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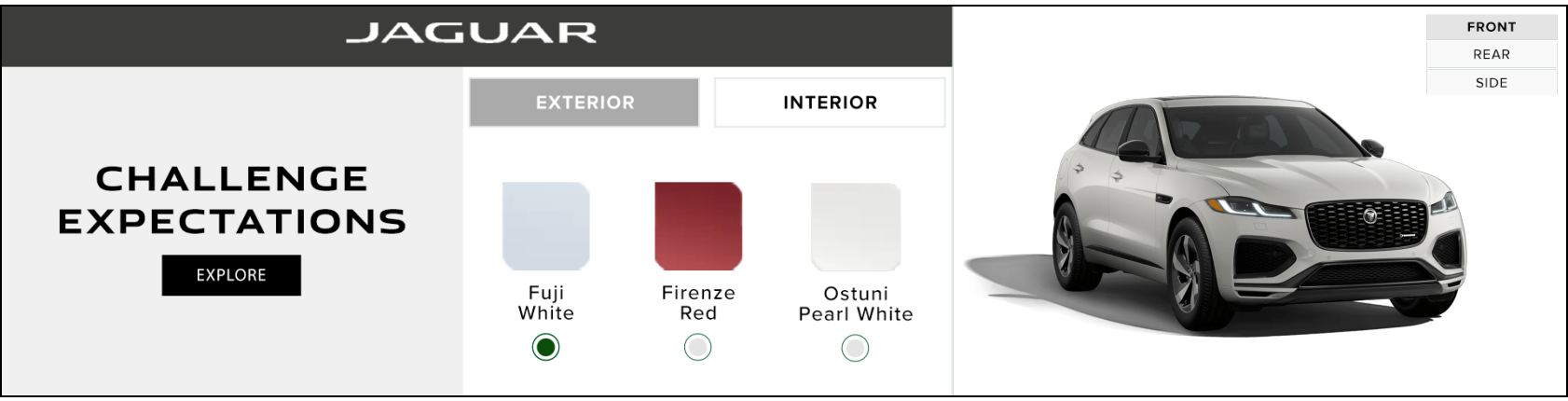

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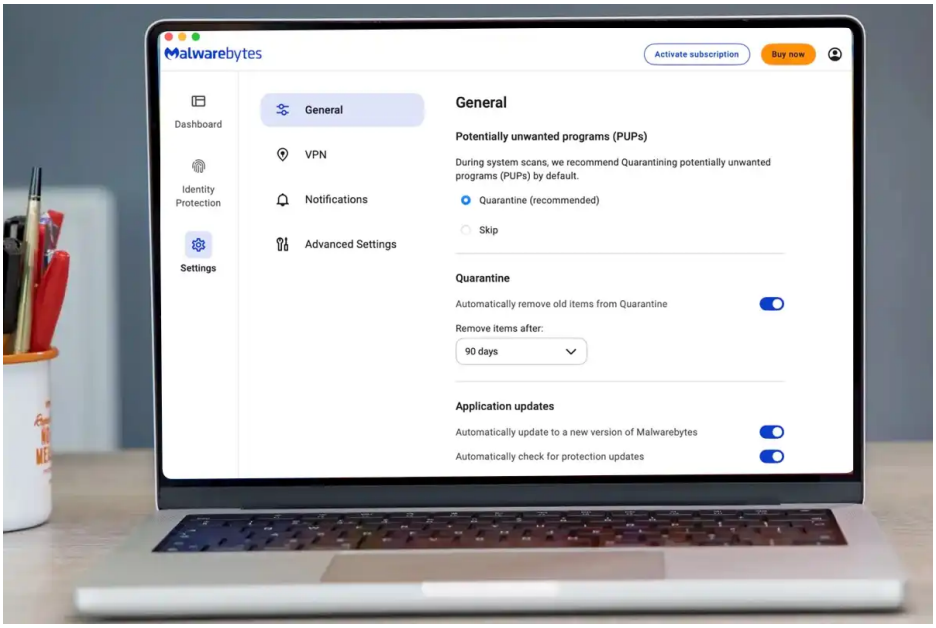
REVIEWS

Malwarebytes Free Antivirus Review

Malwarebytes' free edition is good at removing pesky malware, but bugs, tie-ins to paid services, crashes, and lack of an external volume scan don't help.

By Chris Barylick
Contributor, Macworld | FEB 10, 2025 8:48 AM PST



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At a glance

Expert's Rating

Pros

- Good settings, performance, and easily-created whitelists
- Easy installation, full disk access setup
- Effectively catches and removes some viruses and malware that similar applications sometimes miss

Cons

- Occasional crashes that required software uninstallation, Mac reboot, and reinstallation of Malwarebytes
- Still no external volume scan feature present after all these years

Our Verdict

Malwarebytes' free edition is good at hunting down and removing some of the peskiest viruses and malware around, but between its bugs, occasional crashes, need for reinstallation, and the fact that its full feature set is locked out until an account has been created or a subscription has been signed up for, this feels like pulling teeth. Couple this in with the fact that an external drive scanning feature is STILL missing after all these years and it feels as if the Mac is a second-class citizen where the company is concerned.

