

## The Macintosh OS X Color Picker

When you choose to change colors in most programs while using OS X on the Macintosh, you get the OS X color picker.

In most applications, like Mail or TextEdit, it pops up when you choose Show Colors from the menu, or tap Shift/Command/C. For some you have to specify that you want to use the System Color Picker in the Prefs for the program.

Others require a key combination; for instance, in Adobe GoLive you need to hold down Option/Command, and click in the large color swatch to the left of the Color tab.

This built-in System Color Picker is a very slick tool, but it seems a lot of people don't really know how to use it, because there's not any documentation to speak of. Which is a shame, since it's fantastic and extremely useful. So, here you go!



Across the top, as everyone knows, are a series of icons.

The first one opens a *Color Wheel* that allows you to pick the hue and saturation from the wheel, and the value from a slider on the side. This is pretty standard stuff, and a lot like the old picker.

The second opens the *Sliders* portion of the picker, where you will find sliders for all the normal color picking schemes; Gray Scale, RGB, CYMK, and HSB. Once again, no big whoop.

The next one, though, starts to get into the really handy properties of the Mac picker. This is the *Lists* picker. There are several canned lists included with the OS, including Web Safe Colors, which is nice.

But the real beauty of the thing is that you can make your own lists! Need a consistent set of colors for your design team? Make 'em here, distribute them to everyone, and they'll all have them right in their Picker, with no mistakes. Found the perfect color for Gold, and want to have it available in all your 3D programs? Put it in a list here, and open it everywhere. There are myriad possibilities, as I'm sure you can see.



To start your own list, choose *New* from the *List* menu under the swatch window. A new list will be opened, containing only the color currently in the large swatch at the top of the window.



You can name it by clicking on the menu again, and choosing *Rename....* A window will open; just type the name you want into the text field.



Add colors by getting a color using any method, so the large swatch is filled.

Then pick *New* from the *Color* menu below the list window.



The new color will appear in the list, automatically named for the List and given a number.

Give the color whatever name you want by selecting it in the list, then choosing *Rename...* from the *Color* menu at the bottom



Once you have a list, you can easily find colors in it by typing part of the name into the *Search* field below the List window.



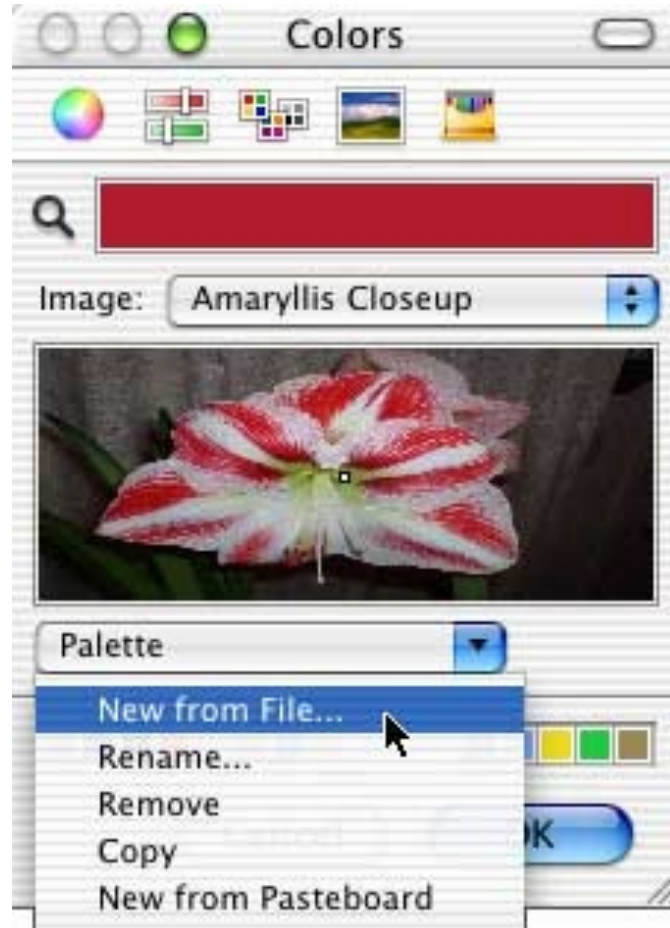
As you type, the list will change to show only the colors with those letters in the name. When you see the one you want, stop typing, and choose it!



Besides all that, if you pick a color using another method, and then choose a list, it will automatically take you to the closest match in the list. So you can pick a perfect shade of teal, go to the Web Safe Colors list, and it will open to show you that 66CCCC is the closest web safe match.

Click on that swatch, and you have the Web Safe Closest Equivalent to your color.

