ToolGPA

NOVEMBER 2026

i3

The Insider’s Guide

Tiling window manager for X11 on Linux and BSD



Every plan, grade, refund rule and rival among window managers and launchers, read from i3’s own pages.

Made by Michael Stapelberg and contributors · checked Nov 13, 2026 · toolgpa.com

2.6
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Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

ToolGPA put this guide together from i3's own pages, its app-store listings and our grades. Every fact in it is on i3's page too, where it is kept up to date. Checked Nov 13, 2026.

Welcome

What it is, who it suits, its grades and the ten things to know first

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GPA, above 23 of the 48 other window managers and launchers we grade

i3 is a tiling window manager for the X11 display server, aimed at advanced users and developers. Windows sit in a tree layout, modes change keybindings, and an IPC interface lets other programs send commands. It is open source under the BSD license.

To get you started, here are **8 things to know about i3**, taken from its own pages and our grades.

> "
>
> **No rating on record, and setup is by editing a text config file.**
>
> From our grade for ease of use

1 **Best for keyboard-driven tiling on X11**

It is for advanced users who edit a text config, and it does not run on Wayland.

2 **It is free**

i3 has no paid plan at all.

3 **It runs on Linux**

Linux.

4 **Tree-based tiling**

Arranges windows in a tree, allowing more flexible layouts than a column-based approach.

5 **Modes**

Vim-like modes let a resize mode use different keybindings from the default mode.

6 **IPC interface**

Other programs can subscribe to events and send commands.

7 **A 2.6 GPA, above 23 of 48**

That is against the other window managers and launchers we grade, on value, the free plan, features, ease of use and platforms.

8 **Keep it**

i3 is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

i3 at a glance

PRICING Free	FREE PLAN It is free
FREE TRIAL None stated	RUNS ON Linux
MADE BY Michael Stapelberg and contributors	CATEGORY Window Managers & Launchers
OUR GRADE 2.6 GPA, good	

The report card

Best for keyboard-driven tiling on X11

i3 is a free tiling window manager for X11 on Linux and BSD, with tree layouts, modes and an IPC interface. It is for advanced users who edit a text config, and it does not run on Wayland.

TOOLGPA REPORT CARD — i3 — Graded Nov 13, 2026

SUBJECT	GRADE	COMMENT
Value for money	A	Free to download under the BSD license with no paid edition, so it sits well under the category's cheapest quarter.
Free plan and trial	A	The whole program is free with no cap, and you can download and run it.
Features	B	Tree tiling, modes, IPC, multi-monitor handling and a User's Guide, with no gap in the window-manager job on the listing.
Ease of use	D	No rating on record, and setup is by editing a text config file.
Platforms and integrations	D	Linux and BSD on X11 only, no other operating system, with no integrations listed.
Grade point average		Good, out of 4.0 **2.6**

An A is worth 4 points, a B 3, a C 2, a D 1 and an F nothing. The GPA is the average of the five.

Who i3 is for

- ✓ Fits if you run Linux on X11 and want to drive windows from the keyboard
- ✓ Works for developers who script their desktop over the IPC

Who it is not for

- ✗ Skip it if you use Windows or macOS, as it does not run there
- ✗ Not for you if you are on Wayland, where the site points to Sway instead
- ✗ Too light for anyone who wants menus and settings screens, because configuration is a text file
- ✗ Watch out: the project says it targets advanced users and developers

Good to know

Good for

- ✓ Linux users who want a keyboard-driven tiling layout on X11
- ✓ Developers who script their desktop through an IPC

Worth knowing

- ⓘ Works with the X11 server only; Wayland users would look at Sway, which reads i3 configs.
- ⓘ Built for advanced users, with configuration done in a text file.

What it costs

Every plan, the free plan, ways to pay less and how prices have moved

Free

No paid plan at all

i3 is free to use.

> **Free to download under the BSD license with no paid edition, so it sits well under the category's cheapest quarter.**
>
> From our grade for value for money

FREE

$0

Free software; the project publishes its source and lists no paid edition.

Read from i3wm.org on Nov 13, 2026.

