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TURN IT UP TO ELEVEN: 11 TIPS FOR WINDOWS 11

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I'm old enough, but just barely, to remember the excitement surrounding Microsoft's Windows 95 launch on August 24, 1995. That launch was the first time something so nerdy as a computer operating system got mainstream media attention. And lots of it too. That level of technology-mainstream magic probably wasn't recaptured until Apple's iPhone launch in 2007. And, like iPhones iterating annually - 15 years of iPhone, Windows continued to evolve and improve, if mainly in the background.

On October 5, 2021, Microsoft unveiled its newest "whole number release" of Windows, known as Windows 11. Like Windows 10, initially released in 2015, Windows 11 is a free update to computers that meet its system requirements. Microsoft has gotten very good at evaluating systems and installed applications via Windows Update (you do have automatic updates on, right?) and will let you know when your computer is good to make the changeover.

However, for those "bleeding edge" techies or folks shopping for a new computer during holiday sales, here are 11 tips to get you running on Windows 11.
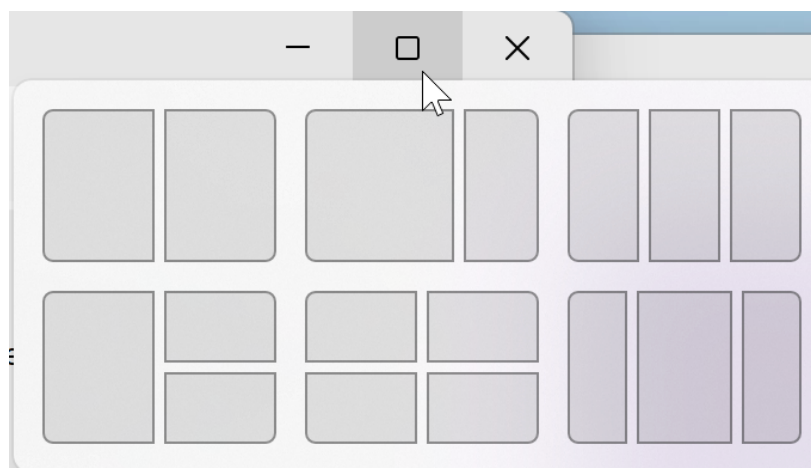
CAVEAT
TIP 0
I'm starting with "Tip 0" to reiterate that I don't know your system and, more importantly, your software. If you told me you have a recent computer, use only Microsoft Office 365 and Adobe Acrobat, and are an "early adopter" of tech accustomed to handling bugs or weirdness, I'd tell you to go ahead and upgrade. However, my advice would be quite different if you told me you use five-year-old versions of Time Matters and PCLaw without active maintenance contracts and no desire to upgrade. I would say don't upgrade now; perhaps never. And then there's everything in the middle. Even desktop-based add-ins for cloud-centric programs, like the Clio Launcher, may be affected. It's best to wait for vendor confirmation in such cases.
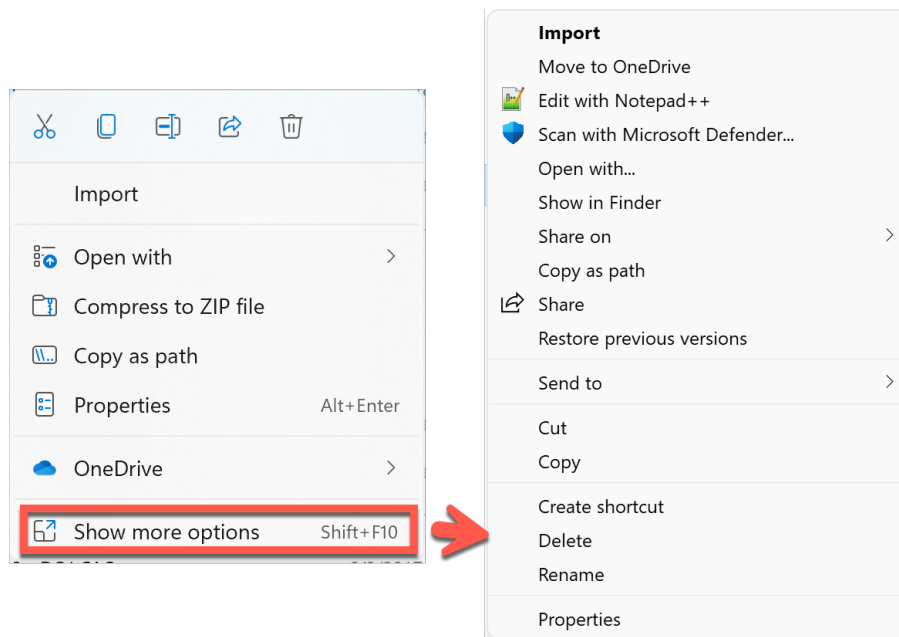
11 FOR 11
1. SNAP TO IT
Windows 11 modifies the window controls in the top right of each application's window. Previously you had three boxes that let you, in order, minimize the window, maximize the window, and close the window. Those three options still exist. But the maximize button does more too. Hover your mouse over the maximize button (but do not click), and Windows presents you with options for relocating that window on your screen. Windows 11 gives you many more options than Windows 10 did. You can also activate the windowing options by pressing Windows key + Z. If those don't work for you, make sure the feature is turned on under Settings > System > Multitasking > Snap windows.