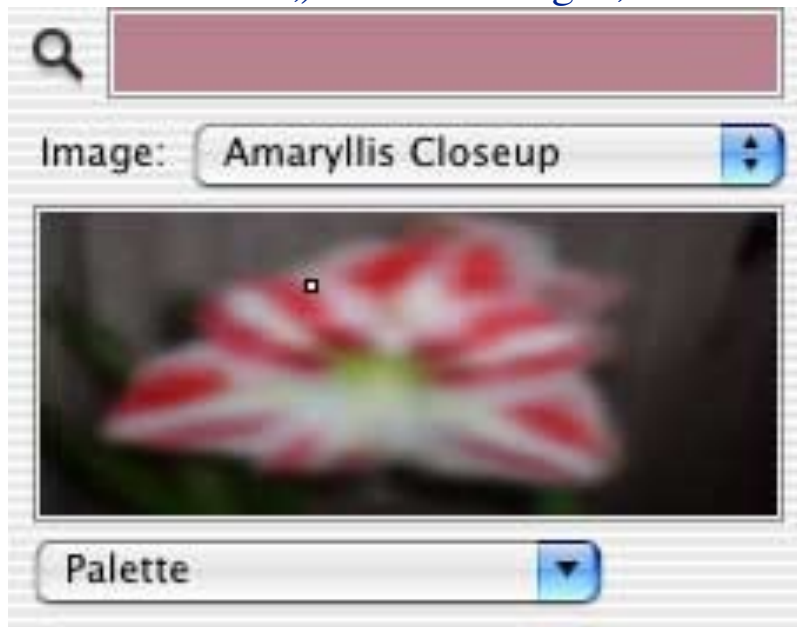
You can also remove selected colors using the *Color* menu, or whole lists using the *List* menu.



The fourth icon opens the *Image Palettes*. The Spectrum palette is loaded by default, but you aren't limited to it. You can open any picture you have, and use it as a palette, by choosing *New From File...* from the *Palette* menu below the picture.

Once you have one, you can pick any color from within it, just by clicking. Or you can drag and watch the colors change. A tiny white square will show you exactly where you are.

You can also paste a picture from the clipboard here (*New from Pasteboard*.) *Rename* images, *Remove* them, and so on.



An interesting thing about this particular method; if you click anywhere in the image to pick a color, then resize the palette a few times, it will cause the picture to blur, giving you gradations between the colors that you didn't have before, as seen here.

You can also copy the pictures (*Copy* in the *Palette* menu) and paste them into any other program, or right back into the color picker. So if you get just the right amount of blurring by resizing, you can copy, and then paste the new picture in as blurred. (Otherwise, when you open the color picker in another program (or another session of the same program) the picture will be sharp again.)

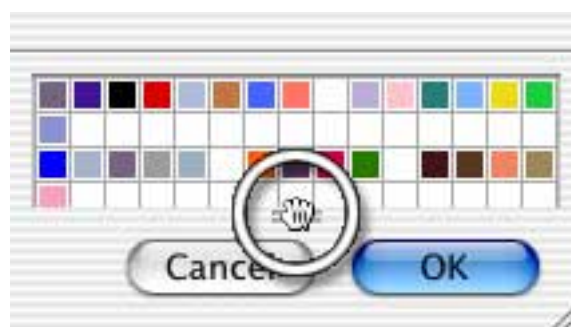
Finally, there's the famous *Crayon* picker. Which is cute, but that's about it.

However, that's just the beginning of what the picker can do.



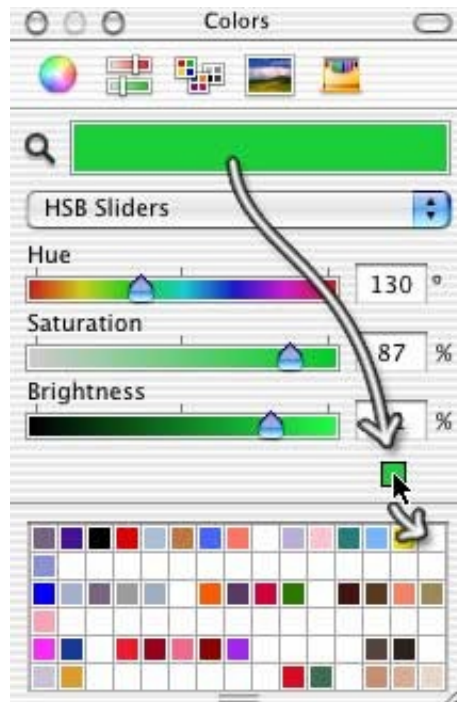
Below the icons is a *Magnifying Glass*, which behaves like an eyedropper on steroids! Click on it, then move your cursor. It magnifies the pixels below it, and allows you to pick the color of any pixel, anywhere on your screen, no matter what program is responsible for the window containing that pixel.

So you can grab a color from anything at all - a .pdf file your boss sent you, a picture you are working on, a photograph you just took - and find the closest Web Safe color, or put it into your own document, or simply use it to match type colors perfectly. Just like that!



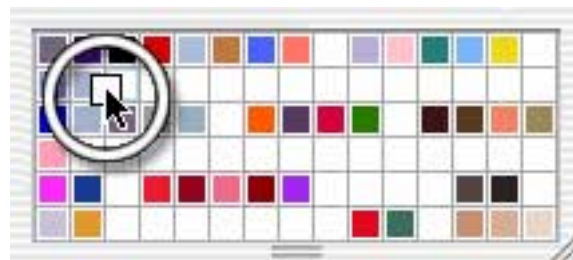
You can also save whatever colors you are working on by just dragging them to the *Swatch Drawer* at the bottom of the picker.

