

## Microsoft removes Win10 File Explorer features without notice



By Brian Livingston • [Comment about this article](#)

Microsoft's updates for Windows 10 in November and December 2023 made significant changes to the File Explorer interface and its search functionality. But the Redmond software giant has posted no written information about the differences or how users can configure them.

Some of the modifications revert File Explorer to the configuration it had in Windows 10 19H2, the version that existed way back in November 2019.

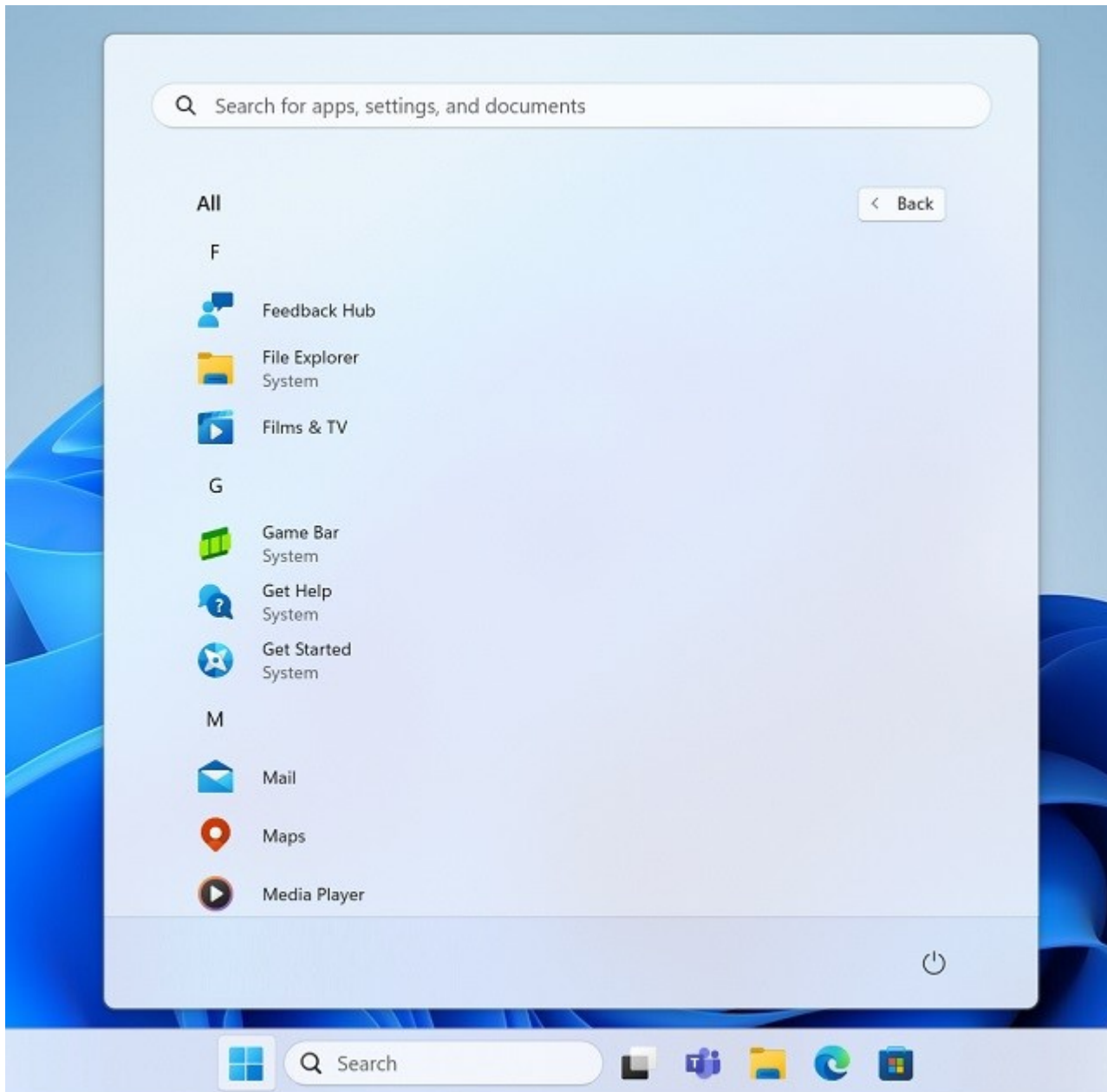
Ironically, you may find that you actually prefer the old behaviors to the new ones.

But that isn't the point. The point is that changes of this magnitude cry out for written explanations from Microsoft.