2. IN WITH THE OLD

Microsoft spent a lot of time polishing and simplifying the interface in Windows 11. One of these simplifications cleaned up the voluminous options you saw when right-clicking a file. Over the years, the list had grown long and convoluted. The new right-click menu presents the most common choices (e.g., cut, copy, delete, etc.) on a short menu. But don't fear, all the previous options remain under the "Show more options" selection.
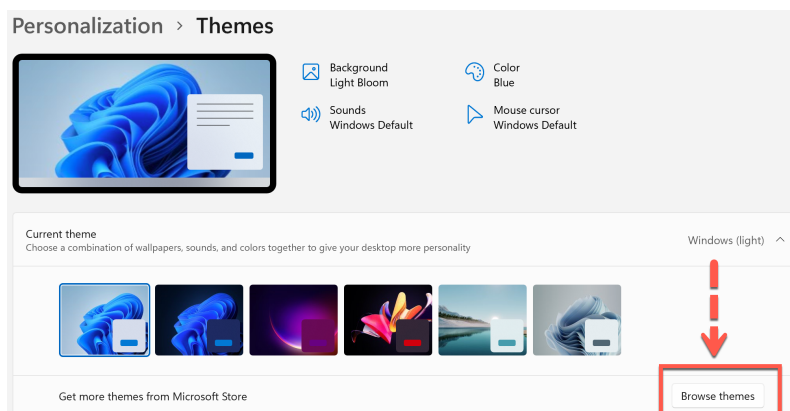

3. LIVE LIFE IN THE EDGE

Microsoft Edge is the homegrown browser Microsoft launched in Windows 10 as the successor to Internet Explorer. Edge never took off and was quickly surpassed by Google Chrome on the desktop and Safari and Chrome on mobile. In 2020, Microsoft scrapped the existing Edge browser and relaunched it with the same open-source underpinnings as Chrome. This change means that sites should appear and work the same in Edge as they do in Chrome. There's no need to download Chrome, especially if you've found it to be slow on your computer. Edge also runs most Chrome browser extensions, although Google-specific extensions, like Gmail enhancements, still run best in Chrome.
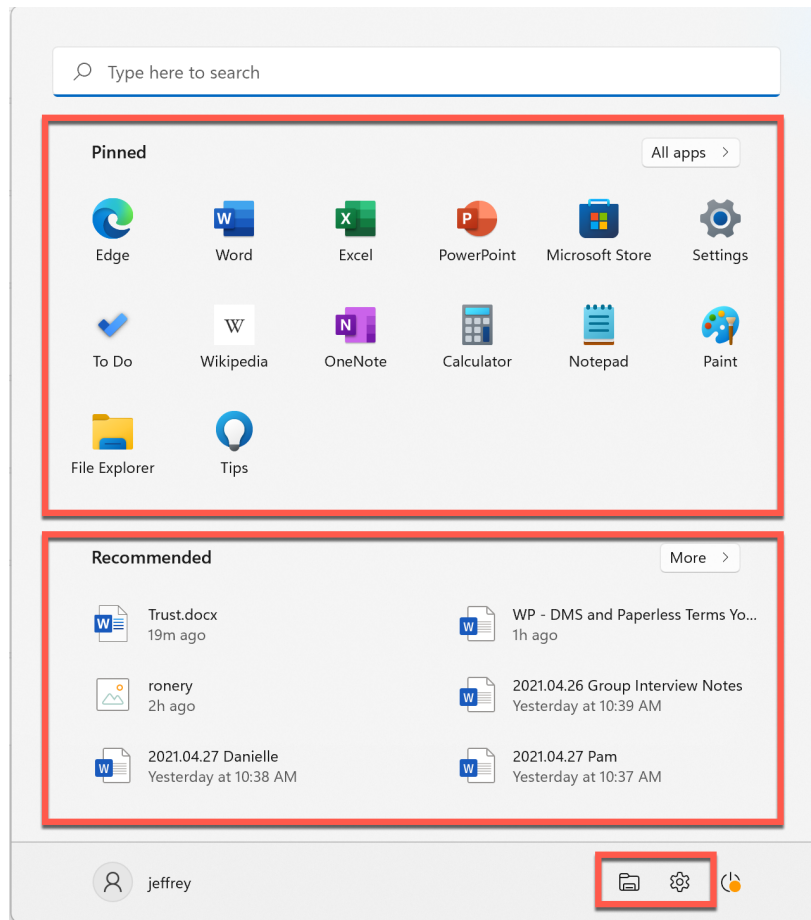
4. TO EACH HIS OWN

