XFree86 on Darwin and Mac OS X

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1. Introduction

XFree86, a freely redistributable open-source implementation of the X Window System, has been ported to Darwin and Mac OS X. This document is a collection of information for anyone running XFree86 on Apple's next generation operating system.

Most of the current work on XFree86 for Darwin and Mac OS X is centered around the XonX project at SourceForge. If you are interested in up-to-date status, want to report a bug, or are interested in working on XFree86 for Darwin, stop by the XonX project.

2. Hardware Support and Configuration

The X window server for Darwin and Mac OS X provided by the XFree86 Project, Inc. is called XDarwin. XDarwin can run in three different modes. On Mac OS X, XDarwin runs in parallel with Aqua in full screen or rootless modes. These modes are called Quartz modes, named after the Quartz 2D compositing engine used by Aqua. XDarwin can also be run from the Darwin console in IOKit mode.

In full screen Quartz mode, when the X Window System is active, it takes over the entire screen. You can switch back to the Mac OS X desktop by holding down Command-Option-A. This key combination can be changed in the user preferences. From the Mac OS X desktop, click on the XDarwin icon in the Dock to switch back to the X window system. (You can change this behavior in the user preferences so that you must click the XDarwin icon in the floating switch window instead.)

In rootless mode, the X window system and Aqua share your display. The root window of the X11 display is the size of the screen and contains all the other windows. The X11 root window is not displayed in rootless mode as Aqua handles the desktop background.

From the console, the Darwin port of XFree86 uses the IOKit for device driver loading and discovery, rather than the XFree86 module loader. Because of this, the XFree86 configuration file is not used on Darwin or Mac OS X systems. The descriptions found elsewhere of devices supported by XFree86 for other operating systems also do not apply.

XFree86 for Darwin or Mac OS X will work with any video card that you have an IOKit driver for. If you are running Mac OS X, this typically means any card that has been shipped by Apple. If a card works for you with the Mac OS X GUI, it will work on the same machine with XFree86. If you have a pure Darwin installation, you may need to download additional third-party drivers from Apple's Darwin site. IOKit drivers are typically installed in `/System/Library/Extensions/` or `/Library/Extensions/`.

Multi-button and scroll wheel mouse support works well with all USB mice that I have tested. I have done no testing with ADB mice, but without a special driver, only a single mouse button

will work on an ADB mouse.

3. Getting Started

Following are instructions for building and running your own copy of XFree86. The procedure for getting your X server up and running on Darwin and Mac OS X are very similar. Where there are differences I have noted them below. Note that to build XFree86 for yourself on Mac OS X, you need to install the Developers' Tools.

If you don't feel the need to live on the cutting edge, you can save some time and effort by using the precompiled binaries available on the XFree86 FTP server at `<URL:ftp://ftp.xfree86.org/pub/XFree86/4.2.0/binaries/>`. Follow the instructions in the Install document to install it. This will create two new directory trees, `/usr/X11R6` and `/etc/X11` For Mac OS X Quartz support, download the optional Xquartz.tgz tarball. With Quartz support, the XDarwin application will be installed in `/Applications`.

If you get the precompiled binaries you can skip ahead to the section on *running the X Window System* (section 4., page 2) On the other hand, if you want to build things yourself from scratch, follow the directions below.

3.1 Get the Code

The first thing you need to do is to get the source code from the XFree86 project.

- Setup CVS: Both Darwin and Mac OS X include CVS (Concurrent Versions System), which is an easy way to download and keep up to date with open source code released by XFree86 and others. You do have to setup CVS properly, however, to tell it where to look. Follow the XFree86 instructions on how to do this either via ssh or via the cvs pserver.
- Now make a directory in some convenient place which will serve as your top level directory for you open source development efforts. I am going to call this directory `sandbox/` in the following discussions and you could put this directory, for example, in `~/sandbox/`.
- From the command line type:

```
cd sandbox
cvs checkout xc
```

  Wait for all the files to complete downloading.

3.2 Build XFree86

Once you have everything ready it is easy to build and install XFree86. From the command line:

```
cd sandbox/xc
make World >& world.log

(wait for several hours)

sudo make install >& install.log
sudo make install.man >& man.log
```

4. Run the X Window System

You need to add the X Window System executables to your path. Your path is the list of directories to be searched for executable commands. The X11 commands are located in `/usr/X11R6/bin`, which needs to be added to your path. XDarwin does this for you by default and can also add additional directories where you have installed command line applications.

More experienced users will have already set their path correctly using the initialization files for their shell. In this case, you can inform XDarwin not to modify your path in the preferences.

XDarwin launches the initial X11 clients in the user's default login shell. (An alternate shell can also be specified in the preferences.) The way to set the path depends on the shell you are using. This is described in the man page documentation for the shell.

In addition you may also want to add the man pages from XFree86 to the list of pages to be searched when you are looking for documentation. The X11 man pages are located in `/usr/X11R6/man` and the `MANPATH` environment variable contains the list of directories to search.

On Mac OS X, you can run XFree86 from the Darwin text console or in parallel with Aqua. To get to the text console in Mac OS X you need to logout and type ''>console'' as the user name. This will shutdown Core Graphics and bring up the console login prompt. Login again as your user.

From the text console you can start the X Window System by typing ''exec startx''. After a brief wait at least one terminal window should pop up for you. So far it probably isn't very impressive as you might not even have a window manager running to allow you to move windows around.

When you are ready to quit XFree86 type ''exit'' in the main terminal window or quit with the window manager if you have one running. Unfortunately the X server does not shutdown correctly and if you did not start with ''exec startx'', you will get an apparently frozen screen with only a spinning beachball cursor on it. Nothing you type shows up on the screen, but in fact your keystrokes are being received by the console. Type ''logout'' to return to normalcy after a brief delay. With Darwin, this should put you back at the text console login prompt. With Mac OS X, Core Graphics will restart and you should be given a login window.

To start XFree86 in Quartz mode you can launch the XDarwin application in the `/Applications` folder, or from the command line type ''startx -- -quartz''. By default this will give you a mode picker to choose between full screen or rootless mode. You can change the default to always use a particular mode in the preferences, or you can specify the ''-fullscreen'' or ''-rootless'' options on the command line instead of ''-quartz''.

Customize the X Window System

The X Window System is very customizable and you will certainly want to change some things. There is a lot you can do to control how your windows look, how the windows are moved, resized, etc. You will likely want to get a fancier window manager than twm, which is included with XFree86. The `.xinitrc` file in your home directory controls what programs are run when you start the X Window System. You can find a sample `.xinitrc` file in `/etc/X11/xinit/xinitrc`.

There are many window managers that have been ported to Darwin. The following pages contain collections of window managers and other X window system clients:

- Fink: A package manager that will easily download, compile, and install lots of open source software from the Internet.
- GNU-Darwin: A source for tons of software ported to Darwin.
- Stepwise's Softrak site
- Darwinfo's ports page

Good luck!

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