The modifications seem to be intentional and not a bug of some kind. But, strangely, nothing about the mods appears in [KB5032278](#), which describes the November 30, 2023, update for OS build 19045.3758. Nor is any information apparent in [KB5033372](#) regarding the December 11, 2023, release of OS builds 19044.3803 and 19045.3803.

### MS is under the gun to meet European Union regulations

Strange as it may seem, Microsoft has posted detailed explanations of changes it's made in Windows 10 and 11 to comply with new European Union (EU) regulations. These regs deal with such things as privacy for users and open access for third-party developers. But the corporation hasn't explained — in any public documents that I can find — its changes to the Win10 File Explorer, which millions of people worldwide use every day.



**Figure 1. In some updated versions of Windows 10 and 11 — and in all versions by March 2024, Microsoft says — the search results now show the label “System” for MS operating-system components. This change is intended to help end users distinguish between results that are Windows components and those that are third-party code.** *Source: Microsoft Windows Insider [blog post](#)*

In a Microsoft Windows Insider [blog post](#) on November 16, 2023, the Redmond company describes its changes to comply with EU regulations as follows:

*Microsoft is working to ensure compliance with the Digital Markets Act (DMA) in the European Economic Area (EEA). We have released the November 2023 non-security preview update for Windows 11, version 23H2 to the Release Preview Channel ([Build 22631.2787](#)) that previews many of the changes we’ve made to Windows 11 to meet these obligations. ...*

*We have also enabled the November 2023 non-security preview update for Windows 10, version 22H2 [Build 19045.3758](#) with many of the changes we’ve made to Windows 10 to meet these obligations. These changes will gradually be rolling out to devices in Release Preview*

*over the next couple weeks. ...*

*We'll be updating Windows 10, version 22H2 and Windows 11, version 23H2 PCs in the EEA to be compliant by March 6th, 2024.*

As an example, Figure 1 shows cases where Redmond is being required to add the label "System." This applies whenever a Windows search includes results that are Microsoft operating-system components.

More importantly, Microsoft is being required to make certain Windows apps uninstalleable. The company's November 16 document says, "we've added the ability to uninstall":

- Camera
- Cortana
- Web Search from Microsoft Bing, in the EEA
- Microsoft Edge, in the EEA
- Photos

The EU is presumably requiring that Windows features such as these be uninstalleable to make it easier for third parties to sell their own search engines, browsers, and so forth.

Other significant Windows modifications that are intended to encourage third-party development are listed in Microsoft's November 16 [blog post](#). For instance, the post states that Windows now has a more "robust" API (application programming interface) with more "interoperability points" to benefit outside app developers.

But that post leaves completely unanswered the questions surrounding Microsoft's changes to Win10 File Explorer. Let me explain what those changes are, how they may affect you, and how you can undo or reconfigure them.

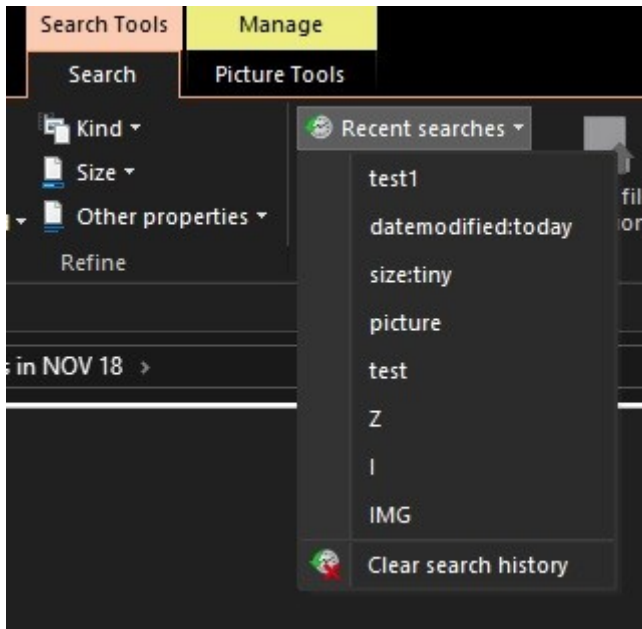
## How the Win10 File Explorer changes affect you – and what you can do

The following are some of the effects of Microsoft reverting Windows 10 File Explorer back to its behavior in November 2019, according to numerous end-user complaints:

- File Explorer can no longer search Microsoft OneDrive storage, only files that are local.
- Searches begin to produce results as soon as you type the first letter. Previously, File Explorer would wait until you completed your query and pressed Enter.
- File Explorer no longer displays eight recent search queries items in a drop-down list when you click inside the Search box. Only the three most recent strings are shown (if that). If your copy of Win10 has been updated with KB5033372, you must now navigate to Search Tools to see a longer list of your previous searches, as I explain below.
- Typing **datemodified:** and a date would previously match files with that date. The new behavior pops up a monthly calendar for you to select dates from. (You can navigate to different months.)
- Typing **size:** and a number would match files of that size. Now, a drop-down box offers seven ranges for you to choose from.

