

## Sylpheed – Quick and Extremely Configurable

# Mail Enough for Anyone

Sylpheed is a quick and flexible mail client that helps you manage even large amounts of mail. Based on the GTK+ toolkit and running on the X Window System it is aimed at giving a quick response with a graceful and sophisticated interface. It has easy configuration and intuitive operation. **BY THOMAS ZELL**

**M**ail clients are very common. A Freshmeat [1] search produces innumerable results. In addition to heavyweights, such as Kmail [2] or Evolution [3] there is a GUI program that offers just what the doctor ordered for Joe Public. This program is called Sylpheed.

Sylpheed is an email program and news reader, based on GTK+, and mainly designed for speed. The program looks very much like any other mail program, so you will feel at home almost immediately. Amongst other features the program supports:

- Multiple user accounts
- Thread display
- News filtering
- Attachments
- SSL/TLSv1 for POP3, SMTP, IMAP4rev1, NNTP
- X-Face
- User definable headers
- Multiple MH directories
- Mbox import/export
- Automatic mail checks
- Line wrap for overlength lines
- Clickable links
- XML based address book

## Installation

You will need to obtain the program first. The current version is 0.8.3. Look for it on the subscription CD or on the *Sylpheed* [4] home page. If a compiled package is unavailable for your distribution, simply expand the archive file in a directory of your choice and *cd* to the directory.

Before you start installing, make sure you have a GCC compiler, GTK+ 1.2.6 or later and a Unix based operating system. You can normally launch



*configure* without setting any other flags. If you additionally intend to use **GnuPG** [5] or **OpenSSL** [6], you should start by typing the following:

```
./configure --enable-gpgme \
--enable-ssl && make
su
make install
```

## Configuration

After launching *sylpheed* & in a terminal window, Sylpheed welcomes you by suggesting a directory for your mailbox. This directory is created below your home directory if it does not already exist, so make sure that you do not overwrite any existing files. Accept the default directory only if you are sure that nothing can go wrong.

The next step is to set up your accounts. If you intend to use multiple accounts, ensure that you choose a memorable name, such as the name of the provider, for each one, and assign one account as default.

Fill out the Personal Information and Server data fields. Most users will select the POP protocol from the menu. Enter your providers data in the *Server for receiving* and *SMTP Server* fields. For some providers (such as GMX) note that your User ID will be your complete email address, in contrast to most providers.

Click on the next tab to specify if and when Sylpheed should delete messages on the mail server. You might like to enable the Download all messages from server option. This depends on whether you use other programs on other

