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If your Android device is feeling a little stale, or maybe the manufacturer has abandoned it and you'd love to breathe a little life into it, your best bet is to root it and install a new ROM. It's like installing a brand new operating system on your phone or tablet, and an in many cases can give you features the manufacturer never thought to offer. Last week, we asked you which Android ROMs you thought were the best. Then we took a look at the five best Android ROMs based on your nominations, and put them to a vote. Now we're back to highlight the winner. If you've had an Android phone for any period of time, you've probably been tempted to root it and Read moreAndroid ROMs vary widely, and we knew that going into this, but we still wanted to know which ones you thought were the best for device support, bundled features, flexibility, and speed. Of the top five, CyanogenMod took first place, bringing in 61% of the overall vote. In second place with close to 20% of the vote was the Android Open Kang Project (AOKP). Right behind it in third is MIUI, with just over 10% of the votes cast. Slim ICS followed behind in fourth place with close to 6% of the vote, and bringing up the rear with just over 3% of the votes cast was Liquid Smooth ROMs.The Hive Five is based on reader nominations. As with most Hive Five posts, if your favorite was left out, it's not because we hate it—it's because it didn't get the nominations required in the call for contenders post to make the top five. We understand it's a bit of a popularity contest, but if you have a favorite, we want to hear about it. Have a suggestion for the Hive Five? Send us an email at tips+hivefive@lifehacker.com! Whether you're looking to upgrade an Android device forsaken by its manufacturer or you just want more control over the phone or tablet you own, you've probably gone looking for a new ROM. Rooting your phone is the first step, but a new ROM will give you a completely new mobile OS, and this week we're going to look at five of the best Android ROMs, based on your nominations. Earlier in the week, we asked you which Android ROMs you thought were the best. We took your nominations, tallied them up, and now we're back to highlight the top five. It's important to note that not every ROM is available for every device, and different ROMs are aimed at different audiences—some of them are designed to upgrade the OS and others are lean and mean installs to speed up your phone. Whichever you choose, you'll have to make sure your device is supported by the developers behind the ROM before installing. If you've had an Android phone for any period of time, you've probably been tempted to root it and Read moreThe poll is closed and the votes are counted! To see which of the contenders took the top spot, head over to our weekly Hive Five followup post to see and discuss the winner! If your Android device is feeling a little stale, or maybe the manufacturer has abandoned it and...Read moreCyanogenModCyanogenMod is arguably one of the (if not the) most installed Android ROM in the world, and for good reason. It offers a ton of great features, is available for more devices than most other ROMs of its type, and has the type of polish and support that makes it easy to fall in love with. There are builds of CyanogenMod for Android phones and tablets, and slowly but surely the developers behind CyanogenMod are rolling out Ice Cream Sandwich versions for devices whose manufacturers have given up on upgrading the device entirely. To boot, CyanogenMod includes features you won't find in stock Android, like support for OpenVPN, support for downloadable themes, more privacy tools, and more. You can find a list of supported devices here.Android Open Kang Project (AOKP)The Android Open Kang Project (AOKP) is a relative newcomer compared to many of the other popular ROMs already available, but it's rapidly growing in popularity. It offers many of the features that CyanogenMod has, and at first blush you may mistake one for the other, but as soon as you start looking at the options and add-ons, you'll see the differences. AOKP has earned high marks for add-ons and tools that you can't get in CM, centralized control over ROM options, and overall more customization options than CM. At the same time, its development community is smaller and it may not have the same polish and device support that CyanogenMod has. Still, it's super-fast, it's stable, and definitely worth a look. You can find a list of all supported devices here.MIUI MIUI struck us with how beautiful the user interface was and how elegant it made Android look and feel. It's not the most feature-packed or hackable ROM, but it's definitely one of the most customizable and elegant, and it's seriously fast. MIUI started life as a modded version of Android localized in China, but fans of the mod have since localized it for dozens of languages and