An excellent description of these and other File Explorer changes is provided in a long Microsoft Community [blog post](#) by end user Geo44. I recommend that you read that post as well as some of the replies to it that add additional information about the problems.





The screen shot at left by Geo44 illustrates how you can work around File Explorer's newly missing search history:

**Step 1.** Expand the ribbon.

**Step 2.** Select "Search Tools."

**Step 3.** Pull down "Recent searches."

Understanding these steps, of course, in no way explains what is going on with File Explorer in Windows 10 and when, if ever, users will gain OS-level control over these behaviors.

While we're waiting for Microsoft to clear up the confusion, I suggest that you read posts by other harried Windows users that may help you understand how the changes may affect you:

A [Reddit post](#) by user mohammed0106 explains how to regain "live search" after installing various updates.

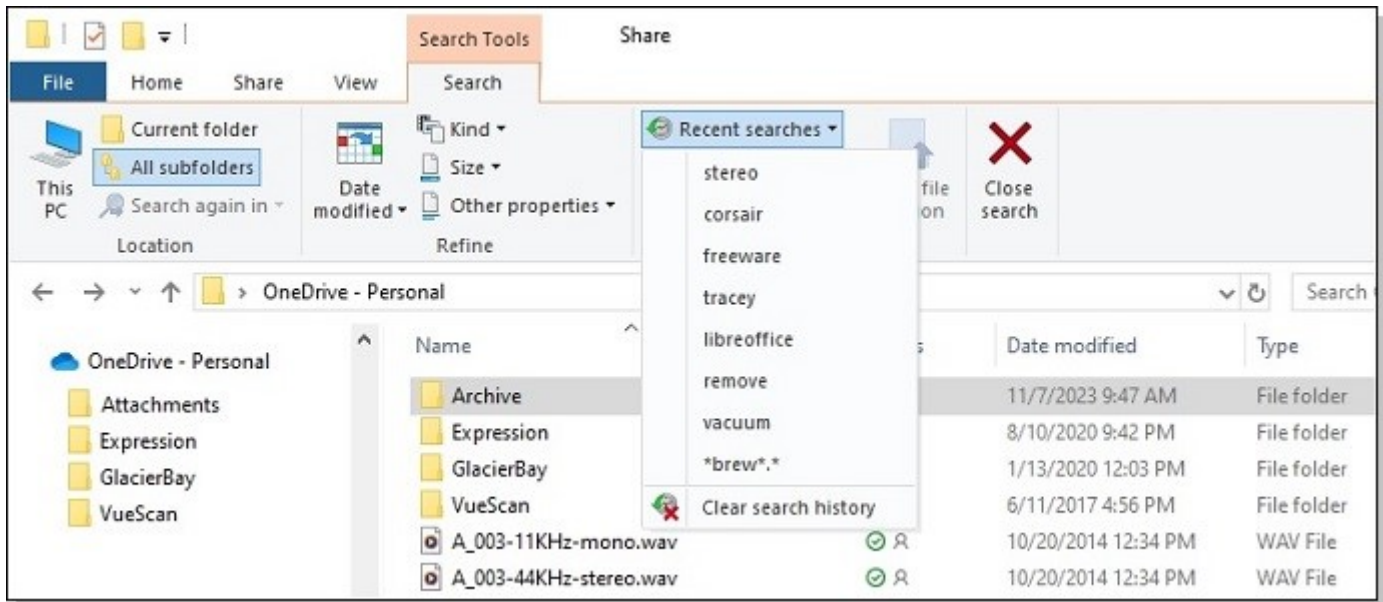
Another [Reddit post](#) by user ADAMPOKE111 raises additional issues with the new, smaller location bar and search box and how they are affected by the recent changes.

A [BetaWiki page](#) about the November 2023 update covers many of the numerous recent changes that Microsoft made to Windows. Besides modifications to Copilot and the Windows shell, the page includes a short section on Win10 File Explorer's reversion to its November 2019 behaviors.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of anything in writing from Microsoft about the File Explorer changes, it's impossible for me to tell you whether a specific instance of Win10 does or does not have particular behaviors.