Open or close the drawer by dragging on the two horizontal white lines below it.



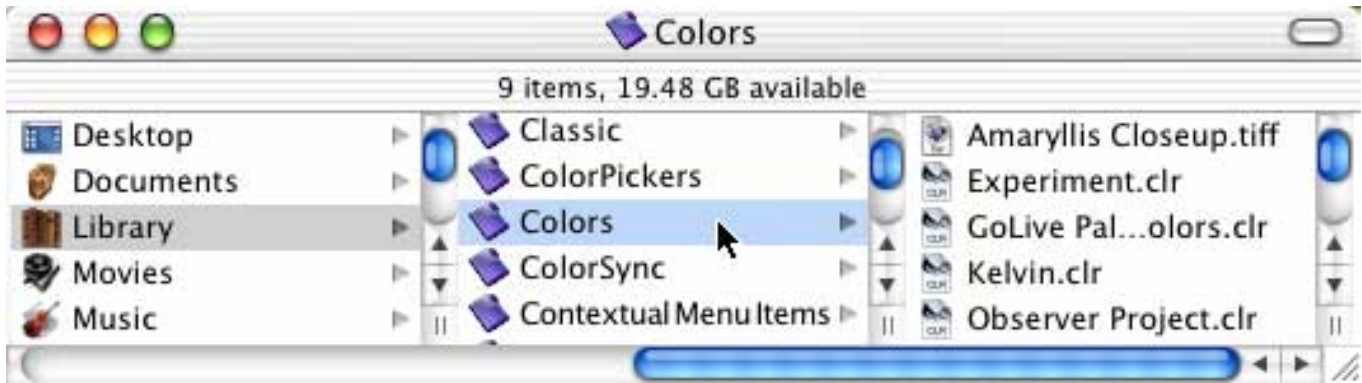
Then just click on the large color swatch at the top, and drag. As you do, your cursor will turn into a small swatch. Put the color wherever you like in the drawer by releasing the mouse button.

Once you have your colors there, you can rearrange them by dragging them around. As you drag, a duplicate will appear. Drop it wherever you want. If you drop it onto another color, it will replace it.



Make them "go away" by dragging an empty (white) swatch onto the color.

You can save up to 300 of these temporary swatches, to retain your colors while working, or to carry from one program to another. Any app that can use the System picker will have access to all the swatches, lists, etc. (Open the Window and the Drawer to the maximum size to see all 300 swatch slots.)



All the lists and picture palettes are stored in your *Home>Library>Colors* folder as .clr and .tiff files; so you can share them with other people in your group, with your friends, or on the Web.



As if all of that wasn't enough, you can also download additional color picking methods, like [Old Jewel Software's Painter's Picker](#). All you have to do is drag it into your *Home>Library>ColorPickers* folder, and you can automatically pick a bunch of color schemes, and do all sorts of other things that expand the already large capabilities of the color picker.

Like grab a color with the Magnifying Glass, and automatically be given the other three colors that form the Golden Complimentary color scheme, in the Web Safe color range. Check it out! (And don't forget to pay the small shareware fee, if you decide to keep it installed.)



Or [Chromatic Bytes](#) color picker, [Shades](#), which lets you pick from a range of related shades, keeping either the Hue, Saturation, or Brightness constant. You determine the size of the steps, and the number of chips that are shown in the Shades grid (the latter is on a drop down menu.) The colors are all HSB, but if you hold your mouse over any chip, you get a Tool Tip that tells you the RGB values, too, in case you need those. This one is perfect for those situations where you need several exact matches for a color just a few shades different from one you keep in your Swatch Drawer. Using this tool, you don't have to save another swatch; just use the same color from the grid! You can try it for a month before you decide to get it, but for \$14.95, you can't go wrong.

By the way, if you happen to be working with a program that supports it, you can choose the transparency from the Color Picker as well! (That's what you see in the screen shot above, working with [NoteTaker](#).) I didn't realize this, because most of the programs I use don't support it, but it's nice to know!

If you search the web, you might be able to find more of these add-ons. For instance, [Lucky Software](#) makes a little freeware gem called [Hex Color Picker](#), that automatically gives you the hex code, 3 digit code, RGB percentage, or RBG value of whatever color is shown in the main swatch. Since you can use the magnifying glass to put any color on your screen in there, you can't beat this one! I highly recommend downloading it, if you ever need numerical color values.

If you have one you like, let me know, and I'll add it to this list, and credit you with the discovery!



One caveat about using the add on Color Pickers. For some reason, Photoshop won't use them if they are not visible in the Icon Bar. In other words, if they appear in the fly out menu to the right of the picker, as shown above, they will not work. (They might not even display properly. The second one in the menu above is the Hex Color Picker, not Shades.) To fix this, just increase the size of the color picker (drag the bottom right corner) until the icon for the one you want is showing. Then you will be able to use it normally.

And that's it! I hope this helps you to use the Mac OS X Color Picker to its fullest, and simplifies your work!