What it does

Its main features, where it runs, what it works with and who makes it

1

Place it runs: Linux

Tiling window manager for X11 on Linux and BSD. Here is what it does, as its own site describes it, and what it covers: open source, public API, keyboard-first, window management.

> **Tree tiling, modes, IPC, multi-monitor handling and a User's Guide, with no gap in the window-manager job on the listing.**
>
> From our grade for features

Tree-based tiling

Arranges windows in a tree, allowing more flexible layouts than a column-based approach.

Modes

Vim-like modes let a resize mode use different keybindings from the default mode.

IPC interface

Other programs can subscribe to events and send commands.

Multi-monitor handling

Assigns each workspace to a virtual screen and supports rotated monitors.

Documentation

Ships a User's Guide and internal-workings documentation.

Where it runs

Linux

What it works with

Its own pages name no integrations.

i3 is made by Michael Stapelberg and contributors.

Where it stands

Its grades against its category, and whether to keep it or make your own

23/48

Other window managers and launchers it is graded above

i3's GPA of 2.6 is higher than 23 of the 48 other window managers and launchers we grade, and level with 11.

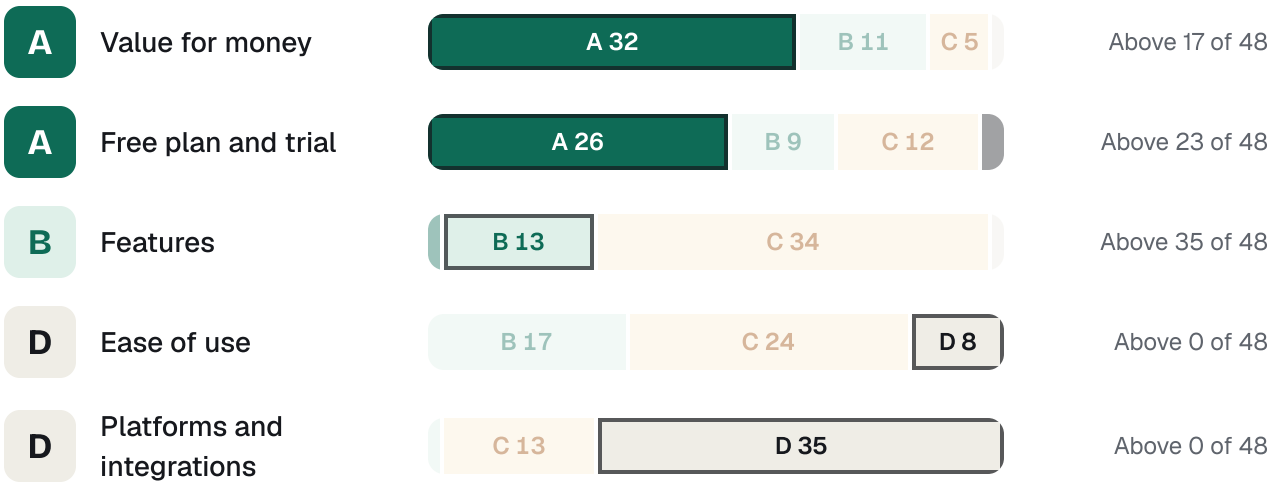
It stands best on free plan and trial (A, above 23 of 48) and worst on ease of use (D, above 0).

i3 has no paid plan.

On features, ease of use and platforms it scores 1.7 out of 4. Nothing scores higher for less, though at least one tool matches that score at a lower price.