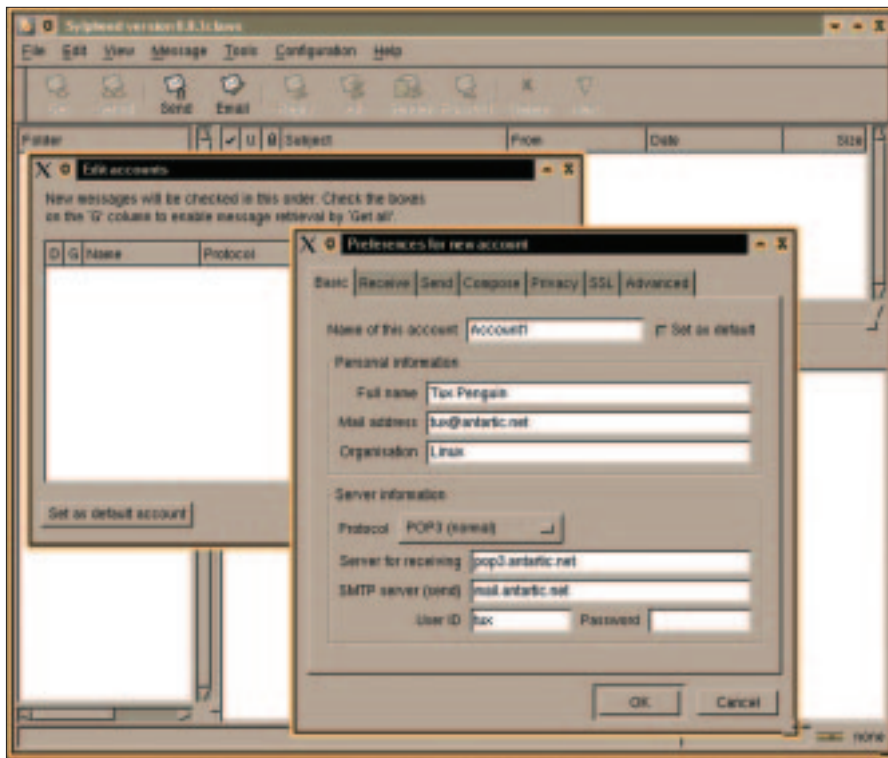


Figure 1: Sylpheed on initial start-up

operating systems to view your mail, or you possibly use a web interface from time to time.

You can use the other defaults for the time being. Before you can modify the settings for Private and SSL you must first add support for GnuPG and OpenSSL. To discover what plug-ins you have installed, click on Help/About.

## Additional Settings

After downloading your mail (Message/Receive new mail) you can carry on setting up Sylpheed to meet your requirements. To do so, select Configuration/Common Preferences.... If

you do not like the default font, simply select Display and specify a font size.

Figure 2 shows a useful setting for date display in day-month-year format. The default setting may be confusing to American users.

Sylpheed opens links when you double click on them. If nothing happens, the wrong browser may have been preselected.

In this case you can select "Other" in the Common Preferences and enter `galeon -n '%s'`, for example.

## GLOSSARY

**GnuPG**: GNU Privacy Guard. Also known as GnuPG. GnuPG is a complete and free substitute for the well-known PGP encryption program. As it does without patented encryption algorithms, you can use GnuPG without any restrictions. To use GnuPG with Sylpheed you will also require GPGME (Gnu PGMade Easy) version 0.3.5 or later. GPGME is also available from [5]. If you use distribution packages instead of compiling the sources, make sure that you also install the developer packages.

**OpenSSL**: A free implementation of Secure Sockets Layer. Communication between server and client is encrypted rather than in the clear text form.

**Galeon**: A GNOME based browser that allows Mozilla to render the pages. As the appearance of this tool is based on the GTK theme used, it is extremely flexible and quick. Galeon also offers convenient features, such as deactivating popups with just two mouse clicks. You can download Galeon at [9].

This will open any links you double click in a **Galeon** window. Of course, you can choose Konqueror or Netscape as your default browser, but make sure that you add '%s' after the program name and any options.

## And now for the nice bits...

If you receive several email messages every day, and would like to tidy up your *Inbox*, you might like to consider filtering your messages and creating new directories. Right click on your mailbox and select *Create new folder*. Sylpheed will then create a directory with the name you supply below `~/Mail`.

Take some time to think about how you will want to organize your mail, and create a few folders, such as "Private" and "Work", for example. You can delete the filters later, simply by right clicking them, but if you have defined filters and then delete the target folder, all that effort goes to waste.

You can click on a folder to create any number of subfolders and sort them by sender, mailing list, priority, and similar criteria. After creating multiple folders, you can now let Sylpheed sort your mail.

This may be superfluous if you only receive one or two messages a day as Sylpheed version 0.4.61 or later allows you to sort mail by drag'n'drop, however, if you subscribe to a number of mailing lists, you might find manual mail