Most people know you can change the Windows desktop image. We often do to pictures of family, friends, pets, or favorite places. But you can change much more about Windows' appearance than just the desktop picture, such as everything about the Windows' interface being light or dark themed. Under Settings > Personalization > Themes, Microsoft now includes a link to explore and down these like "Pumpkin Season," "Bridges of Autumn," "Earth from Above," and dozens of others.
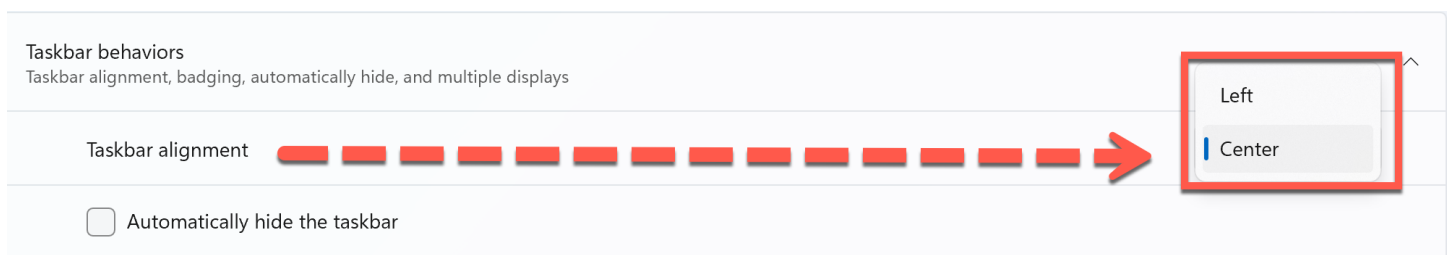

5. START IN A NEW PLACE

Microsoft moved the start button from the bottom left corner, where it's been since Windows 95, to the center of the taskbar. Indeed all taskbar icons are centered on the taskbar, and the "spread" left and right as you open additional programs or windows. The new start button adds some handy customizations. You can pin apps to