Price When Reviewed

Free

Best Prices Today: Malwarebytes Free Antivirus

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There are times when you can love and rely on a utility for a given set of functions, but it can still fall short on the whole. This is the case with Malwarebytes' Free edition, which currently stands at version 5.10.0 as of this writing, requires macOS 11 (Big Sur) or later to install and run and functions as a lead into Malwarebytes' paid services.

The software includes access to Malwarebytes' 14-day free trial, which now requires registration and a credit or debit card to be stored on file to bill against. The paid versions offer features such as Real-Time Protection, VPN functionality, anonymous browsing, $2 million in identity insurance, social media monitoring, enhanced Dark Web monitoring, and an online personal data remover, with the paid accounts starting at $44.99/£29.99 a year for the standard version, more if you opt for the VPN and related features. Read our review of Malwarebytes Premium Security for Mac for more information.

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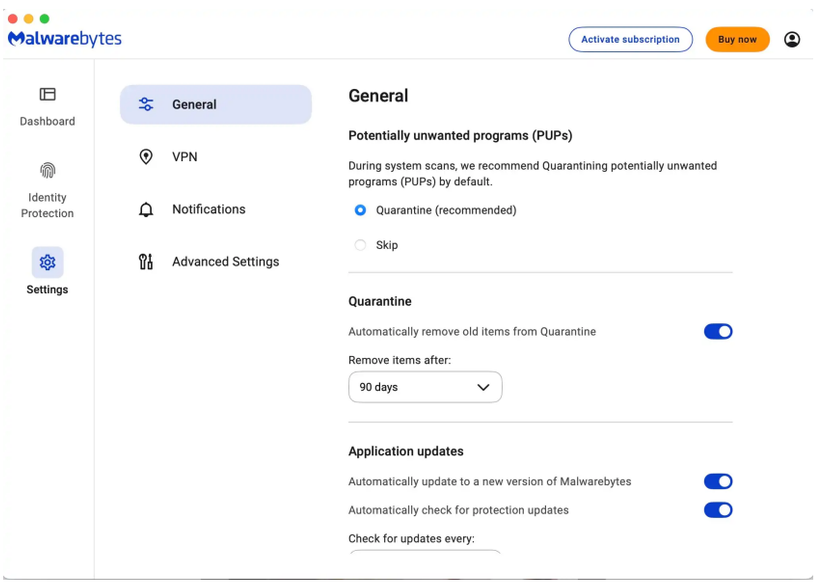
But what do you get with the free version of Malwarebytes? A fair amount, but a lot of it serves as ads/teasers for Malwarebytes' paid services.

The software downloads and installs cleanly, with minimal fuss required to grant it full access to your Mac's entire hard drive. Launch the app, and you can check out features such as Identity Protection, which runs a web-based scan to let you know where your information has been leaked and exposed.

Other features, such as Real-Time Protection and scheduled scans need to be unlocked via a subscription, and the days of extremely easy access to Malwarebytes' fully featured 14-day free trial seem to have gone the way of the dodo. The application's settings are easy to get to, and it's simple to create whitelists of files to ignore during scans, but it seems as if more and more features require at least a registration and means of payment to be stored on file as opposed to unfettered access to the full application's toolset for two weeks to effectively try things out.



Settings for Malwarebytes

Image: Foundry

Testing Malwarebytes' free edition proved mostly successful, and after adding a random slew of malware to my M2 MacBook Pro and running the application, Malwarebytes worked well with macOS GateKeeper function, keeping the vast majority of malware off my Mac and heading questionable installations off at the pass. For the malware that did get through, Malwarebytes was able to remove infamous culprits such as AdWind and XLoader, but didn't remove the fake Adobe Album application I installed, which had to be removed manually.

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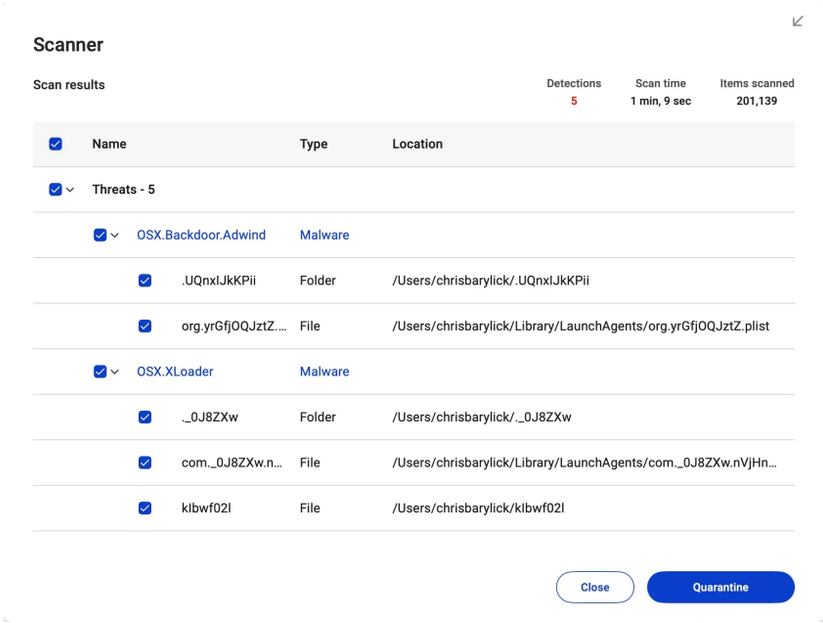

Threats identified

Image: Foundry

Several odd crashes surfaced during testing that offered no error number or crash log to save and reference against, and I found myself uninstalling Malwarebytes, rebooting my Mac, and reinstalling Malwarebytes no less than two times, which was concerning.

