

Software Reviews

Fruityloops 3 for Windows

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Fruityloops Anyone?

Well there are some programs that seem to push your PC and your creativity to the limits! Fruityloops 3 is one such tool! Definitely not for the technophobes, it brings the funky homeboy garage scene into the mainstream, creating electronic trance/techno/dance music on your desktop. Fruityloops 3 produces commercial quality tracks that sound as modern as tomorrow.

What is Fruityloops 3?

The description outlined in the help defines it eloquently. "Fruityloops is a pattern based sequencer, which means you create your songs in pieces (patterns) using the Step Sequencer and the Piano Roll view and then weld those pieces together using the Playlist window.

First Impressions

When I first looked at Fruityloops, as a musician, I thought it detracted from the art of making music as it is just point-and-click. Perhaps there needs to be a new style called "mouse music" and the orchestrator called the "mouse musician". However, after playing around with it for a few hours I quickly came to realise that behind the clicks are some very powerful tools that seem to have limitless boundaries in what can be done. Yes, it takes the concept of point-and-click technology to the max, with hundreds of gizmos to enhance, tweak, deform, filter and explode your sound. There seems to be virtually no limit to what can be created, as every note can have a multitude of effects and filtering. I must mention the appearance of the screen and layout. It is absolutely fantastic and obviously hundreds of hours has gone into making so slick and functional. I couldn't fault it. In a word - IMPRESSIVE!





Figure 1 The step entry window.

Figure 2 A full screen shot of Fruityloops 3

Fruityloops comes in three very tasty flavours

- Fruityloops Online Pro (US \$49.00)
- Fruityloops Online Full (US \$99.00)
- Fruityloops Boxed (US\$149.00 or AU\$299.00)

So what's different between the versions other than the price?

Fruityloops PRO contains all of the core editors and functions it needs to operate. These include external generators, 16Bit 44 KHZ stereo, external midi control, unlimited number of channels, 4 to 64 notes per pattern, integrated TS-404, support for VSTi and DXi, export to wav, mp3 and MIDI, playlist and piano keyboard. The FULL versions contains everything in the PRO Plus the following. Piano roll, full automation of all the wheels, ASIO support (very low latency), internal controllers. The BOXED version contains all of FULL plus the following. It comes in a box (funny that!), printed manual, DreamStation DXi (\$35.00 US), CD containing over 3300 royalty free samples.

An interesting benefit of purchasing any of the download versions is that it gives you access to lifetime free updates. Which means, when version 3.5, 4, 5 and 10 come out in the future, it's free. A lot of companies usually offer a few of the sub releases free, as firstly, they are bug fixes and secondly, features that weren't tested enough to make the original release date. It's an interesting idea, and one certainly not on the Microsoft Office drawing board! The skeptic in me wonders if they actually are ever planning to release an update, as it would be an easy claim to make then... Only time will tell.

If you browse the <http://www.fruityloops.com/> website, you will find some of the subtle differences between the versions.

The demo on the website (which was the version used for this review) contains all of the features of the FULL version. The developers have been very generous in that even though save has been disabled, you can still export as wave, MP3 or MIDI for free! This is handy if you want to make a drum loop to import into your existing sequencer, sampler or to even produce a full song and send over the Internet to your friends. The only drawback of course is that if you want to go back and work on a piece you did last week, you will then need to start again! That's the price you pay when it's free. If you're at this stage, it might be worth your while to purchase it, as you are not only saving your own time, but also supporting the very talented programmers who produced this very cool program.

Getting it Setup

Installation was a breeze, no conflicts or reboot required. It is recommended however that you have the latest version of Microsoft DirectX (version 8) already installed. This is a free download from the www.microsoft.com website. Windows 95/98/ME/2000 and XP compatible, with around 30 Meg of free hard disk space needed. The box says a Minimum of a 486, however recommends a Pentium II processor or higher. Basically, the faster your machine, the more powerful, Fruityloops becomes, as it is able to run more effects and channels at once. Ram memory requires 16 Meg, however 64 or higher is recommended. If using the boxed version, a CD drive must also be installed. For this review I used an AMD Thunderbird Athlon 1.2 gig with 512 Meg ram, 80 gig HD and a Yamaha Waveforce audio card. I had **ZERO** problems with the stability of this program. Despite I feel pushing it and the computer beyond the limit I had not a solitary crash. Amazing stuff!

What are some of the practical applications for Fruityloops?

Other than the obvious, which is to make really modern music, it has some interesting benefits in education and commercial environments.

Some ideas for education:

- The student could be given the hands-on task to compose basic patterns like, 4 beat, 8 beat, 16 beat. This would not only reinforce an understanding of contemporary drum styles, but they could also discover that the styles that are used today are very similar to the ones used back in the 60's. A basic 8 beat rock, could be created using acoustic instruments (ie a drum kit), then using the same pattern, replace the instruments with an electronic kit. This of course would need supplemental explanations by the teacher, however using the

exploratory method, seems to be a big hit when dealing with kids of any age in education.

- Following the exploratory theme, it is possible to hear and learn how various filters and effects change the timbre of a sound.
- Arranging skills – listening to various combinations in the playlist of the same material. Bringing various different ideas at different time can dramatically change the overall sound of the piece.
- The power of Fruityloops makes it possible to import a MIDI file then re-orchestrate the piece using more contemporary instruments, which could be MIDI, or the internal instrument of Fruityloops. The amazing thing here is during my tests, there was no perceivable delay between the MIDI and software synthesiser. The kids of today may never appreciate the problems of latency, as it simply doesn't exist in Fruityloops.

