

Helium 2.1.1

The Balloon Help Manager

Written by and © Copyright 1991 Robert L Mathews.
Icons by AndrewWynn (Cool, aren't they?)

About Helium

You've probably said it yourself: "Balloon Help is a good thing! But I hate the drudgery of having to go all the way to the Help Menu, turn on Balloon Help, point at the thing I want help with, and then turn Balloon Help off again every time I want help with one little thing! And that small, ugly type in the Balloons is unreadable and unattractive!" (If you haven't said that, go ahead and say it now. We'll wait while you catch up. Anyway, it sounds better when said out loud.)

Helium puts an end to that awful drudgery forever. It allows you to choose a key combination that inflates Help Balloons instantly (well, close enough). When you let go of the keys, the Balloons disappear. It's almost magical!

If that weren't enough, you can also choose the font and size of the text that appears in most of the Balloons, and you can hide the Balloon Help icon in the menu bar without giving up access to those special Help Menu items. This is sort of magical, too.

Installing Helium

To install Helium, put it in the Control Panels folder (you can just drop it onto your closed System Folder and it will find its way there) and restart your Macintosh. You should see the fantastic Helium icon at the bottom of the screen as Helium is installed. If you want to turn Helium off for a single computing session, hold down the shift key or the mouse button before the icon appears to prevent it from installing (you'll instead see the Helium icon with an X through it). If you want to turn Helium off for longer than that, it's probably more convenient to simply remove it from your Control Panels folder.

Once you've installed it, open the Helium control panel and personalize Helium by typing in your name or company name. Then, adjust the settings to your satisfaction...

The Helium Control Panel

The first (and most important) thing to do here is set the combination of keys that will make Helium inflate the Help Balloons. To do this, hold down the keys you want to use, and click the "Set Hot Keys" button with the mouse. You probably shouldn't set it to be the same combination that any other application or extension uses to do something special - not because you'll have any technical problems, but because you'd find two things happening at once. You can use the Command, Option or Shift keys — and if you have an Extended Keyboard, you can also use the Control and Help keys.

If you choose to use Help as a Helium hot key, other applications that normally use the Help key for something else will ignore it. For example, pressing Help in Microsoft Word would normally invoke Word's help screens, but it won't if you're using it for Helium. The Help key will, on the other hand, work normally if you don't use it as a Helium hot key, even if Helium is installed.

You can choose the font and size in which you'd like most Help Balloons to display their text. Just choose the appropriate settings from the pop-up menus. (If you accidentally create something really ugly or unreadable while experimenting with this, you can press the "Use Standard" button to restore Apple's default settings.)

If you'd like to hide the Balloon icon in the menu bar, check the appropriate box. If you do this, you can still pull down the Help menu by holding down the command key and clicking in the application menu. This allows you to choose custom Help Menu items ("Finder Shortcuts", for example) that are inaccessible with other utilities that hide the Help Menu icon.

You can also check or uncheck the "Show Startup Icon" checkbox - if it's unchecked, you don't get to

see AndrewWynn's great icon, but some people think startup icons mess up their startup screens, so you can do it if you must.

With the exception of showing a hidden Balloon Menu icon, any of the settings that you change in the Helium control panel take effect immediately: you don't have to restart your Macintosh, or even close the control panel. Hiding the Balloon Menu icon also takes effect immediately - however, for technical reasons, showing it has no effect on applications that are already running. The icon will appear when you launch a new application or restart your Macintosh.

[A Note About Finder 7.0 Menus](#)

Let me start by saying that I love Finder 7.0 dearly. The folks at Apple did a fantastic job. Now let me say that it seems to have some "unexpected features" (some people have overheard me calling them "bugs," but I'm mostly past the resentment stage now).

These features can conceivably interfere with Helium's ability to inflate menu Help Balloons in the Finder if you already have a menu pulled down and then press the hot keys. If you have problems with this working, simply let go of the mouse button, hold down the hot keys, then click in the menu title again. Helium will then work properly until the computer is restarted. Lumped into the same "unexpected feature" category (although the causes are actually different) are the fact that you cannot get Balloon Help for a menu title until after you have clicked in a menu at least once since you turned the computer on (go figure: I don't understand that one either), and the fact that Apple menu items will never show Help Balloons unless you have the hot keys pressed down when you first click in the Apple.