the top of the menu (and still access all apps via a button at the top right). Windows lists recommended (aka recent) documents below pinned applications. You can customize this display under Settings > Personalization > Start to include things like most frequently used apps and place certain "core" icons next to the power button, as I did for Settings and File Manager.
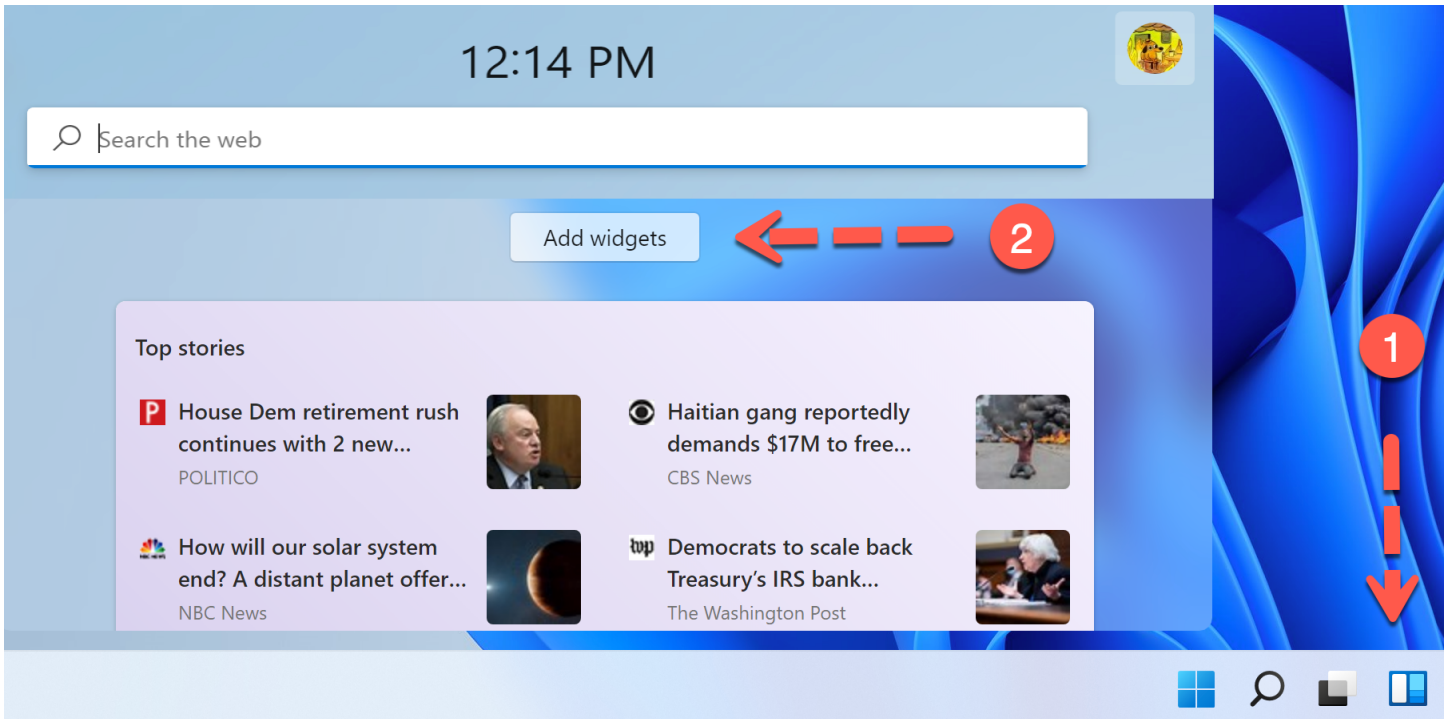

6. RESPECT TRADITION

For those who want their Start button on the left, where we've seen it for a quarter-century, Windows accommodates you too. Go to Settings > Personalization > Taskbar. Change Taskbar alignment from "Center" to "Left." All is right (or left) with the world again :)
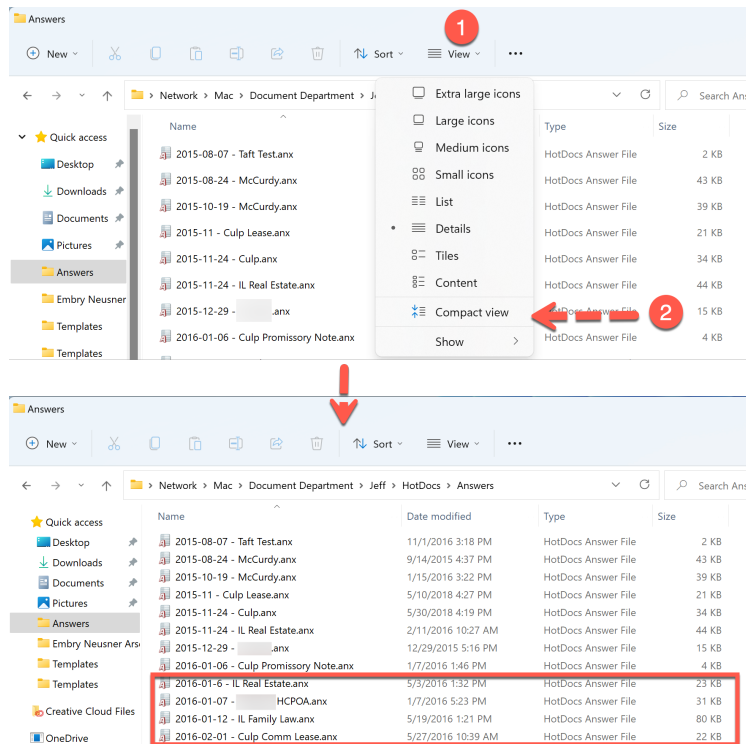

