User guide

Freatix MailTools for Thunderbird

Find messages, insert reusable text and follow conversations: MailTools adds independently switchable modules to Thunderbird. Your existing accounts and folders remain the starting point.

Applies to version 0.2.47 | Updated: 23 October 2026. The installed version is shown in Thunderbird's Add-ons Manager. Reminders and scheduled sending start disabled.

Which features belong to which version?

- Base version 0.2.45: Search, the search index, Comments and Settings.
- Since 0.2.46: Text Blocks, Images with annotations, conversations inside the reading pane, a dedicated Topics tab and background conversation preparation.
- Since 0.2.47: optional comment reminders and scheduled sending from Drafts, with searchable histories.
- Find the installed version under Freatix MailTools in Thunderbird's Add-ons Manager. Menu labels may vary slightly between Thunderbird versions.

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Finding this guide

Open Freatix MailTools settings through Thunderbird's Add-ons Manager. The Help / User guide section offers the German and English PDFs to save. Both files are included with the installed add-on and are available offline.

This guide describes the bundled version. It will be updated as additional modules are released. You do not need a Freatix account to use MailTools.

Installation and first use

Installing an XPI file

- Use the supplied XPI for your intended version and Thunderbird 140 or later.
- In Thunderbird, open Add-ons and Themes, then Extensions.
- In the tools menu, choose Install Add-on From File, select the XPI and confirm the permissions shown. Alternatively, drag the XPI into the Add-ons Manager.
- Open Freatix MailTools settings, choose the modules you want and save your changes.

Update the existing installation

Install the new XPI over the existing extension. Do not remove the add-on first. A normal update with the same add-on ID reuses existing local data; back up your Thunderbird profile if you have important comments or text blocks.

Updating from 0.2.45 adds permission to edit mail drafts for Text Blocks and Images. Confirm the permissions shown only if you want this feature update. Automatic image sizing is initially off.

Version 0.2.47 adds local timers and transient session storage. Saving and sending scheduled drafts, clearing a successfully sent source draft, and desktop notifications require deliberate additional permission grants. The new modules remain off until enabled.

What happens on first use?

The local index records messages exposed by Thunderbird. It includes subjects, senders and recipients, with message bodies added according to your settings. Large mailboxes take longer to index initially. Results may be incomplete while indexing is in progress.

After a restart, the saved index is loaded into memory. Conversation mappings are prepared again in the background. Restarting does not automatically mean downloading all messages again or rebuilding the entire stored index.

Server access is possible: reading content that is not stored locally can make Thunderbird retrieve it from your mail provider. On Thunderbird 140, obtaining reply references may already require reading a full message.

Turning modules on and off

Search, Topics, Text Blocks, Images and Comments can be enabled separately in settings. Turning a module off does not delete its saved data. Search and Topics share an index, so indexing may continue when Search is off if Topics remains enabled.

Finding messages quickly

Quick search and full search

Open quick search using the MailTools button in Thunderbird's toolbar. The default shortcut is Ctrl+Alt+K; you can change it in Thunderbird's extension shortcut manager.

Enter part of a subject, a name or another search term. Search also supports word prefixes and limited spelling differences. Press Enter or choose Open full search to reach the detailed results view, where additional filters and sorting options are available.

Narrowing results

- Search scope: everywhere, subject, message body or sender/recipient.
- Account and folder: restrict the search to the relevant collection.
- Date, attachments or comments: narrow down matching messages.
- Sorting: for example, newest first or best match.

Expand a result to load its content on demand. Where available, the detailed view offers Formatted and Plain text modes. Open original message opens the message in Thunderbird. MailTools previews do not load remote images or execute active mail content.

Which message bodies are searchable?

Under Search > Options, choose folders for message-body indexing. Local Folders are selected by default. Select server folders deliberately; the workload estimate helps you decide. Selecting a whole account as a rule also includes folders added to that account later.

- Balanced: up to 25,000 characters per selected message body; recognized quotations and signatures are removed where possible. This is the default.
- Full: up to 200,000 characters, including quotations and signatures; uses more memory.
- Compact: subject, sender and recipients only; no message-body search.

Changing the index profile requires a rebuild. Changing the folder selection incrementally adds or removes the affected local indexed bodies. It does not delete the original messages.

If a word in a message body cannot be found, check the profile and folder selection first. Being able to display a message does not mean its entire text is searchable: previews and the search index serve different purposes.

Comments and Text Blocks

Adding a comment to a message

Select a single message and choose Comment. Enter your note and save it. The comment bar initially shows a compact summary; you can expand, edit or delete it.

Comments are stored locally and associated with the message. MailTools also adds a Thunderbird tag to mark commented messages. The comment text does not change the original message and is not automatically sent to anyone.

Under Comments > Options, you can enable the option to include comments in output. This applies to printing, PDF and other output that uses Thunderbird's displayed message. An archiving tool that reads the original message directly does not automatically include the comment.

Ordinary updates, restarts and moving or copying an unchanged message preserve its comment association. Identical copies share the same comment. Comments already fully associated since test build .12 are automatically upgraded to the current storage format when needed, without another confirmation.

Only very old test comments linked by Message-ID alone may still show Review older comment. This is not a normal update step. Do not confirm an uncertain association; the old record remains preserved.

