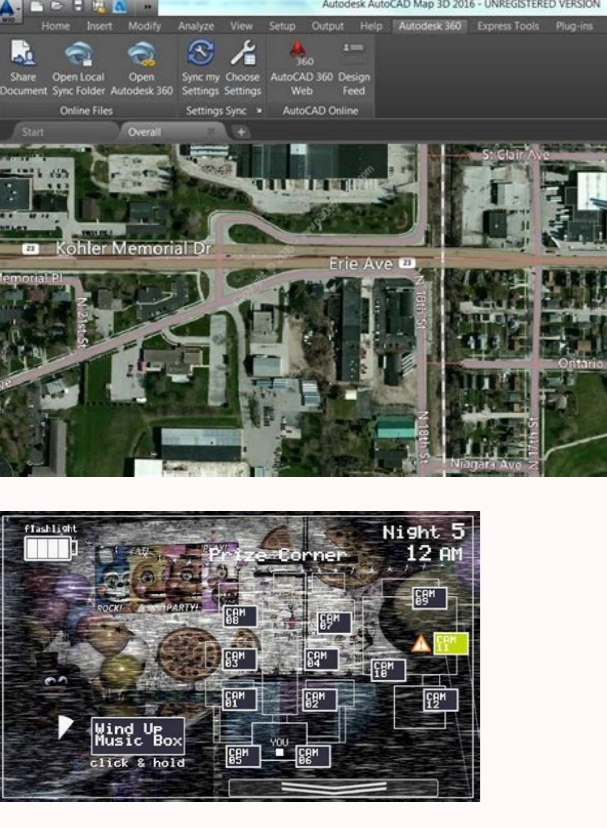


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Skip to content If you've ever wanted to be able to download Google Maps data for offline use, you should check out gmapcatcher, a cross-platform application that caches map segments locally. There's both a GUI version and a command-line version that you can use to pull down the maps data. The whole thing is written in Python, but the installer should handle everything for Windows users. If not, install Python and try again. gmapcatcher (Google Code) How-To Geek is where you turn when you want experts to explain technology. Since we launched in 2006, our articles have been read more than 1 billion times. Want to know more? Google Maps is a completely free service that provides maps, public transport information, detailed directions, and listings of businesses to users all over the world. This article explains how to get directions, change map types or details, download maps for offline viewing, discover places to go and restaurants to try. The Google Maps website and apps can give you directions to and from a location detailing how long it will take to get there, what transport options are available, and suggested times for leaving with an estimated arrival time. This example uses the smartphone app, although the instructions for using the web version are almost identical. Open the Google Maps app on your iOS or Android device. Tap Search here. Type your destination in the Search field. Google Maps provides directions from your current location by default in a search. To look for Google directions from a different starting point, tap Your location and search for a beginning place as you did the destination. Browse the suggested results and tap on the one that you're looking for. Make sure to double-check the location's street name, city, and state to make sure that you get directions to the correct place. You may even need to check the country. The map for the location you choose loads with some basic information along the bottom of the screen. Tap Directions. If this is correct, tap Directions. If the location is incorrect, repeat your search to find the place you're after. The Google Maps driving directions display first by default. Tap Steps to read the turn-by-turn directions. This is useful if you're a passenger assisting the driver or if you need to skip ahead to make sure you make the correct turns. Tap Start to begin real-time Google Maps driving directions that will guide you each step of the way. Google Maps driving directions uses your device's GPS to track your location which can drain your device's battery. If possible, connect your smartphone or tablet to a power source during a long trip. If you prefer public transport options, tap the train icon to view public transport options. Tap on a route to view more details of it or tap the default Depart time to refine your search based on public transport leaving now or to specify an exact departure or arrival time. Tap Options to select specific public transport types and your preferred travel style. Tap Start when you are ready to leave. Customizing the arrival time can be useful when you need to get to a place at a specific time such as when catching a flight or going to a doctor's appointment. You can also tap the person icon to view Google Maps walking directions. The three-lined icon shows you detailed directions, while the Live View option activates an augmented reality (AR) mode that overlays directions on top of what the camera sees. Tap Start for voice navigation to guide your walk. Tap the hailing icon to view Google directions for car services such as Uber. Estimated costs and travel times display at the bottom of the Google Maps app. Tap each company logo to compare details. When you're ready, tap Open App. Tapping Open App opens the related car app on your smartphone or tablet. If you don't have the appropriate app installed, you are prompted to install it. Tap the bicycle icon to view Google bike directions for cyclists. Tap the airplane icon to receive Google directions that involve flying. If no flights are available, you are presented with a Can't find a flight there message. If flights are available, you see an estimated average cost and travel time. Click on See Flights on Google to open a browser window and compare flights on the Google website. The Google Maps apps and website offer several different visual styles that change the way the map looks while maintaining all of its functionality. To change the map type in Google Maps, tap the diamond icon in the upper-right corner and then tap the option that you want to see. If you think you might need to use Google Maps when you don't have a cellular or internet connection, you can save data from specific areas by performing a long press on the map, swiping left on the menu, and tapping Download and then Download again. In newer versions of the software, tap the three-dot icon and select Share Directions. Then, select to print or send the directions to another person or device. In addition to giving directions, Google Maps is also a powerful business directory that can be used to find places near and far. To use the business directory, tap on a category from the floating menu at the top of the screen after opening the Google Maps app. The map then populates with nearby businesses in that category and a listing with basic information and photos. To get more information on each business, tap on its map pin or name from the list. The address and contact information are readily available along with photos and reviews posted by other users. If you're logged into your Google account, you can contribute to Google Maps by adding your own photos and reviews. Select a place, go to the Photos section and select Add a Photo, or go to the Reviews section and choose a star rating. You can also suggest edits for outdated business information, or add missing locations and roads. Thanks for letting us know! Get the Latest Tech News Delivered Every Day Subscribe Tell us why! Walk into any school classroom and you will likely see a flat, rectangular map of the world sprawled across the wall. Generations of children have grown up learning that this projection is what Earth looks like. But does this flat map really reflect what our planet is like? Though