7. WIDGETS FOR WINDOWS

Most of us use widgets on our smartphones for weather, calendar, news, etc. Microsoft added a widgets pane to Windows 11. Click the widgets button to the right of the magnifying glass on the taskbar to open the widgets pane (or press Windows key + W). You can get a glance at your Outlook calendar, your Microsoft ToDo list, and track news. Currently, most widgets run on Microsoft services, but I expect to see additional options in the months ahead.

8. EASIER ON THE EYES

By default, Microsoft's File Explorer in Windows 11, the tool you use to create, copy, or move files and folders, adds extra space between files in a list, making it easier to read. If you're like me, however, you prefer information density over visual prettiness. You can condense the file list by choosing View > Compact view from the toolbar. In the example below, we see 50% more files in the list (12 versus 8). The nice thing is that the choice of views is yours.
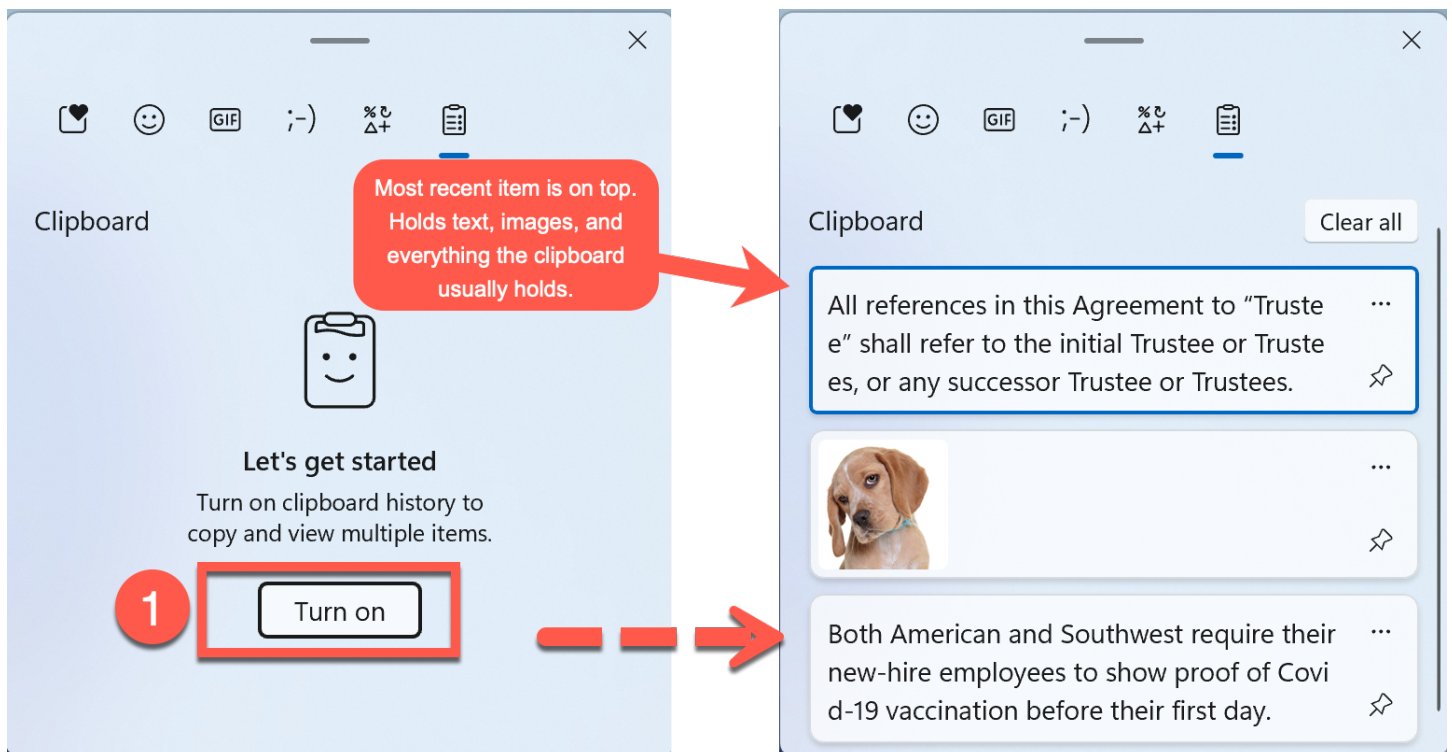
9. SHORTCUT ROUTE

