

As with using a product for free or purchasing it, we all make our decisions upon personal preferences.

The same holds true for genealogy software. There is a wide variety of choices from those that are free to those that charge yearly fees for maintaining your data.

Lets start off with what genealogy software is.

Genealogy software is computer software used to record, organize, and publish genealogical data. At a minimum, genealogy software collects the date and place of an individual's birth, marriage, and death, and stores the relationships of individuals to their parents, spouses, and children.

Additionally, most genealogy programs handle additional events in an individual's life, free-form notes, and photographs and other multimedia, and source citations.

Genealogy software programs can produce a variety of graphical charts and text reports, such as pedigree charts, ahnentafel reports, or Register reports. Some desktop applications generate HTML pages for web publishing; there are stand-alone web applications, as well. Most genealogy programs can import and export using the GEDCOM standard.

With many features available certain programs are geared towards specific religions, and will include additional fields relevant to that religion. Other programs focus on certain geographical regions. For example, having a field for the family's coat of arms is only relevant if the family comes from a part of the world that uses them.

Some programs allow for the import of digital photographs. Others focus on the ability to generate kinship charts. Some programs are more flexible than others in allowing for the input of children born out of wedlock or for varying types of spousal relationships.

While most programs and applications are desktop-based, there are a number of web-based entries in the genealogy software market.

Many genealogy applications focus on data management in that they allow users to manage all the information they collect on individuals, families, and events. Other tools available to the genealogist include research management tools, mapping tools, charting programs, and web-publishing programs.

The ability to share information has become tantamount in almost all programs. Most genealogy software will allow for the export of data in the GEDCOM format, which can then be shared with people using different genealogy software. Some genealogy applications use GEDCOM internally and therefore work directly on GEDCOM data. Certain programs allow the user to restrict what information is shared, usually by removing information about living people for privacy reasons.

Now that we have a basic understanding of what the software is, let us take a look at what you as the user has to choose from.

One of the first options that we have to look at is what computer operating system you are going to use. Be it Windows, Mac, or a version of Linux (Ubuntu, Fedora, Red Hat, etc). Once this decision is made we can again narrow down the software options we have.

## The Basic User

A majority of users will want software that is fairly easy to use, and will keep track of the basic data, such as births, marriages, and deaths, as well as family relationships. As a basic user you will also want the ability to document sources, generate reports and share data with others. There are many Windows based programs that will do this for you.

Listed below are some of the easier programs to use. Though many of them have tremendous capability of doing much more than the basics.

I am not recommending any program over another, it is your choice. Take the software out for a test drive. Use it, play with it, experiment, to see if it meets your needs.

Ahnenblatt  
Ancestral Quest  
Brother's Keeper  
Family Historian  
Family Tree Builder  
Family Tree Maker  
GEDitCOM II  
Genbox Family History  
GenealogyJ  
GenoPro  
GRAMPS  
Legacy Family Tree  
LifeLines  
MacFamilyTree  
Personal Ancestral File  
PHPGedView  
Reunion  
SmartGenealogy  
The Master Genealogist  
The Next Generation

## The Advanced User

For those that are slightly more advanced and wish to use programs at that almost professional research level, many of those that I have listed above will do that for you, but there is a class of software available to all that is highly customizable and relatively easy to use, again some is free of charge and some are not. This software is called open source software and usually needs a computer with a web server setup on it to use.

Do not be discouraged, this is not as difficult a task as you think. For the Windows and Mac platform there are a few programs that will load a web server onto your computer.

Programs like WAMP and XAMPP are available to download as a zip file. Once executed, it will load all the server software, create the database and set up all of your systems to use it. Then once it is installed you just find an open source program like GRAMPS (free), or The Next Generation (pay for). Place it into the HTML directory, open your web browser and type in its name like you would any other website, and it appears in your browser. The same software for creating the server will also allow you to create a web site on your own personal computer that if you wish can be uploaded to the web if

you have web hosting company and domain name.

If you are a Linux user you can install the LAMP server protocols and you can be up and running in no time.

What is nice about an open source program, even those that you pay for, is that they all can be changed to meet your needs. You can view all the computer code and edit it at your leisure. Unlike a closed source program where you are locked out of it.

The new Genealogy Software

Within the last few years there is a new type of genealogy software. It is now getting to be called Social Genealogy Media. Places like Facebook where you can link family and friends. Geni, MyHeritage.com and many more.

With these online companies, their basic services for documenting your family tree are free, but in order to view certain information they require a membership. The biggest advantage is that all information is stored online, the disadvantage is that these sites do not offer you a lot of tools to document your information.

I use these sites, by uploading the very basic of my data so that it can be found by others searching for my information.

For more information about many of these programs here is a list of sources for you.

My Heritage <http://www.myheritage.com>

Geni <http://www.geni.com/>

Genealogy Software reviews <http://www.gensoftreviews.com/>

The Master Genealogist <http://www.whollygenes.com/>

Family Tree Maker <http://www.familytreemaker.com/>

WAMP <http://www.wampserver.com/en/>

XAMPP <http://www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp.html>

Ubuntu <http://www.ubuntu.com/>

Legacy <http://www.legacyfamilytree.com/>

The Next Generation <http://lythgoes.net/genealogy/software.php>

PHP GedView <http://www.phpgedview.net/>

GRAMPS <http://gramps-project.org/>

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com>