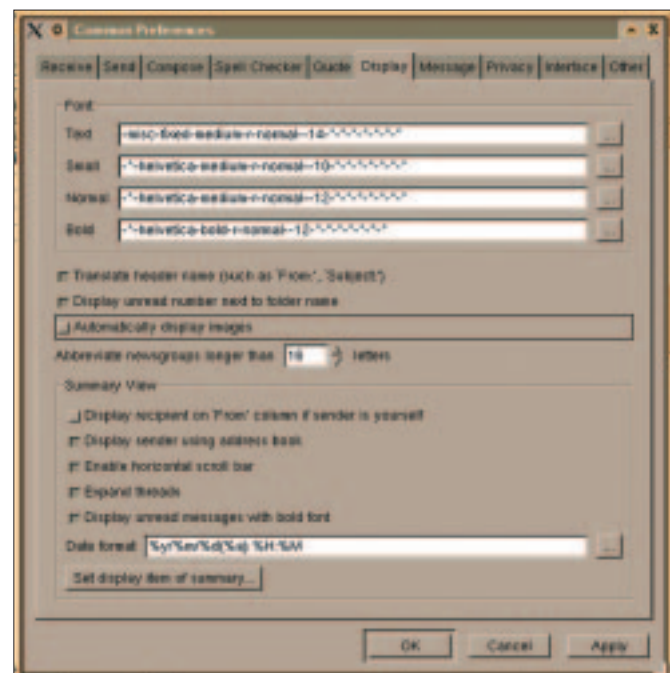


Figure 2: Fonts too small, links broken? Modify your common preferences

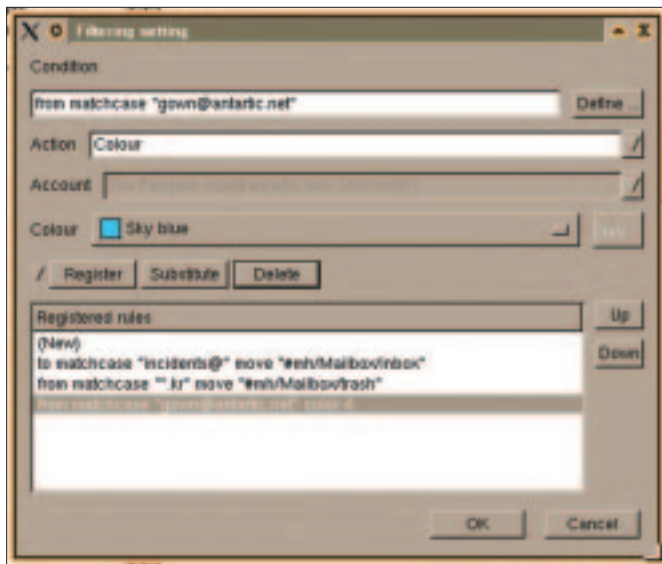


Figure 3: Using Filters to tidy up

sorting somewhat tedious. Select *Configuration/Filtering* in the menu. Figure 4 shows you a filter setting for the *incidents@securityfocus.com* mailing list.

If an email message is received from *incidents@*, it will automatically be placed in the *Incidents* subfolder. When ever you create a new rule, make sure that you apply the rule by clicking on *Register*, to inform Sylpheed that you really mean to implement the change. When you modify a rule, you need to confirm by clicking on *Replace*.

You can apply fairly restrictive filters, for example defining *@hotmail.com* as the sender ("From") and stipulating the option *Do not accept*. This will protect you from tons of spam but also means that you cannot receive mail from friends with Hotmail accounts. You will need to create another rule to avoid this and allow electronic messages from *good\_friend@hotmail.com*. Create the rule first, and then choose an

appropriate target.

Now register the rule and ensure that Sylpheed applies this rule

before the generic Hotmail rule. To do so, select the rule and click on *Up* to move the rule up to a position before the generic rule. As you will not want to apply your filters manually, you should now select *Preferences/Preferences for current account* and then *Receive/Filter messages on receipt*.

If you have explored the art of filtering somewhere else and want to apply some filters you have already fine tuned, you can easily do so. In the *Receive* area of your *Common Preferences* you can easily import programs such as **procmial**.

You can now receive and automatically sort or delete mail, but you may occasionally want to compose a message. To do so, select the menu item *Message/Compose new message* and