designed with the best of intentions — to provide a detailed and coherent projection of Earth — flat maps are far from accurate; some areas look far bigger than they really are, others appear much smaller, and distances between various land masses are misrepresented. "Every world map is distorted in some respect," Matthew Edney, a professor of geography and the history of cartography at the University of Southern Maine, told Live Science in an email. Related: What is the oldest-known archaeological site in the world? "It's a question of what you want," he said. "Do you want the regions to be shaped as they are on a globe, or sized as they are on a globe? For most purposes, the latter is much more appropriate, but the aesthetic of the former is still culturally hegemonic." Despite the protestations of flat-Earthers, our home planet is not flat — it is technically an oblate spheroid — a sphere with a flattened top and bottom and a bulge along the equator. This has, since the dawn of mapping, presented a major problem for cartographers: How can a three-dimensional object be faithfully represented in two dimensions? If you've got a spare globe, or an old tennis ball, try cutting it open and rearranging it into a perfect rectangle — this impractical challenge will give you a good idea of just how incompatible a spheroid and a flat rectangle are. The Mercator projection, created by Flemish geographer and cartographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569, was a revelation half a millennium ago and remains the most widely used flat depiction of Earth, according to MapHover (opens in new tab). This map was favored by navigators for centuries because it enabled them to plot courses in a straight line. In terms of precision, however, it leaves a lot to be desired. A flat map with the Mercator projection. (Image credit: BardoczPeter via Getty Images) Some projections distort more than others," Edney said. "Mercator's projection is the classic example. The projection is conformal and also has the special property that great circles are straight lines," Edney said. A great circle is "defined as any circle drawn on a globe with a center that includes the center of the globe" (opens in new tab), an educational resource website. "This combination of properties," continued Edney, "produces significant areal distortions. On the globe, meridians converge as they approach a pole, and the lengths of parallels of latitude grow shorter until the pole. But, when mapping the Earth into a rectangle, the poles are stretched from points into lines the length of the equator. Every parallel is stretched to the length of the equator, so on the map, there is horizontal stretching as one moves poleward. Related: Who was the first person to write about the British Isles? "On the globe, parallels are equally spaced, but to get the special property of great circles and straight lines, Mercator's projection exponentially increases the separation of parallels as one moves poleward. On the map, therefore, there is increasing vertical stretching as one moves poleward." The result of this is that some regions look far bigger on the map than they are in reality, while others are drawn much smaller. "This distortion is usually described in terms of the relative sizes of Greenland, Europe, Africa and India — the former two shown "larger" than they should be, the latter pair much smaller. Again, all is relative. To put this in context, Greenland and Africa appear to be similar in size on the Mercator projection, when in reality Africa is nearly 14 times larger, according to Scientific American (opens in new tab). Similarly, Alaska is represented as being around three times bigger than Mexico, when in fact Mexico is around 1.3 times bigger (opens in new tab). A map with the Gall-Peters projection. (Image credit: Strebe, CC BY-SA 3.0) So, given the Mercator projection is flawed when it comes to its capacity to represent size, are there any other world maps that we should be using instead? One alternative to Mercator's projection that was popularized in the 1970s and 1980s is the Gall-Peters projection, which is equal-area, but quite ugly," Edney said. "My academic grandfather, Arthur Robinson, said it made the continents look like long underwear hung on a line to dry." This projection has its own accuracy issues. Though all areas are the correct size relative to each other, most land masses are distorted in order to make it so. Land masses appear stretched — horizontally at the poles and vertically at the Equator — meaning that, though countries are roughly the correct size, they are by no means the right shape. This distortion is, as with the Mercator projection, most prominent at the poles. Various other flat maps have been drawn over the centuries, but they all have the same issue: It is impossible to portray the 3D Earth on a 2D map without compromise. The Winkel Tripel projection (opens in new tab), designed in 1921, is the National Geographic Society's preferred flat map, but even this has issues with distortion, particularly regarding the Pacific Ocean, which looks vaster on this map than it is in reality. This double-sided pancake map is the most accurate flat map of Earth ever created. (Image credit: J. Richard Gott, Robert Vanderbel and David Goldberg) This map is favored by National Geographic because, when compared to other small-scale maps, there is less distortion. It is known as a "compromise projection" because, while it doesn't entirely eliminate the common flat map distortions regarding area, direction or distance, it minimizes them as much as possible. This ultimately means that almost every part of the map is distorted in some way, just not excessively. In 2021, astrophysicists produced what is believed to be the most accurate flat map of Earth ever, as reported by Live Science. It consists of two "pancake maps" that can be viewed side by side or back to back. This way of presenting Earth is fundamentally different to nearly every other flat map, and it remains to be seen if it will be widely adopted for use in textbooks and on classroom walls. "I would like it if all map publishers went to equal-area projections," Edney said. "But ultimately it's a matter of what sells." Originally published on Live Science.

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