Perhaps the most infuriating part of the testing was finding out that Malwarebytes still has yet to offer a volume selection feature to target external volumes such as thumb drives, backup drives, NAS volumes, etc. This feature has been present on the Windows version of Malwarebytes for years, and an email I received from Malwarebytes corporate office last year stated this version was in the works, but as of version 5.10.0, it seems to be nowhere to be found, and it's a rough guess as to exactly which volumes outside of your internal drive the free version will scan for viruses and malware. Yes, this is worth your attention and consideration, but this also feels as if you're pulling teeth here and that doesn't help when you're shopping for a good antiviral/antimalware program to rely upon for your Mac.

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Should you use Malwarebytes Free Antivirus?

In as much as I want to like Malwarebytes' free edition and heartily recommend it without question, I found myself hitting land mines that I'd never run across with the software, which would give anyone pause. I didn't expect I'd have to remove and reinstall it twice, and up until recently, activating the fully-featured 14-day trial didn't require creating an account and placing a credit or debit card on file.

So much of this application feels locked off until the piggy bank opens on your end, and I don't feel as if I'm asking the world for Malwarebytes to finally bring Malwarebytes' Mac version up to par with the Windows version and add an external volume feature to target scans with.

EXPLORE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- How does Malwarebytes perform?
- What features does Malwarebytes premium offer?
- Is Malwarebytes a good deal?
- Can Malwarebytes remove malware?
- Can Malwarebytes protect against ransomware?

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There's a reliable program here, and odds are I'll keep a copy on hand to remove viruses and malware that other programs miss, but it feels as if you need to wrap yourself around the paywall and the application's constraints to get what you need out of it. Yes, this is worth looking into, and the price is right for an annual subscription, but it feels as if Malwarebytes, or any other product this mature, shouldn't have these crashes or place this many obstacles in the way of the program's overall functionality. The user shouldn't feel as if they have to open their wallet to even see if the program is worth their money in the long run.

Best Prices Today: Malwarebytes Free Antivirus

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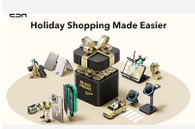

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Author: Chris Barylick, Contributor, Macworld

Chris Barylick is a D.C.-based technology journalist, loves writing about emerging technologies, video games, DIY projects, hardware, utilities, politics, and upgrades, and has written for Macworld since 2007. He is the owner of East Bay Mac Menders, SnarkFish T-Shirts, the Mistakes Were Made Dinocast, and has masters degrees in both Business Administration (George Washington University '05) and Journalism (The University of Maryland '23), and inadvertently wound up in the Guinness Book of World Records for being the "4 AM Guy" at the first Apple Store opening in 2001. He has accidentally set two hard drives on fire to date.

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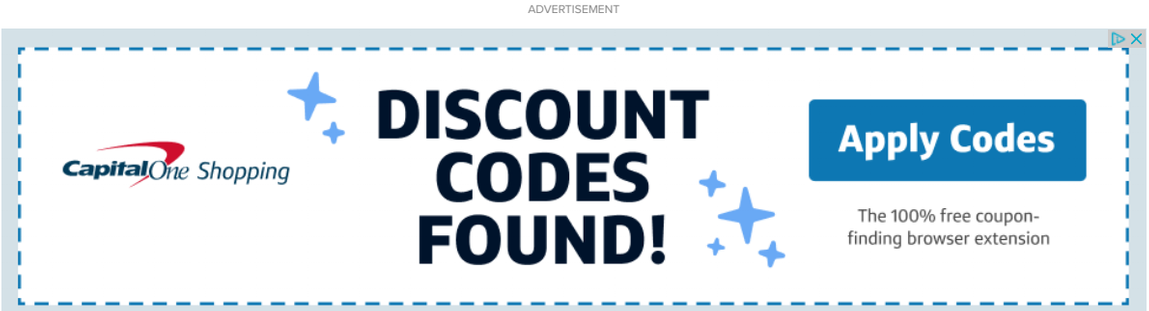

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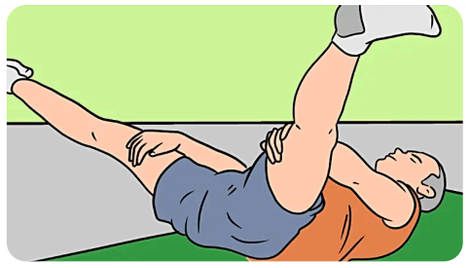

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