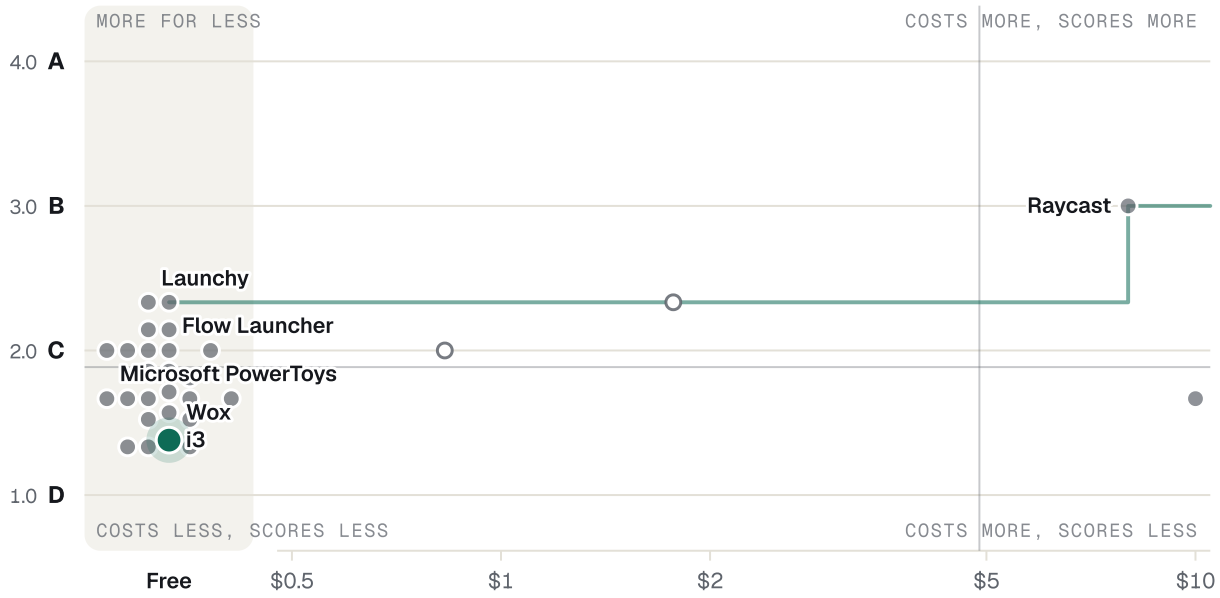
Each grade against the category

Every bar is all 49 window managers and launchers we grade, cut by the letter each got. i3's own letter is outlined.



Price against what you get

Each dot is one of 29 window managers and launchers. Further left costs less; higher up scores better on features, ease of use and platforms. i3 is the marked dot.



What paid plans start at, a month (each step along is roughly double)

Keep it, or make your own?

Whether this is something you could build for yourself with an AI app builder, and what you would give up.

Keep it

i3 is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces.

What you could not

- Control over other apps' windows.
- A real app for Linux. Something home-made would be a web page.
- An API that other software can build on.
- The depth: we grade its features B, which means it covers the whole job.

What this rests on. i3's listing: what it does, where it runs, what it plugs into and what it costs. It is a judgement about the kind of software this is. We have not built a replacement for it, and making your own means looking after it too. How we decide, and every tool's verdict.

The alternatives

The tools it is most often weighed against, side by side



Sway, Awesome, Hyprland, Vicinae and Ulauncher

The 5 tools i3 is most often weighed against, with where each one differs from it.



2.6 GPA

Sway

Free

i3-compatible tiling Wayland compositor.

i3 and Sway compared in full

A

2.4 GPA

Awesome

Free

Lua-configurable framework window manager for X.

i3 and Awesome compared in full



2.6 GPA

Hyprland

Free

Dynamic tiling Wayland compositor with animations.

i3 and Hyprland compared in full



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Vicinae

Free

Keyboard-driven launcher for Linux, macOS and Windows.

- Only Vicinae lists macOS and Windows apps.
- Vicinae also covers launcher, clipboard manager and calculator.

i3 and Vicinae compared in full



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Ulauncher

Free

Open-source application launcher for Linux with extensions.

- i3 also covers window management.
- Ulauncher also covers launcher.

i3 and Ulauncher compared in full

Quick answers

The questions people ask about it, each answered in a line or two

12

Questions, each answered in a line or two

The short version of everything above, for when you only need the answer. Each one is told in full in its part of the guide.

Is i3 free?

Yes. i3 is free to use.

How much does i3 cost?

i3 lists one plan. Free: $0.

What platforms does i3 work on?

i3 is available on Linux.

Does i3 have an Android app?

No Android app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. i3 is listed for Linux.

