

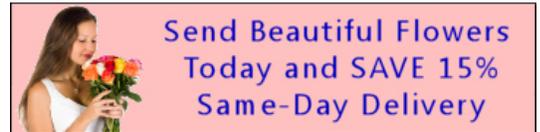


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## Malwarebytes: Protection for Android

Malwarebytes has released the latest Android version of its acclaimed security suite. It's not just a port of MBAM for Windows, but a program carefully designed for mobile devices and the threats their users face, even from apps that they trust. Read on to see how Malwarebytes for Android works...

### Review: MBAM for Your Android Smartphone

Installing Malwarebytes for Android (let's call it MBAM-A, okay?) from the [Google Play store](#) is simple, if you know a secret that should not be a secret. The first time you open MBAM-A after installation, it will pause at the "Welcome to Malwarebytes for Android" screen. No matter what you tap or click, nothing will happen.

Oddly, this reminded me of the text-based "Colossal Cave Adventure" game, circa late 1970s. There was a secret command "xyzyz" to teleport yourself from one room to another. But if you used that command in the wrong room, the game would respond with "Nothing happens."

I was tempted to shout "xyzyz" but then I noticed the four dots -- a subtle clue that you have to swipe your finger across the screen, right-to-left, to get things going. (I added the red arrow for emphasis.) Nowhere do the words, "swipe left to continue" appear on this screen. That's pretty bad design. Fortunately, you'll see this screen only once.

MBAM-A looks for malware and ransomware, and blocks it before it can infect your phone. It will also detect malicious links in text messages, email, or websites. It can also identify apps that have the ability to track your location, monitor your calls, or cost you money.

Once started, MBAM-A quickly scans your Android device (phone, tablet, Chromebook, etc.) and gives you a compact summary of "issues" it has found. These fall into several categories, which you can access by tapping the "hamburger" of three stacked line in the upper-left corner of MBAM-A's main screen.

**Security:** includes scanning functions and a "security audit" of your device's system settings. Scanning will find malware and PUPs - potentially unwanted programs. I was surprised to learn that my phone had 332 apps and 6000 files, but glad to see that there was no malware found. The security audit will show you system settings that might allow hackers to infiltrate your device, and how to change them to close those holes.

One example is the recommendation to turn on device encryption. If you do so, you'll need to enter a passkey each time you power on the phone. The upside is that if your phone is lost or stolen, your data will not be accessible. But if you forget the passkey, you're out of luck.

If you click the little gear icon on the Security screen, you can tell MBAM-A to scan after every restart, scan only while your phone is charging, or schedule daily or weekly scans.

**App Manager:** "Your apps" shows system apps that come with Android and, separately, apps that you have installed, including minutiae such as how many minutes and seconds each app has been open. The "privacy audit" is truly handy. It shows at a glance how many apps have permission to use various Android features that may endanger your privacy.

Those permissions include "can read personal info", "can track location", "can cost you money", "can access text messages", and "can access calendar". Tap on a permission category to review each app that can access that permission, and decide whether to keep the app, or modify its permissions.

For instance, apps that can access your location should be scrutinized. I wondered why the Starbucks and Chase Bank apps needed to know that. But I remembered that both of them have the ability to find a nearby retail store or branch. To do so, they need to know where you are. (We just have to trust that they won't use that permission to otherwise monitor our comings and goings.)

Similarly, you should not be worried that Facebook Messenger or Whatsapp can access your messages and contacts. But if you have a game or flashlight app that wants to access your location, contacts, calendar, or phone calls, that's cause for concern.

If you have the Android Marshmallow or later operating system, you can open Settings > Apps, tap an app's name, then tap App permissions. From there, you can toggle individual permissions on or off. If you have an older Android version that does not have the "App permissions" option, your only recourse is to remove the app from your device.

**General:** Here you'll find the gear icon that universally represents "Settings." Things you can set include Scanning options and the types of protection that you wish to enable. Real-time protectors and anti-ransomware protection are enabled by default. Scanning URLs sent to you via text message is a very good thing enable. "Safe browsing" scanning is also an option. Automatic updates can be enabled and limited to WiFi connections, saving cellular data costs.

MBAM-A is free to try. It comes with a 30-day trial of the app's full range of Premium features. Those Premium features include real-time "always on" scanning, anti-ransomware protection, anti-phishing protection, and a "remote security" option, which allows you to secure your phone remotely via text messaging.

At the end of the 30-day trial, you can pay \$39.99/year to retain the Premium features, or revert to the free version. In the free version, you can still scan for malware and other threats, but you have to remember to initiate the scan on your own schedule. This is pretty much the same as the Windows version of MBAM, which lacks the real-time scanning feature.

Your thoughts on this topic are welcome. Post your comment or question below...