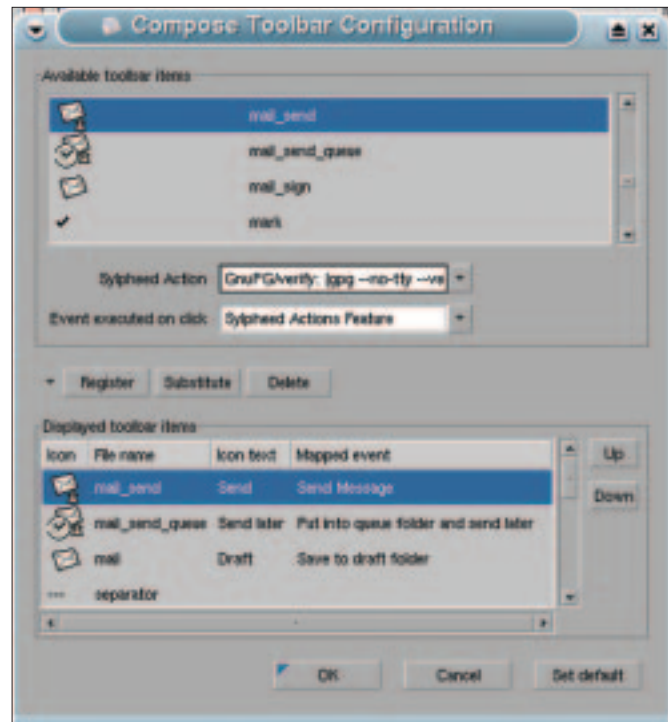


Figure 4: Even the toolbar is customizable in sylpheed

then you can start typing. Fill out the *Subject* and *To* fields as appropriate. If you have created multiple accounts, a drop-down menu appears in the line for your own data, allowing you to select an email address.

The fact that you only need to type the first letter of the recipients name and then press *Tab*, to have Sylpheed display a list of possible recipients is a nice feature. This only works for addresses you have added to the address book – although adding address book entries is quite simple. Right click on an email message to display a drop-down menu allowing you to add the email sender to the address book by selecting *Add to address book*.

After composing an email message, you can either send the message immediately using *Message/Send* or *Send later*. If you appear to have forgotten something Sylpheed will let you decide whether you to go ahead or correct your mistake. If you have any questions regarding Sylpheed, or some of the options are causing you difficulty, you should take a look at the FAQ (*Help/FAQ*) or join the Sylpheed mailing list at [4].

## Claws?

Sylpheed provides you with almost everything you need, so what is

## GLOSSARY

**Patch** : Patches are applied to repair program errors or introduce improvements. The advantage is that you do not need to download the entire source code, just the patch. This is not much of an advantage for a program like Sylpheed, which has a relatively small footprint, but it can be a major advantage if you require a kernel patch. Sylpheed has its own patch page [12], where you can download the latest Sylpheed patches and a guide to applying patches.

**Procmial** : Procmial is a versatile program for sorting and filtering electronic mail. You can launch various programs, or play different sounds, based on criteria you define yourself, or forward email to other email accounts. The home page is located at [13].

**Pspell** : Portable spellchecker. A program that checks documents for typos. The dependencies and differences between GNU Aspell, Pspell, and the now obsolete Ispell are not easy to comprehend. In case of doubt, simply install the Pspell and Aspell packages your distribution provides, and apply the required languages. Additional information is available from [1].

Sylpheed Claws? Sylpheed Claws is the developer version that contains the latest features, but may not be as stable as Sylpheed. If you really need a spellchecker, and have never **patched** a program, take a look at Sylpheed Claws. You can download the program from [10] or simply copy it from the subscription CD. To use the spellchecker you will need the source package for **Pspell** or the *pspell-0.12.2-devel* package or better.

Sylpheed Claws includes the following enhancements:

- selective download (preview of sender and subject line on the server)
- different appearance by applying customized themes (see Figure 5)
- enhanced filtering system
- customized toolbar

### And?

Sylpheed is a versatile email program that is useful for email users with a high message volume. Additionally, the