countries. It offers strong theme support, beautiful stock apps, customizable lockscreens, support for GApps, and complete root access. You're not going to get a wealth of niche features here, but you will get a device that's much easier and more fun to use once you install MIUI. You can find a list of supported devices here. If you've become a bit bored with the way Android looks and works, MIUI is a completely different...Read moreSlim ICSIf you have a Galaxy Nexus, Nexus S, Samsung Galaxy S or Galaxy S II, Slim ICS may be the ROM for you. Not only will Slim ICS bring your device up to Ice Cream Sandwich, it's also a super-thin, lightweight installation that's remarkably easy to install, even though it's clearly aimed at advanced users. Slim ICS already has GApps rolled in, so you don't need to install them later. Where other ROMs try to add tons of new features and tweaking options, Slim ICS is designed to trim the fat down to the bare essentials and give you a fast and clean ICS installation. It's only available for a handful of Samsung devices and there's pretty much one developer and a few beta testers behind the scenes, so don't expect a ton of feature additions or new devices, but it is updated weekly and sports a good number of third-party mods.Liquid Smooth ROMSLiquid Smooth ROMs are available for multiple devices, and while the project started off with the Motorola Droid, Droid 2, Droid X, Droid Incredible, and HTC Thunderbolt, it's also available for the Galaxy Nexus and a few other devices, although you'll have to poke around the forums a bit to find them. The banner feature of Liquid is that it's probably one of the fastest ICS ROMs available, faster even than the stock install that comes on the Galaxy Nexus. You don't sacrifice features for the speed, but the overall size of the ROM is still nice and small, leaving more space for the apps and features you choose to use, as opposed to ones forced on you. GApps are baked right in, and the ROM offers theme support so you can customize it to your liking. All in all, if you have a supported device, it's probably the leanest, meanest ICS ROM you can download.Now that you've seen the top five, it's time to put them all to a vote and decide the winner.No honorable mentions this week, but you all nominated well over 60 different ROMs for consideration, so whatever ROM you settle on, make sure it's a good match for the features you're looking for, the device you own, and the version of Android you want to run. These may be your top five, but they may not be the best for your specific device, so do your homework!Have something to say about the nominees that we missed? Did your favorite not get enough nominations to be included? Remember, the top five are based on your most popular nominations from the call for contenders thread from earlier in the week. Share your thoughts in the comments below.The Hive Five is based on reader nominations. As with most Hive Five posts, if your favorite was left out, it's not because we hate it—it's because it didn't get the nominations required in the call for contenders post to make the top five. We understand it's a bit of a popularity contest, but if you have a favorite, we want to hear about it. Have a suggestion for the Hive Five? Send us an email at tips+hivefive@lifehacker.com!Photo by Peter Kirn. Android is open source, so developers can take its code, add features, and build their own operating system images for Android phones and tablets. Many Android geeks install such custom ROMs — but why? “ROM” stands for “read-only memory.” A custom ROM replaces your device’s Android operating system — normally stored in read-only memory — with a new version of the Android operating system. Custom ROMs are different from acquiring root access. Get The Latest Version of Android This is by far the most popular reason to install a custom ROM. Many manufacturers never update their older Android phones and tablets or updates may take months to reach phones thanks to carrier and manufacturer delays. If you have an older device that isn't receiving updates anymore and you want to run the latest version of Android, a custom ROM is just the ticket. CyanogenMod is the most popular ROM for this purpose — it has its own tweaks, but the base system is similar to the stock version of Android created by Google. Thanks to CyanogenMod and other custom ROMs, many older devices that will never be officially updated can run the latest version of Android. If your device is still receiving timely updates — especially if it's a Nexus device that Google is updating regularly — custom ROMs won't be anywhere near as compelling. RELATED: Why Your Android Phone Isn't Getting Operating System Updates and What You Can Do About It Replace Manufacturer Skin With a Stock Version of Android RELATED: Why Android Geeks Buy Nexus Devices Manufacturers like Samsung and HTC “skin” their versions of Android, replacing the clean look