How to create desktop shortcut or launcher on Linux

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If you have a program you use regularly on Linux desktop, you may want to create a "desktop shortcut", so you can launch the program by simply clicking on the shortcut. While most GUI programs automatically create their desktop shortcut during installation, GUI programs built from their source or terminal applications may require you to set up associated shortcuts manually.

In this tutorial, I will describe **how to create a desktop shortcut or launcher on various Linux desktops.**

A desktop shortcut is represented by a corresponding .desktop file which contains meta information of a given app (e.g., name of the app, launch command, location of icon file, etc.). Desktop shortcut files are placed in **/usr/share/applications** or **~/.local/share/applications**. The former directory stores desktop shortcuts that are available for every user, while the latter folder contains shortcuts created for a particular user only.

Create a Desktop Shortcut From the Command Line

To manually create a desktop shortcut for a particular program or command, you can create a .desktop file using any text editor, and place it in either /usr/share/applications or ~/.local/share/applications. A typical .desktop file looks like the following.

```
[Desktop Entry]
Encoding=UTF-8
Version=1.0                                  # version of an app.
Name[en_US]=yEd                              # name of an app.
GenericName=GUI Port Scanner                 # longer name of an app.
Exec=java -jar /opt/yed-3.11.1/yed.jar       # command used to launch an
Terminal=false                               # whether an app requires t
Icon[en_US]=/opt/yed-3.11.1/icons/yicon32.png  # location of icon file.
Type=Application                             # type.
Categories=Application;Network;Security;     # categories in which this
Comment[en_US]=yEd Graph Editor              # comment which appears as
```
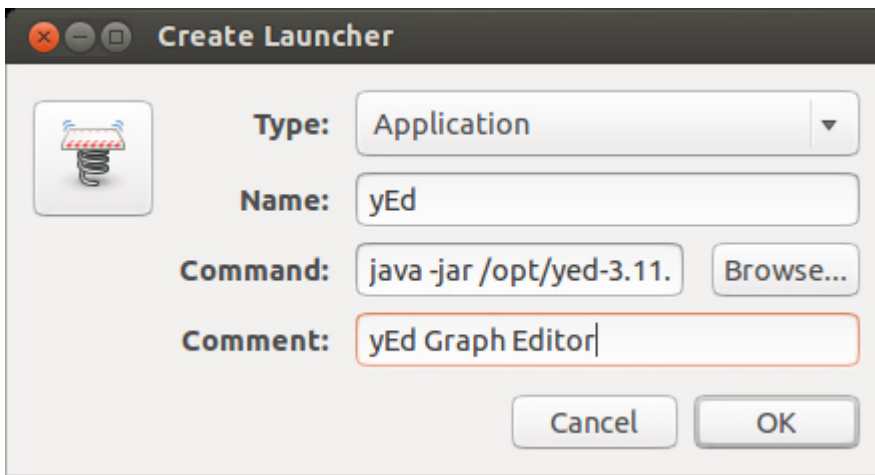
Besides manually create .desktop file, there are various desktop-specific ways to create an application shortcut, which I am going to cover in the rest of the tutorial.

Create a Desktop Shortcut on GNOME Desktop

In GNOME desktop, you can use `gnome-desktop-item-edit` to configure a desktop shortcut easily.

```
$ gnome-desktop-item-edit ~/.local/share/applications --create-new
```

