Email Programs: Thunderbird vs Outlook

An email program is the app on your computer that shows your email. Thunderbird is free. Outlook comes in two versions — a free app and a paid program — and they look alike, which confuses everyone. Here is the simple version.

Thunderbird, in plain words

- Free, made by Mozilla — the nonprofit behind the Firefox browser. No price and no ads. It may mention optional paid extras, like a Thundermail address, but the program itself is free forever and never pressures you to pay.
- Works with almost any email address — Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, Outlook.com, and your internet company's email. You type your email address, then sign in on your email company's own sign-in page, and it sets it up.
- Calendar and spam filter built in. It blocks most junk mail on its own, and it has a calendar for appointments.
- Your email stays yours. It connects straight to your email company — nothing extra is stored on anyone else's computers in between.
- Windows, Mac, and Linux. Download it free from thunderbird.net.

The confusing part: two Outlooks

Microsoft uses the same name for two different things. Here is how to tell them apart:

- Outlook the program (classic) — the full desktop program. It comes with a paid Microsoft 365 subscription (about $100 a year for one person). It has a ribbon of buttons across the top and a File menu. This is the powerful one — offices use it.
- Outlook the app (new) — the free one. It comes built into Windows 11 and replaced the old Windows Mail app at the end of 2024. It works with Outlook.com, Gmail, and Yahoo accounts. The free version shows small ads.

- Which one do I have? Open it and look at the top-right corner. If you see a switch that says “New Outlook,” you are using the new app. If the top-left says “File” with a wide ribbon of buttons under it, you have the classic program.
- Outlook on your phone — the Outlook app for iPhone and Android is free. It signs in with any email address and keeps your mail, calendar, and contacts together.

Note: You still need an email address first A program is not an account. Thunderbird and Outlook are the windows you look through — you still need an email address (Gmail, AOL, Yahoo, or Outlook.com) to look at. All three programs work with all of those addresses.

Free vs paid, honestly

- Thunderbird — free, no ads. The best no-cost choice for most people.
- New Outlook app — free, but shows ads. Fine if it came with your computer and you like it.
- Classic Outlook program — paid, as part of Microsoft 365. Worth it if you already pay for Microsoft 365 for Word and Excel, or you want the most powerful email program.
- All three work with Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL. You do not need to change your email address to change programs.

When to call Sean instead

- You are not sure which Outlook you have.
- You want Thunderbird installed and set up.
- Your email will not sign in to any program.
- The old Windows Mail app stopped working and you need your mail back.

Call Sean at (813) 770-6082.

Need a hand? Call Sean at **(813) 770-6082**.