

# An OPCUG Product Review



## FancyZones

By Chris Taylor


About Chris Taylor: Chris is on the Community Review Board for [SANS's OUCH! security awareness newsletter](#) designed for everyone. He is President of the [Ottawa PC Users' Group](#) and a [Microsoft Windows Insider MVP](#).

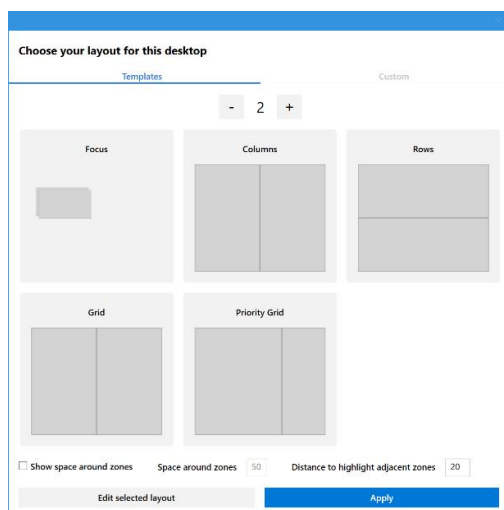
In the ancient history of Windows 95 and XP, Microsoft released an unsupported suite of tools for the operating system called *PowerToys* that added nifty functionality to Windows. On May 8, 2019, Microsoft launched the open source project *PowerToys for Windows 10* on GitHub. The September 5, 2019 release included an especially useful module: FancyZones.

FancyZones lets you define various zones on your desktop and have program windows fill the zones. For anyone who likes to have multiple programs visible at the same time, FancyZones is great. It's like Windows Snap on steroids.

Windows Snap can arrange application windows and works pretty well. But it has annoyances like not remembering where you had programs snapped, difficulty getting multiple programs to snap into the same section of the screen, only permitting 2, 3, or 4 areas, and only allowing easy resizing of screen areas when using 2 areas. FancyZones overcomes all those and more.

To get FancyZones, install the *Windows 10 PowerToys*. Browse to the repository on GitHub at <https://github.com/microsoft/PowerToys/releases/>. Scroll down to *Assets* at the bottom of the most recent release. Click the entry for the *PowerToys\*.exe* file. Once the download completes, run it and have it launch PowerToys when the installation completes.

I recommend taking FancyZones for a quick spin before getting into customizing zones. Press the default hotkey;  + ~ (hold down the Windows key and press tilde).




Click the spinner near the top to select the number of zones. At the bottom, there is an option to have space around zones. In the middle are a number of zone layout templates. There is one *Windows layout* template with overlapping zones called *Focus*. All others are *Table layouts* that have non-overlapping, tiled zones. Select one of the templates, and click the *Apply* button. Back in Windows, hold down the shift key while dragging the title bar of a program window. As it moves over a pre-defined zone, the zone will show in blue. Release the mouse button and the program will fill the zone. You can even drop program windows into multiple zones. Hold the shift key and move the mouse pointer near the common edge of two adjacent zones. Both zones will turn blue and releasing the mouse at that point will drop the window into both zones. You can also hold Shift+Ctrl keys to select multiple zones as you drag.

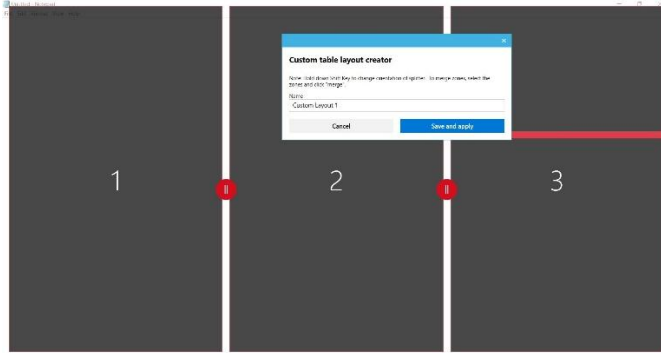
## Zone editing

You are not locked into the provided templates. You can define layouts with your preferences for the number of zones, their positions, and whether the zones overlap or not.


## Table layout mode editing

If you want zones that are tiled, create a custom *table layout*. Press  + ~ and select an existing table (non-overlapping) layout template. Click *Edit selected layout*.

In the editor, as you move your mouse around, a line will appear. Hold down the shift key to toggle between horizontal and vertical lines. Click the mouse to split the zone at that point. To merge zones, click within one zone and drag to select an adjoining zone. When you release the mouse button, click the *Merge zones* popup that appears. To change the sizes of zones, drag the gutter handles that appear in circles along the borders of zones. When done, enter a name for your custom layout and click *Save and apply*.



## Windows layout mode editing

If you want zones that can overlap, create a custom *windows layout*. Press  + ~. Select the *Focus* layout template and click *Edit selected layout*. In the editor, select any zone, drag it to a new position, and use the corner handles to resize the zone. To add a new zone, click the *ADD NEW ZONE* button. Delete zones by clicking the X in the top-right corner of the zone. Once done, give your layout a name and click *Save and apply*.

To customize settings for FancyZones, click the PowerToys icon in the system tray followed by *FancyZones* in the left panel. There are many settings and most are pretty self-explanatory. There are a few that I found particularly worth considering;

- By default, when dragging windows, zones are ignored and you can drop them anywhere. Only when you hold the shift key down while dragging will placement in zones be forced. By turning off *Hold Shift key to activate zones while dragging*, you reverse the behaviour – a normal drag will force the window to a zone, shift-drag will allow you to drop a window anywhere.
- If you are in the habit of changing screen resolution, *Keep windows in their zones when the screen resolution changes* will keep things orderly when you do so.
- *During zone layout changes, windows assigned to a zone will match new size/positions* makes it easier when changing sizes or positions of zones. Existing windows will resize to the new layout automatically.
- *Move newly created windows to their last known zone* ensures when you launch a program, it starts in the last zone it was in.
- At the bottom, you can exclude programs from snapping to zones. A part name can be used to match multiple programs such as *note* matching *Notepad.exe* and *Notepad++.exe*.