If you need to minimize all open windows and get back to your desktop, you can do so by pressing Windows key + D. That shortcut instantly minimizes all of your open program windows. Windows key + E opens File Explorer. Windows key + S brings up the search box. Start typing an app or document name and hit Enter to open it! A complete list of Windows keyboard shortcuts (not just Windows 11) is available here.
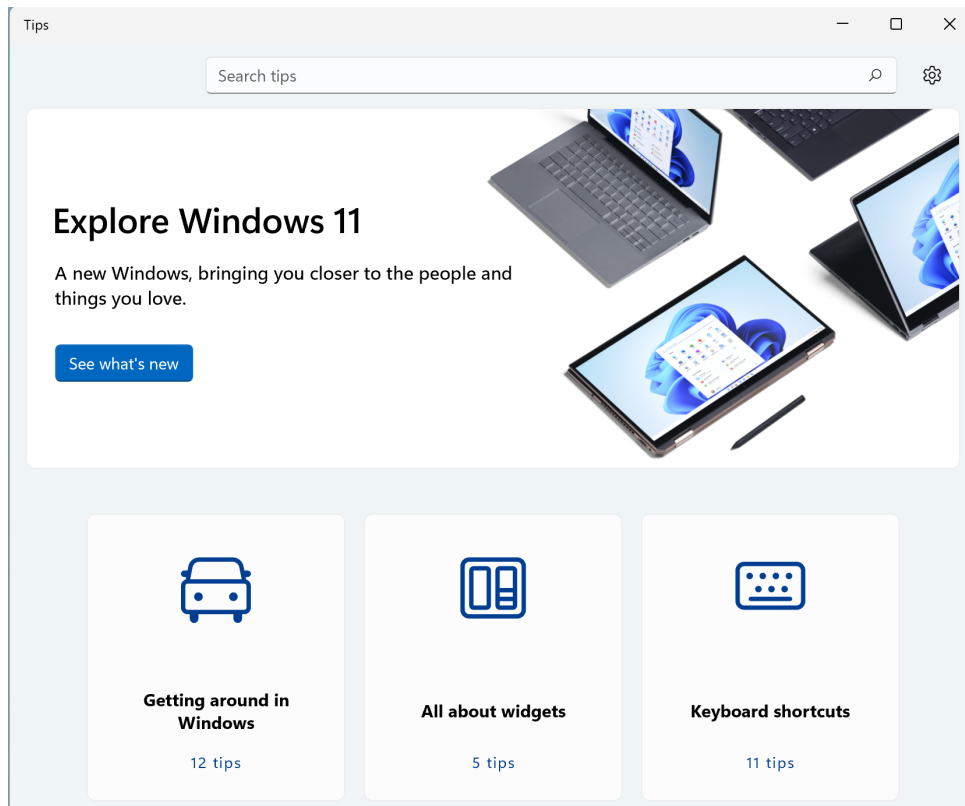

10. KEEP A RECORD

You may think that Windows clipboard (i.e., the background tool that holds the text or images you copy and paste between apps) remembers only the last thing you copied and pasted. Not true! Windows 11 has a clipboard history that syncs across your Windows 11 devices. You activate the clipboard by pressing Windows key + V. When you first launch it, Windows prompts you to turn on the service. It remembers what you copy, with the most recent item on top. You can clear the clipboard at any time by pressing the "Clear all" button.

Windows 11 includes a Tips app that educates you about new features and capabilities. If it's not showing on your Start menu, click in the search box, type "tips," and hit Enter. The Tips app will launch. Alternatively, you can borrow from tip 9 above and hit WIN + S to bring up the search box and then type "tips." Microsoft starts you out with over 60 tips in six categories. When you've had your fill of those, you can always visit Microsoft's Windows 11 support page for more information.

I hope these tips start you out strong with Windows 11 *when you're ready to make the leap*; remember Tip 0 :) If you come across other great Windows 11 tips, I'd love to hear them.