current instance of Dropper.

The Properties Dialog Box

Clicking on a Dropper window with the right mouse button will bring up the properties dialog box.

Caption

Program

Arguments

Accept Dropped Files

Working Directory

Working Directory from Dropped File

Full Pathnames

Icon From

Run Minimized

Locking Icons

Run Once Only

Hide on Run

Double Click

Deleting Icons

Global Dialog Box

Caption

Checking "Caption" allows an optional caption to be displayed below the icon. In addition, if the icon represents a non-Windows program, this caption will be displayed under the icon representing the running program.

Program

The "Program" field shows the pathname of the executable or data file associated with the icon.

Arguments

The "Arguments" field allows you to optionally enter arguments for the program when it runs. A "%s" may be placed anywhere in this field to show where the names of any dropped files should appear.

Accept Dropped Files
Full Pathnames

Accept Dropped Files

Checking "Accept Dropped Files" to allow this icon to accept dropped files.

Arguments

Working Directory

The "Working Directory" field allows you to set the directory in which the program will be run. This may be overridden when files are dropped on an icon with the From Dropped Files option

Working Directory from Dropped File

Checking "From dropped file (if any)" will result in the working directory being set to the directory from which any file dropped onto the icon originates.

Working Directory

Full Pathnames

Windows places a limit on the length of a command line. As a result there is a limit on the number of files that may be successfully dropped on a Dropper icon. As a result, if the Working Directory from Dropped File option is selected, Dropper will not include the full pathnames of each file. This may be switched off by selecting the "Full Pathnames" option

Icon From

The "Icon From" field specifies the file from which the icon is to be extracted. Clicking on the "Previous" and "Next" buttons moves through the icons in this file.

Run Minimized

Checking "Run Minimized" results in the program being minimized when it is executed.

Locking Icons

Checking "Locked" prevents the icon from being moved or closed.

Lock All

Run Once Only

Checking "Run Once Only" prevents Dropper from running that application twice.

Hide on Run

Hide on Run

Checking "Hide on Run" hides Dropper's icon for a program while that program is executing.

Run Once Only

Double Click

Checking "Double Click" forces a double click to be used to start the program (useful if you have Single Click to Launch selected).

Deleting Icons

Clicking on the "Delete" button will delete the icon. Note that this button may be disabled by Locking the icon.

Deinstallation

Dropper may be deinstalled simply by deleting the files shipped with the program. There is only one extra file created by Dropper during execution, called "dropper.ini", which can be found in your Windows directory.

If you have installed Dropper as your shell you will need to replace it with Program Manager, or another shell of your choice.

Finally, if you have Dropper set up to execute automatically (either through Program Manager's startup group or the "Run=" or "Load=" lines of win.ini) then you should delete Dropper's entry.