Google created with their own look that's often more cluttered and less cohesive. Many people don't like this but still want to use a flagship phone like the Samsung Galaxy S4 or HTC One. You can't just switch from the manufacturer's skin to the stock Android look — sure, you can replace the launcher without installing a custom ROM and even without rooting, but there's no erasing all the questionable customizations the manufacturer has made to the operating system. To get the stock Android look and replace all the manufacturer's customizations with the clean Android system, you'll need to install a custom ROM. If you don't mind your device's skin or you're using a Nexus device that already comes with a stock Android system, there's no reason to do this. Eliminate Bloatware RELATED: How Carriers and Manufacturers Make Your Android Phone's Software Worse When you purchase a phone from a carrier, it often comes packed with bloatware, NASCAR apps, TV apps, a Contacts app that stores your contacts on your carrier's servers instead of on your phone — these apps can clutter your system and waste disk space. Manufacturers even add their own software before the carrier gets to it, so you have two companies each adding their own bloatware to your phone before it gets to you. If you want to actually erase these apps from your disk, the best way to do so is to install a custom ROM. You can disable the apps without rooting, but this won't free up the disk space they consume. Add Additional Features and System Tweaks Custom ROMs offer features not found in stock Android and many tweaking options you can't get elsewhere. For example, a custom ROM may allow you to: Install skins to customize how your entire Android operating system looks. Customize the quick settings menu Android includes to add your own most-used settings shortcuts. Run apps in tablet mode on a phone, using a more full-featured tablet interface for certain apps. Easily overclock your device to make it run faster or underclock it to make it run slower while squeezing out more battery life. Disable the volume warning that Android constantly shows when you increase the system volume while headphones are plugged in. Hide the bottom navigation bar (on-screen buttons) to get more screen real estate. Easily enable root access by toggling a system setting. Custom ROMs offer many other features — this is only a snapshot of what you can do with such low-level access. RELATED: Forget Flashing ROMs: Use the Xposed Framework to Tweak Your Android Some of these tweaks may be possible on a typical Android device with a solution like the Xposed Framework, which allows custom ROM-like tweaks with only root access. However, custom ROMs are further along in development and include these features in a single package. Configure App Permissions Custom ROMs often include a way to manage Android app permissions, so you can prevent Facebook from tracking your GPS location and play Android games without giving them your phone number and other identity information. This feature showed up in Android 4.3 as a hidden settings panel, so we can only hope that it will appear in an official version of Android soon. Reasons Not to Install A Custom Android ROM Custom ROMs aren't perfect and they can have downsides — depending on the ROM, your device, and how well the ROM supports it. You may run into: Battery Life Problems: The custom ROM may not be as optimized for your device and may drain battery faster than the device's official ROM. Hardware Issues: Custom ROMs may not properly support every bit of hardware in your phone, so you may run into bugs, non-functioning hardware, or just other issues. For example, the device's camera may not take pictures quite as well as it did on its official ROM. Bugs: The custom ROM hasn't been tested by your manufacturer and carrier, so you may run into other bugs specific to your device and ROM. You could also experience system instability, with apps force-closing and the phone randomly restarting itself. Custom ROMs are also more work than just purchasing a device and having it be officially supported and updated by the company you purchased it from. That's why many Android geeks buy Nexus devices, which receive timely updates directly from Google. CyanogenMod is trying to change this by offering an easier installation process via a CyanogenMod app in Google Play. RELATED: How to Flash a New ROM to Your Android Phone If you're looking for a custom ROM and don't know where to start, check CyanogenMod's website and see if it supports your device. You can also check the XDA Developers forum for your Android device and find custom ROMs developed specially for your device, which can be helpful if you have a less common device. Be sure to find a ROM that appears to be stable and well-supported if you go this route. Image Credit: Jon Fingas on Flickr, Johan Larsson on Flickr

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