In this example, `gnome-desktop-item-edit` will automatically create a desktop launcher file in ~/.local/share/applications. To customize icon location and other info, you may have to edit the .desktop file manually afterward.
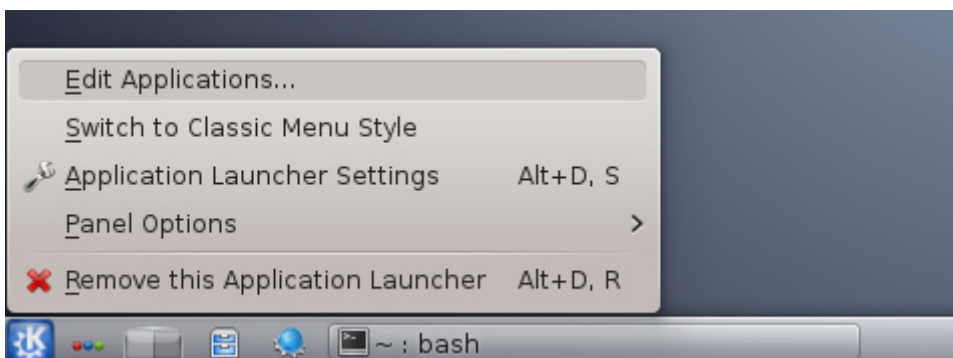
If `gnome-desktop-item-edit` is not available (e.g., on Ubuntu), you can install it as follows.

```
$ sudo apt-get install --no-install-recommends gnome-panel
```
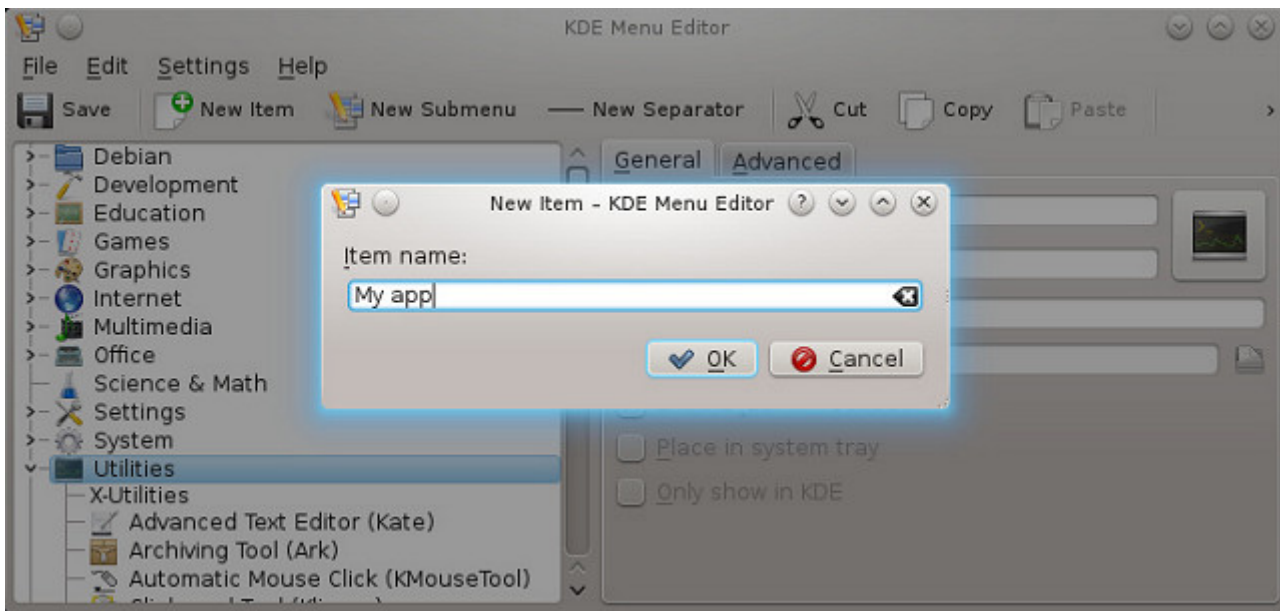
Create a Desktop Shortcut on KDE Desktop

`kickoff` is the default application launcher in KDE desktop. Adding a new application shortcut to `kickoff` is straightforward.
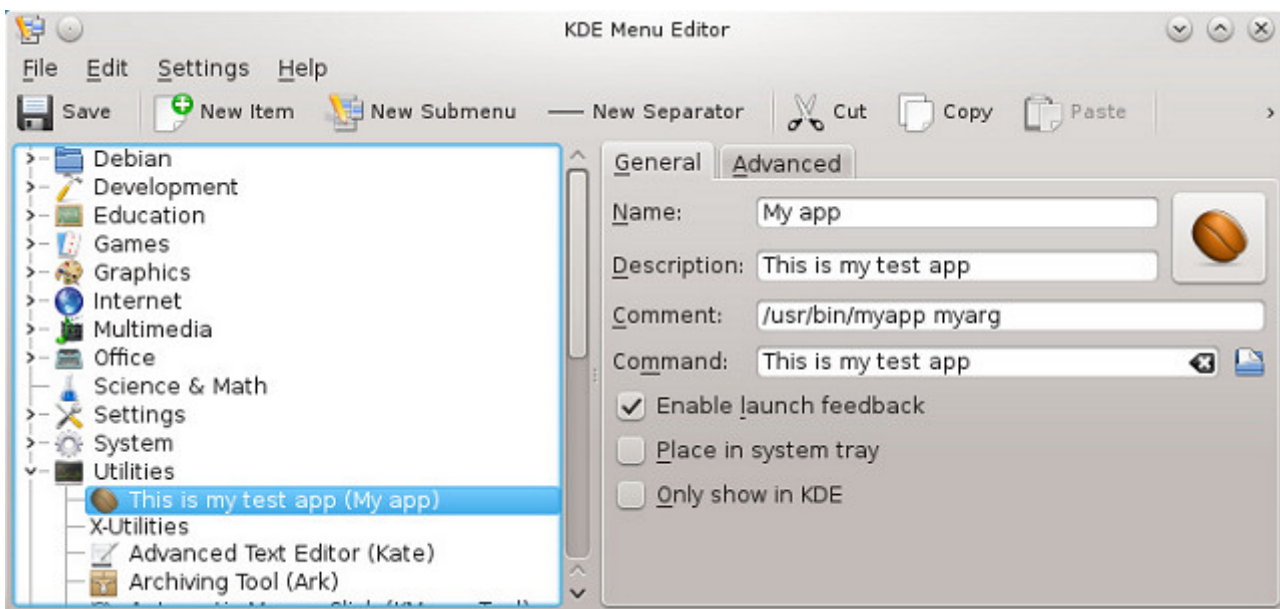
First right-click on `kickoff` icon located at the left bottom corner of your desktop, and then choose "Edit Applications" menu.