Anyway, now that we're past all that unpleasantness, let me just end on a happy note by reiterating that if you have any problems with Finder menus showing Help Balloons, you can just hold down the Helium hot keys before you pull down the menu, and the problem will go away (and probably not come back until you restart). This problem may be fixed in future versions of the Finder.

[Shareware Information](#)

This version of Helium is shareware. (An earlier version was free, but I've spent a great deal of time making this version much cooler, so now it's merely cheap. Sorry.) The shareware system allows you to try software for a while before you pay for it. In this case, you can try it free for 15 days; after that, Helium will remind you that the shareware trial period has expired — then you should either stop using it or send \$7 to pay for it. If you decide to pay for it, you'll receive a secret code that stops the annoying reminder messages.

To pay for Helium, press the "Order" button in the control panel. You'll see ordering instructions and my address. If you'd also like a disk containing the latest version of Helium and some other fun stuff (like sounds and demonstrations of other shareware I've written), simply send another \$5 (that makes \$12 total) and I'll send it to you — no need to enclose a blank disk or stamps or anything like that.

The software can be freely given to anyone else, uploaded to bulletin boards, or distributed through user groups. In fact, I'd appreciate it if you'd do so! However, I do not receive any money that you might have paid to your user group, online service, CD-ROM distributor, or whatever else to get a copy of Helium, so you'll still need to pay the \$7 for it if you decide to keep it.

You can contact me on America Online by sending mail to "L Products" if you'd just like to talk about Helium (or really anything at all), or you can send "real" mail to the address in the "Order" window. If you're having problems with Helium, or have any questions, I'll be happy to help you whether you've paid the shareware fee or not. (You can also reach me electronically on CompuServe: 72551,372; or on GENie: R.MATHEWS4. However, I do not use either of these services more than twice a month, so it might take a while.)

[Ch-ch-changes](#)

Changes from version 2.0.2 to version 2.1:

◇ The seed code registration system has been eliminated, and the reminder messages now appear

only once every five days. You should pay anyway.

◇ Helium 2.1 supports a feature called “Helium Balloons”, which allow people to write and easily distribute Balloon Help files for applications which do not currently support Balloon Help. Information on using Helium Balloons will be included with Helium Balloon files; if you are interested in creating one, contact me for simple instructions and examples.

◇ By extremely popular demand, it’s now possible to hide the Balloon Help menu bar icon.

◇ Added an “Other...” option to the font size menu; you can now choose any size from 6 to 500 points, and I encourage you to do so at least once to see what it looks like.

◇ More Help Balloons added just about everywhere in the control panel.

◇ Added the “Use Standard” font & size button.

◇ Fixed various updating problems related to balloon help and screen savers.

The only change from 2.1 to 2.1.1 fixed a cosmetic bug if the personalization information was left blank. It now can’t be left blank.

[Aware-Ware?](#)

If you’ve really read all the way to the bottom, congratulations. You’re just the sort of get-out-and-go person that we want reading this section. Since Helium deals with balloons, I’d like to mention something about real balloons...

Every year, thousands of animals (especially marine creatures) die from choking on helium balloons that people have let go outside. The bright colors and texture are attractive to many animals, which die a painful and completely unnecessary death by choking. So - don’t let helium balloons go outside, and don’t participate in contests to see how far balloons can travel. An animal’s life is worth more than that.

For more information about animal rights issues, you can contact People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals:

ETA
.O. Box 42516
ashington DC 20015

...or you can call them for information at (301) 770-7444. Many of the suggestions PETA has are simple ones, like not letting go of helium balloons outside — and although PETA has a reputation as a militant animal rights organization, you won’t be required to become a vegetarian or do anything radical. A small change in your habits can make a big difference to a suffering animal.