

# The Plasma Handbook

Sebastian Kügler



# The Plasma Handbook

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Using Plasma</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Plasmoids and Containments . . . . .	2
2.2	The Panel . . . . .	2
2.3	The Panel Toolboxes . . . . .	4
2.4	Adding Applets . . . . .	4
2.5	The Desktop . . . . .	4
2.6	KRunner . . . . .	5
2.7	"Activities" or the Zooming User Interface (ZUI) . . . . .	5
2.8	Shortcuts . . . . .	6
<b>3</b>	<b>Credits and License</b>	<b>7</b>

## **Abstract**

Plasma, the most visible pillar of KDE, is the core interface to the desktop.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Plasma is one of the key technologies of KDE 4 (also known as the "Pillars of KDE"), and one of the most visible to users. As Plasma treats the user interface differently than a traditional desktop, there may be confusion on what Plasma is, what it does, and how to perform common tasks.

This document attempts to address these problems by providing answers to the most common questions.

## Chapter 2

# Using Plasma

### 2.1 Plasmoids and Containments

The essence of Plasma revolves around two basic concepts:

**Plasmoids** Applets, or small applications that live on the desktop.

**Containments** Applets that act as the container for the Plasmoids

On a default desktop, there are two main elements: the Panel and the Desktop itself. Both are containments in the Plasma sense.

### 2.2 The Panel

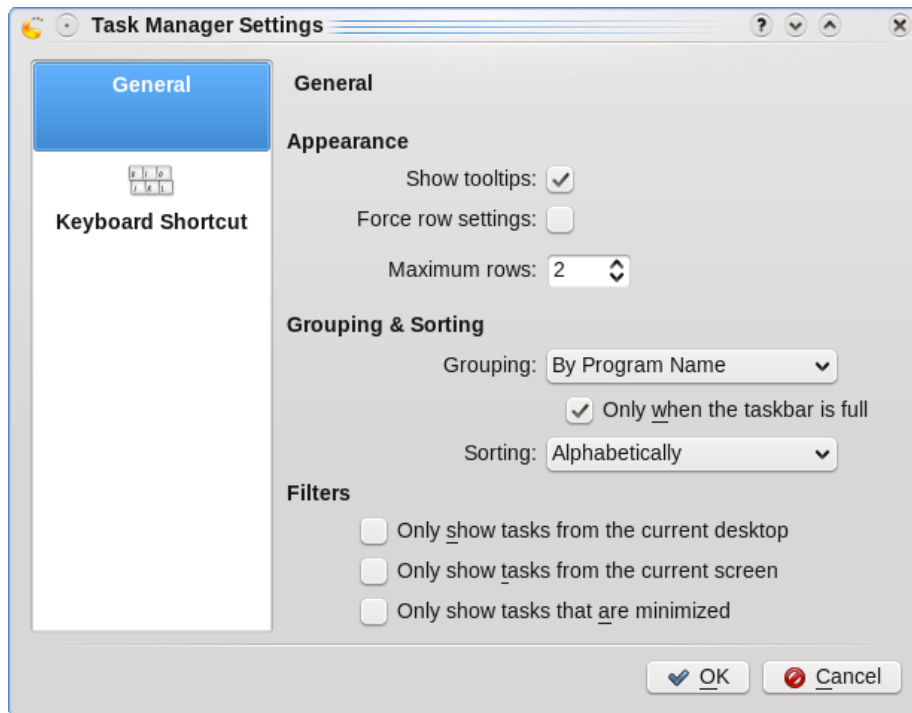
The default panel holds a few Plasmoids: starting from the left, there's the Kickoff application launcher. You can use it to start applications, open recently opened files and the usual logout/shutdown options. There's also a structure that allows you to browse through your applications. The layout has been optimized for the use case that is most common: starting an application. The default tab is the Favorites tab that holds the most-used entries. In the beginning, you'll probably find yourself using the Applications tab more often. Once you have found out what your most frequently started applications are, right click on the items and select the Add to Favorites to add them to your Favorites (or directly into the panel or on the desktop. Note that you need to "unlock" Plasma by means of right clicking on the desktop for any kind of modification). If you prefer KDE's traditional menu-style application launcher, change it by right clicking on the menu button and selecting Switch to Classic Menu Style.

The next icon (looking like either a desktop computer or a laptop, depending on the type of machine) is the Device Notifier. Plug in a USB disk and a dialog will open that allows you to open the device in Dolphin.

## The Plasma Handbook

The next item on your panel is the Pager. It allows you to switch between your virtual desktops. If you change the layout of the Pager through the Number of rows option, which will also affect the layout and animations that are shown in KWin's Desktop Grid effect -- (Switch on desktop effect, press Ctrl+F8 to see it.) For larger pagers, selecting Display windows icons typically makes sense.

The taskbar is up next on the panel. It shows an area for all open windows on all desktops by default. You can make it show all open windows on the current desktop only by checking Only show tasks from the current desktop when you right click on the task manager, between two windows. The size of the text on the taskbar items can be set in System Settings under the Appearance → Fonts → Taskbar. Right-clicking on the taskbar brings the Settings dialog where you can choose several options to customize your taskbar.



Next on our default panel is the System Tray, which is used by traditional applications as a dock. Right clicking on the System Tray allows you to hide or show icons.