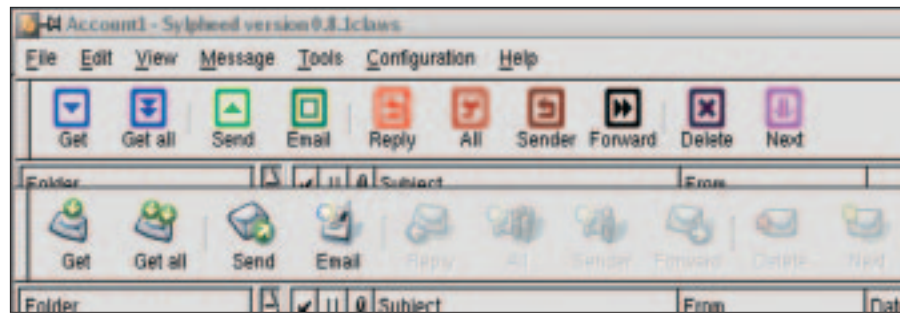


Figure 5: Sylpheed Claws with stw themed customized icons in comparison to Sylpheed Claws 0.8.1 mozilla look

program provides ample configuration facilities to make working with Sylpheed a pleasant experience. If you do not require KDE (KMail) or insist on an address book that reminds you of your friends birthdays and anniversaries (Evolution), Sylpheed is a safe bet.

The only drawback at present is the lack of a spellchecker, however, you can remedy this situation by applying a patch, or simply installing Sylpheed

Claws. Despite the warnings about possible crashes on the Claws home page, this version was extremely stable, and only crashed once in the authors experience, when subjected to extreme pressure during a selective download. ■

## Using GnuPG

The following section contains only a brief introduction. You should refer to [7] and [8] for more details. You can type `gpg -version` to display the currently installed version. If this happens to be earlier than 1.0.6, you should consider updating, as the older versions are buggy. If an error message is displayed to the effect that GnuPG has not been installed, download the packages for your distribution from one of the usual servers, or compile them from source code.

The following command creates a new keypair:

```
gpg -gen-key
```

You are first prompted to specify an algorithm. Choose the default setting (DSA/ ElGamal). The second prompt refers to the key length – the longer a key is, the more secure, but of course, operations using the key will also take longer.

If you specify a key length of more than 1536 bits, GnuPG asks you if a key this size is really necessary. Key lengths of at least 2048 bits are recommended for some needs. DSA typically uses 1024 bits. Following this you are asked to supply your name, a comment, and your email address. This information is used to identify the key. You can change or complete these entries later.

Make sure that you choose an email address that you intend to keep. This will save you and your correspondents trouble with invalid and revoked keys later.

Finally, you are prompted to enter a mantra that you want to use for storing your private key. Make sure that you choose a good mantra. A good mantra is defined as

- not too short
- containing special characters,
- not a name and
- not easily guessed from prior knowledge of the user (such as a phone number, bank account number, name and number of children, or pets)

Use a combination of lower case, capital letters and space characters randomly to add an additional level of security. Also, you will need to be able to remember your mantra easily, as your private key is useless without it. It is also a good idea to create a revocation certificate at the same time, and to store the certificate in a safe place:

```
gpg --output revoke.asc --gen-revoke mykey
```

where `mykey` is either the key ID of your first keypair or part of a corresponding user ID. The revocation certificate is stored in `revoke.asc`, or if you leave out the `-output` option, the output is written to standard I/O.

## INFO

- [1] Freshmeat: <http://freshmeat.net>
- [2] Kmail home page: <http://kmail.kde.org>
- [3] Ximian Evolution homepage: <http://www.ximian.com/>
- [4] Sylpheed home page: <http://sylpheed.good-day.net/>
- [5] German GnuPG home page: <http://www.gnupg.org/de/gnupg.html>
- [6] OpenSSL home page: <http://www.openssl.org/>
- [7] GnuPG Keysigning Party HOWTO: <http://www.cryptnet.net/fdp/crypto/gpg-party.html>
- [8] GnuPG manual: <http://www.gnupg.org/gph/de/manual/>
- [9] Galeon home page: <http://galeon.sf.net/>
- [10] Sylpheed Claws download: [http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group\\_id=25528](http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=25528)
- [11] GNU Aspell: <http://aspell.net/>
- [12] Sylpheed Patch home page: <http://www.thewildbeast.co.uk/sylpheed/>
- [13] Procmal home page: <http://www.procmal.org/>

## THE AUTHOR

Thomas Zell lives in Berlin. His interest in Unix and Linux was raised in 1998. Having tried many distributions he finally developed his own version of the WindowMaker desktop which can be found at <http://www.allroy.de>.