In Windows 10, selecting **Search** in the ribbon and then pulling down the "Recent searches" drop-down box does, in fact, display your last few searches (as shown above and in Figure 2). But that works in Win10 only if your instance of File Explorer is configured to display the ribbon.

(Note: To the best of my knowledge, Win11 never displayed search history when you clicked inside the Search box.)



**Figure 2. In Windows 10, with File Explorer’s ribbon displayed, selecting the Search tab and then pulling down the “Recent searches” drop-down box shows your eight most-recent query strings. Windows 11 never displayed previous search strings when a Search box was clicked. Source: Windows 10 screen cap**

Until Microsoft publishes a report on which changes will be experienced by users in which versions of Windows — and on which dates and in which regions of the world — it’s anyone’s guess how File Explorer will actually behave in your particular instance of Win10.

You may be able to configure some File Explorer preferences using Windows’ own provided tools. Open the Settings dialog and search for **windows search settings**. One of the choices available there may help you accomplish your goals.

## Taking control into your own hands

As always, I’m primarily interested in giving control over Windows back to users whenever they would benefit from some degree of customization (in other words, undocumented features that are not explained by Microsoft).

Geo44’s [blog post](#) includes comments by other users explaining how the previous File Explorer features can be restored, if you rely on them or just want them back.

It’s obvious that governments in the European Union, the United States, and elsewhere want Microsoft to sever the ties that bind (for instance) File Explorer to MS-only services such as its Bing search engine and its Edge browser.

Redmond seems embarrassed that world governments are able to compel the corporation to make its flagship product more open. Perhaps as a consequence, Microsoft’s recent updates to Win10 took an easy way out. The company did not actually write any new code or distribute a revised Win10 File Explorer. Instead, the latest updates simply disable some File Explorer functionality that’s collectively known as ID number **18755234**.

Back in November 2019, an update *enabled* ID number 18755234. This changed the Win10 File Explorer from its original 2019 user interface to a new one. The new set of behaviors existed from November 2019 through the recent updates in the autumn of 2023.

Here are the steps you can use to restore the features that Win10's File Explorer had in 2019–2023. The alteration involves a free app called **ViVeTool**:

- **Step 1.** Visit [ViVeTool](#) at GitHub. Use the **Downloads** button. Unzip **ViVeTool-v0.3.3.zip**.
- **Step 2.** Enter **cmd** in Windows Search and select **Run as Administrator**.
- **Step 3.** Using the **cd** command, change to the folder where ViveTool is installed.
- **Step 4.** Enter the line **vivetool /enable /id:18755234**

That restores File Explorer's 2019–2023 behaviors in Win10. (This, of course, assumes that Microsoft's autumn 2023 updates had rolled your instance of File Explorer back to its November 2019 functionality). If the fix doesn't please you, use ViVeTool to *disable* the same feature ID.

Aside from the command-line approach, you may get more use from ViVeTool with its optional graphical user interface. Developed by Peter Strick, the author of ViVeTool, the newer **ViVeTool-GUI v1.6.1** allows you to find features of Windows Insider Builds that may not be obvious. You can then disable or enable individual features to suit your needs.

A complete explanation of the process is available at the OlderGeeks [ViVeTool-GUI page](#). After you've read the instructions, download **ViVeTool-GUI v1.6.1** from the link at the bottom of that page. (The instructions indicate that users of previous versions, such as ViVeTool-GUI 1.6.0.3 or older, must uninstall them before installing version 1.6.1.)

You can get even more control over File Explorer by using other free apps.

For example, you can configure File Explorer's column sizes by installing such free apps as **StartAllBack** and **WinSetView**.

I wrote about StartAllBack in my August 21, 2023, [column](#) and about WinSetView in my February 6, 2023, [column](#). Both articles are in the free editions of the newsletter.

Of course, there's no law saying that you must use Windows' own File Explorer! A complete stress test of every available alternative is beyond the scope of today's story. But you can get an excellent, ranked list of third-party Windows file managers from a Make Use Of [review](#).

**Bottom line:** Microsoft simply shouldn't be this mysterious about changes such as the ones described above. It only lends fuel to the critics who say Redmond is using its customers as unwitting beta testers for new and buggy software features.

We'll get better answers out of the software giant someday. But until we do, it's up to us to make Windows work the way we want it to work.