Click on an appropriate category (e.g., "Utilities") under which you want to create a shortcut, and click on "New Item" button on the top. Type in the name of the app.
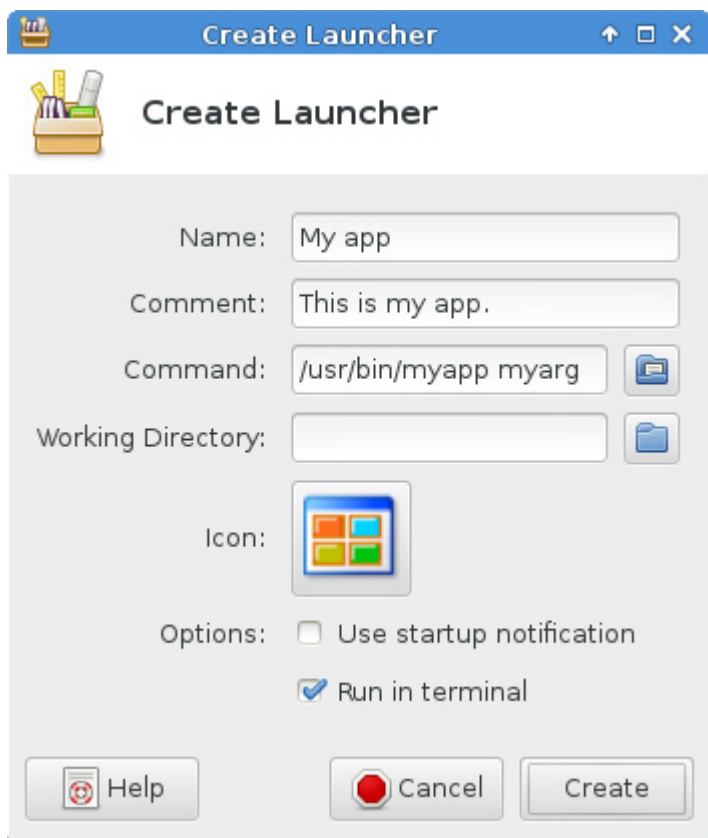
Finally, fill in the meta information of the app being launched by the shortcut.
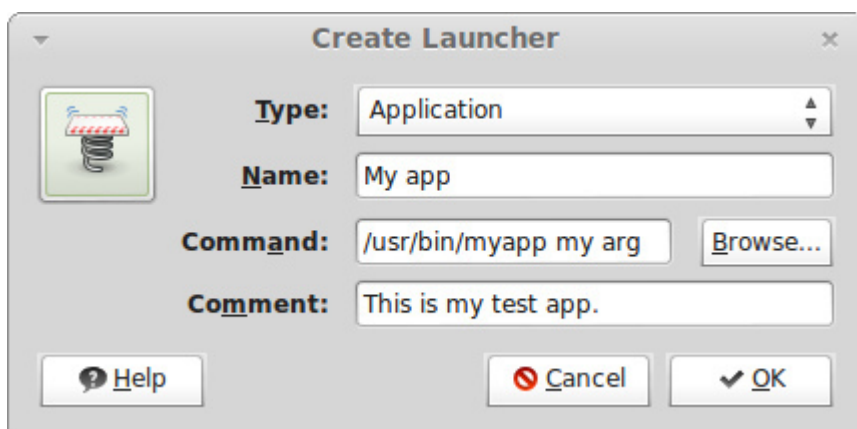

Create a Desktop Shortcut on Xfce Desktop

If you are on Xfce desktop, right-click on the desktop background, and then select "Create Launcher" menu. Then fill out the details of the shortcut.

Create a Desktop Shortcut on Cinnamon Desktop

If you are on Linux Mint Cinnamon desktop, you can create an application launcher by right-clicking on the desktop background, and selecting "Create Launcher" menu.

Create a Desktop Shortcut on LXDE Desktop

On LXDE desktop, simply right click on the desktop background, and choose "Create New Shortcut".

Application Shortcut

General | Advanced

Name: My app

Command: /usr/bin/myapp myarg   Browse...

Change Icon

Tooltip: This is my test app.

☐ Runs in terminal emulator

✕ Cancel   ✓ OK