A small warning to all the educators out there. If you decide to use Fruityloops in your lessons, make sure you delete "C_HC" from the Cool Stuff folder as it does contain words that are inappropriate for kids. Even the website this guy references to is strange.... Anyway, you have been warned!

From the commercial point-of-view:

- The fact that everything that is created (unless you use unlicensed samples) is 100% royalty free.
- Ability to easily create perfectly loopable wave files is invaluable when creating promotional CD's or interactive content (e.g. Macromedia Flash) for the Internet.

Talking to other Users

To get more in touch with the end user, I decided to interview a 12 year old boy, Scott Henderson who is a piano, keyboard and clarinet player. Here are the results.

Q. When did you first hear about Fruityloops 3?

A. *2 to 3 months ago.*

Q. How long before you produced your first song?

A. *It was around a month, I was sort of playing around with a bit on and off, then when I understood how the patterns thingies worked, it was easy.*

Q. Tell us about some of its cool features.

A. *I really like the fact it comes with 13 really cool built-in effects, you can create your own sounds, set different wall papers depending on my mood and easy to use.*

Q. What do you like best about Fruityloops?

A. *Definitely all the effects. There are so many combinations, it's amazing!*

Q. Did you find it difficult to learn?

A. *At the start yes, but once I looked at the demo songs and had a quick read through the book things became a lot easier.*

Q. Do you think you have mastered all of its features?

A. *No, far from it!*

Q. Have you ever used a program like Fruityloops before?

A. *Yes, Acid, Do-Re-Mix and Super Duper Music Looper.*

Q. Out of 10, what rating do you give Fruity Loops?

A. *About 8.5*

What about the competition?

Here is a brief outline of the some of the alternatives to Fruityloops. Both hardware and software solutions are examined.

H	S	Product	Manufacture	Description	Brief Comparison	R.R.P.
Y		DJXII	Yamaha	A MIDI keyboard with a large array of very modern DJ sounds, effects and patterns. Also includes sampling capabilities. www.yamahadjx.com	Able to perform live on stage whereas Fruityloops is generally pre-recorded sequences. Fruityloops is a little more flexible in what can be achieved as it has more editing capability.	US\$269.95
Y		DJXIIB Groove Box	Yamaha	Same concept as the DJXII, however in a box and keyboardless. www.yamahadjx.com	Same as the DJXII	US\$295.95
Y		Groovebox D2	Roland	Roland's equivalent to the DJXIIB. http://www.rolandus.com/	Same as the DJXII	US\$279.95
	Y	NewBeat Trancemission	Microforum	Enables patterns to be mixed together using a very easy-to-use interface.	Released back in 1996, is getting a little on the old side. Only uses 22KHz samples and doesn't contain a software synthesiser or DSP effects.	AU\$99.95
	Y	Acid	Sonic Foundry	A music painting program that can paint loops along a timeline to create a piece. Very well supported with additional loop libraries available. Many effects available, as well as the ability to add Video. http://www.sonicfoundry.com/	A serious competitor for FruityLoops, however I feel FruityLoops is more flexible in that it is able to create its own custom patterns.	US\$399.96
	Y	Super Duper Music Looper	Sonic Foundry	A cut-down version of Acid designed for kids. Same painting features, however no effects. http://www.sonicfoundry.com/	A fun way to make modern music. It is aimed at a different market (kids), so	US\$29.97

					doesn't have the flexibility of FruityLoops.	
	Y	Groove Blender 2	Shockwave.com	A free music mixer that is designed to promote the power of the Pentium 4 - however all you need is a fast computer (an AMD Athlon will run it with no problems). Preset music objects are able to be inserted over a timeline. These can be saved as a WMA file for transmission over the internet. http://www.shockwave.com/	Doesn't have much editing ability (No pattern editor, effects and no software synthesiser). Just a real fun way to make music that doesn't require much musical ability.	FREE

H = Hardware, S = Software

Summing Up

Fruityloops comes highly recommended to anybody interested in producing very contemporary music. The user interface is a small problem and probably has to do with the fact that the software is so advanced. If the developers simplified the operation, then it would possibly reduce the number of options and programmability it currently has. Once you have mastered the interface, the possibilities are virtually endless. Comes highly recommended for amateur to semipro home users, education from around 12 years (if they are very bright and creative) and up, and in commercial production for original loop based material. It would be amazing to think how the developers could improve on such a great program.

Pros

Once you understand how to use Fruityloops it is a very flexible sequencer with seemingly limitless capabilities. It is extremely responsive and it is hard to believe it is based on software synthesiser technology. You do not need a deep understanding of rhythm or for that matter the ability to play any instrument to get Fruityloops working for you, as a high level of computer or musical skill is not required. The entertainment value is very high - particularly the super kooool video light show. Fantastic if you have a dual monitor set up and the students I showed it to were all totally hooked. Documentation is excellent. I feel that the marketers actually **UNDERSELL** this program, as I believe it is far better than they claim - pretty rare these days!

Cons

Can be a little confusing at first as there are simply so many things to click-on. Maybe they could have some tutorial videos to get you started as well as two modes – beginner and expert. Shame that the A5 manual is in B&W as it really is a very “colourful” program and the manual just doesn't do it justice.

Ratings

Value for Money	8
Usability	7
Features	9

Total Score 8

SUPPLIER: www.fruityloops.com

Oh yes - I will be buying a copy ASAP!