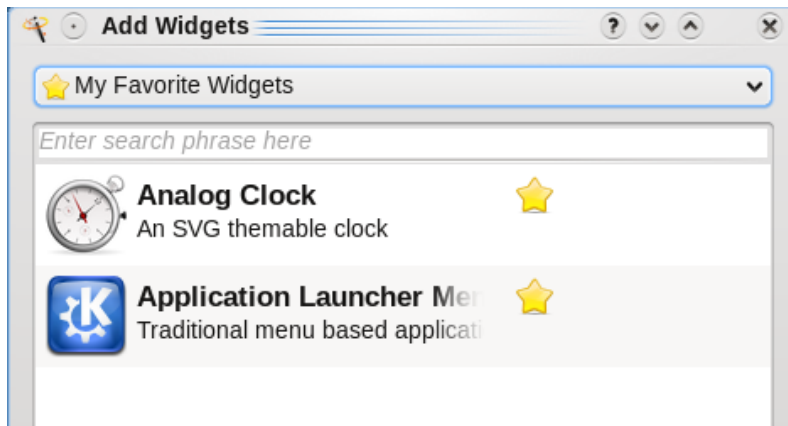
The right-most Plasmoid in the default panel holds the Digital Clock. This clock can display the time in different timezones as well as have its size changed. The clock will adjust its font size to the area it is given by the surrounding containment (that is the panel in this case). If you choose to display the date, this date will be rendered using the Small font option from the System Settings Font dialog. The time will take the rest of the space. So in the end, you'll choose yourself the amount of information displayed, and if that fits. If you want to display more information, make the panel larger or put the clock on the desktop where it can grow freely.

## 2.3 The Panel Toolboxes

If your desktop is unlocked (you can do that by right clicking on the desktop, or when no application has the focus, with Ctrl+L), a small Plasma logo will appear in the bottom right corner (it's commonly named the "cashew"). Click on this cashew, and the panel controller opens. The panel controller allows you to reposition, resize and realign the panel. The Plasmoids living in this panel will adjust their size automatically. Plasmoids have basic knowledge about sizing, provided by the containment. They are programmed to take advantage of that size, and inform the applet about how much space they possibly need. In the end, the containment gives a possible size to the applets, the applets obey.

## 2.4 Adding Applets

Unlock the desktop and you'll be able to add and remove Plasmoids from panel or desktop. You add Plasmoids by simply dragging them where you want them. Right click on an applet to remove it. The Add Applets dialog also allows you to mark certain applets as Favorite so you can find them back more easily.



The Install new widgets button allows you to add widgets you've previously downloaded. Currently it supports native Plasmagik packages and Mac® OSX dashboard widgets. Widgets you install this way can then be accessed just like regular, preinstalled widgets.

## 2.5 The Desktop

The desktop is in fact another containment. One that doesn't put size constraints on the applets. Applets can be moved and sized freely. On the unlocked desktop, Plasmoids will show a frame when you move the mouse over

them. This applet handle allows you to move, resize, relocate and realign the panel. It also allows you to drag Plasmoids on the desktop. The buttons in the corner are used to resize, rotate configure and remove the applet. When rotated, a Plasmoid will act magnetic towards 12 o'clock, so it's easy to get them back into sensible position. By default, most applets keep their aspect ratio when they are being resized. If you want to freely resize an applet, hold the **Ctrl** key pressed while resizing.

Right clicking on the desktop also offers you to configure aspects such as the wallpaper used, and the Plasma theme. Both actions offer to download new wallpapers and themes through KNewStuff.

With open applications, it quickly gets hard to see the Plasmoids on your desktop. The **Dashboard** gets those Plasmoids in front of you, much like the Show desktop functionality you are used to from traditional desktops.

## 2.6 KRunner

KRunner is a versatile mini command-line. You can use it to start applications, open web pages, access bookmarks, search through your desktop data, calculate short equations, and many more. Pressing **Alt+F2** opens the KRunner dialog. You just start typing and KRunner will start searching matches as soon as you've entered more than two characters. You can open the settings dialog to learn about KRunner's functionality, provided by plugins. You can navigate through the matches using the tab and arrow keys.

If you want to know what's going on on your system, there's the Show System Activity button, giving you quick access to a list of windows and processes, with options to monitor their output and kill processes.

## 2.7 "Activities" or the Zooming User Interface (ZUI)

The desktop toolbox, accessed via the top right corner has a button for zooming out. Plasma allows you to have more than one activity. Basically, that is multiple desktop containments hosting multiple sets of Plasmoids. Zoom out from your current activity, choose Add activity to create a new containment, zoom in to your new containment and customize suiting your taste. Plasma's zooming and KWin's desktop grid are similar in that respect, but there is a fundamental difference. While virtual desktop are used to group and organize windows, Plasma's activities are used to group and organize plasmoids. This way, you can switch between activities and have relevant Plasmoids supporting the task you're currently trying to accomplish. You can create a "Free time" activity, with comic strips, a puzzle and other Plasmoids, and a work activity, with relevant RSS feeds, calculator and calendar, for example.

## 2.8 Shortcuts

Most of Plasma's functionality is also accessible through keyboard shortcuts. Currently, the following default shortcuts can be used:

**Ctrl+A** Add widgets

**Ctrl+L** Lock widgets

**Ctrl+-** Zoom out

**Ctrl+=** Zoom in

**Ctrl+N** Next applet

**Ctrl+P** Previous applet

**Ctrl+]** Next containment

**Ctrl+[** Previous containment

**Ctrl+S** Applet settings

**Shift+Ctrl+S** Containment settings

**Ctrl+R** Remove applet

## Chapter 3

# Credits and License

Plasma

Program copyright 2008 Aaron J. Seigo [aseigo@kde.org](mailto:aseigo@kde.org)

Documentation Copyright (c) 2008 Sebastian Kügler [sebas@kde.org](mailto:sebas@kde.org)

This documentation is licensed under the terms of the [GNU Free Documentation License](#).