Does i3 have an iPhone app?

No iPhone app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. i3 is listed for Linux.

Is i3 open source?

Yes. i3 is open source, according to its own site.

Does i3 have an API?

Yes. i3 offers a public API, according to its own site.

Who makes i3?

i3 is made by Michael Stapelberg and contributors.

What are the alternatives to i3?

The closest alternatives to i3 in our directory are Sway, Awesome, Hyprland, Vicinae and Ulauncher.

How does i3 compare with other window managers and launchers?

i3's GPA of 2.6 is higher than 23 of the 48 other window managers and launchers we grade, and level with 11.

Is i3 good value for money?

ToolGPA grades i3 A for value for money. i3 has no paid plan. On features, ease of use and platforms it scores 1.7 out of 4.

Could I make my own version of i3?

i3 is free, so making your own would save you nothing. And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces.

Where this guide comes from

The prices, plans, platforms and features were read from i3's own pages on Nov 13, 2026, and the grades were given on Nov 13, 2026. Graded from this listing, whose facts were read from the i3 project's own pages on 13 November 2026. Not based on using the product, and shorter than our full reviews.

Every tool we list gets five grades, A to F, each with its reason, and a GPA that averages them. How each is decided is at toolgpa.com/grades. This guide is ToolGPA's own work; it is not made, paid for or approved by Michael Stapelberg and contributors. Prices change, so check i3wm.org before you buy.

i3wm.org/
github.com/i3/i3

i3wm.org/docs/

PART 07 · ABOUT

About ToolGPA

Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

7,721

Tools graded, in 95 categories

ToolGPA grades software the way a school report grades a pupil: five subjects, a letter for each with the reason written beside it, and a GPA that averages them. Prices, plans and platforms are read from each maker's own pages and dated, so you always know how fresh a figure is.

Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Every tool on the site has a guide like this one, free to download and pass on. It all lives at **toolgpa.com**.

7,721	95	739	579
tools graded	categories	price changes on record	apps priced in 12 countries

What else is on toolgpa.com

i3, kept up to date

Everything in this guide, with prices and grades as they are today

toolgpa.com/tools/i3

How grades are given

The rules behind every letter and every GPA

toolgpa.com/grades

Value charts

What each tool costs against what it scores, for every category

toolgpa.com/charts

Compare

Any two tools side by side, plan by plan

toolgpa.com/compare

Price changes

Every price rise and cut on record, each with its source

toolgpa.com/price-changes

Prices by country

What apps cost on the App Store in 12 countries

toolgpa.com/prices-by-country

Pay less

Every public discount: yearly billing, students, nonprofits

toolgpa.com/save

Keep or make

Which tools are worth paying for, and which you could build yourself

toolgpa.com/keep-or-make

Scan for the live page

Prices and grades as they are today

Quoting this guide?

Please name ToolGPA and link to the live page, so readers can check the figures for themselves:

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ToolGPA, "i3: The Insider's Guide", checked
Nov 13, 2026. https://toolgpa.com/tools/i3
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Know someone choosing between window managers and launchers?

Send them this guide: toolgpa.com/tools/i3/guide

ToolGPA elsewhere: youtube.com/@toolgpa

See our other guides

The best-graded window managers and launchers after i3, each with an Insider's Guide of its own.

Window Managers & Launchers Insider's Guide

Every one of the 49 window managers and launchers we grade, compared

Flow Launcher Insider's Guide

Free, open-source app launcher and file search for Windows

3.0 GPA

Launchy Insider's Guide

Open-source keystroke launcher with plugins and skins

3.0 GPA

Cerebro Insider's Guide

Free open-source Electron launcher for Windows, Mac and Linux

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Choosing software? Every tool graded, every price dated.

Compare tools at toolgpa.com ›

Everything in this guide is ToolGPA's own summary of what i3's pages, its app-store listings and public reviews said on the dates shown. Grades are our judgement under the rules at toolgpa.com/grades. Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. i3 is a trademark of its owner, and this guide is not made, paid for or approved by Michael Stapelberg and contributors. Prices and plans change: check i3wm.org before you buy.