Creating text blocks

- Open Text Blocks > Options in MailTools settings, or choose Manage in the Text Blocks popup.
- Enter a name, such as Appointment confirmation.
- Optionally select a suggested category or enter a new one.
- Assign a unique shortcut, such as appointment, and enter the reusable text.
- Choose Add text block. Existing entries can be edited or deleted.

Inserting while composing

In a compose window, MailTools opens a searchable list of Text Blocks and access to the image editor. With no search term, it shows the saved entries. Choose an entry to insert it at the writing position.

Alternatively, type #appointment directly in the message body and press Space. If a matching shortcut is saved, it is replaced by the text block. The caret moves to the end of the inserted text. Shortcut expansion is intended for the message body, not the subject or recipient fields.

Text blocks contain plain text in this version. HTML templates, variables and attachments are not part of this feature. Inserting a block does not send the message; the inserted text becomes part of your outgoing message when you send it later.

Give different blocks different shortcuts. If nothing is inserted, check the saved entry, ensure the module is enabled and place the caret inside the message body.

Topics and conversations

Inside the selected message

Open a single message in Thunderbird's reading pane or in its own message tab. When a conversation is identified, a line such as Conversation - 5 messages appears above the message body. The tree starts collapsed.

- Expand Conversation to see the related messages.
- Lines connect replies to their identified parent messages. Forwards are labelled accordingly.
- Sent messages are highlighted in blue. This message marks the currently selected message.
- Expand an individual message to load its content. The embedded preview uses plain text.
- Open original message opens the source message. Open in separate tab displays only this conversation in the detailed Topics view.

Which messages are included?

In ordinary accounts, conversations include matching indexed mail from the same account, including Sent, subfolders and Archive. Local Folders act as a shared archive: selecting a message there also includes mail from other accounts linked by message IDs and reply references. This includes POP3 messages delivered to Local Folders. A matching subject alone does not connect accounts.

Spam, Trash and Drafts are normally excluded as additional conversation messages. The selected message and its source folder receive special handling. Copies of the same message are combined where possible.

Very large conversations show a labelled selection of at most 500 messages and 12 indented levels, keeping the selected message in view. Message references do not authenticate the sender.

Waiting and missing branches

Once the local index has loaded, MailTools prepares account mappings one account at a time in the background. Opening a message very early, using a large mailbox or selecting an unindexed message may still involve a short wait. Conversation is being updated in the background means matching is still in progress.

Parent message unavailable is a placeholder for a missing predecessor. Its content can only be shown once the message is available and indexed. Refresh conversation checks relevant folders in the account; for a local message it includes all accounts. This may take time and require server access.

A separate Topics tab when needed

The Topics button also opens a folder overview. Select a folder and filter the topics. A separately opened single conversation stays focused on that conversation. Normal message reading does not automatically open the Topics tab.

Resizing and annotating images

Automatic sizing

Enable automatic sizing under Images & annotations > Options. It is off on a fresh installation; updates preserve your existing choice. When enabled, new pasted or dropped images are limited to 800 pixels display width. Choose a limit from 100 to 4000 pixels. Smaller images are never enlarged; the aspect ratio is preserved.

Only newly pasted or dropped images are automatically changed. Existing images, recognized signatures, quotes and forwarded-message sections remain untouched. Images inserted using Thunderbird's menu can be edited manually.

Display size versus resolution

Original resolution is preserved by default: the image is displayed smaller but its data does not become smaller. Enable Also reduce image resolution to reduce the number of pixels as well. Small text may become harder to read. Output uses PNG; a smaller file size is not guaranteed for every source format.

If Thunderbird does not permit safe access to the pixels, automatic sizing changes only the display size and preserves the image data. The original file on your computer is never overwritten.

Annotating an image

- Click the target image in the draft, then choose MailTools > Edit image.
- Adjust display width using Small, Medium, Large, Original size or a custom pixel value.
- Select Rectangle, Circle / ellipse or Arrow, plus a color and line width. Drag over the image to draw. Hold Shift for squares and circles.
- After drawing, the editor switches to Select / move with the new shape selected. Drag to move it; use handles to resize, or drag arrow endpoints. Hold Shift while resizing a corner to preserve proportions. Choose a drawing tool again to add another shape.
- Undo also reverses movement and resizing. Delete selection removes the selected shape; Clear annotations removes all shapes. Escape cancels the current step.
- Apply to message replaces only the selected image. Cancel leaves the draft unchanged. Ctrl+Z in the message body can undo the replacement.

Annotations become part of the image. Recipients need no add-on. If you reopen an edited image, previously applied annotations cannot be edited individually.

Image editor limitations

Only fully loaded, locally accessible raster images are supported. No remote downloads, SVGs or animated GIFs. The limit is 40 megapixels or 32 MB of encoded image data. If the target image is otherwise changed or deleted while editing, applying the result is refused; reopen the editor. The annotation color and line width settings are defaults for new editing sessions.

Data and troubleshooting

What stays local?

The search index, settings, comment text and text blocks are stored in the local Thunderbird profile. MailTools has no telemetry and does not send this data to Freatix. Thunderbird may still retrieve mail from your configured provider when reading server folders.

Depending on the account, Thunderbird may synchronize the comment tag with your mail provider. Locally stored comment text is separate from that tag. Text blocks become part of an outgoing message when you insert them and send the message.

Backups and removal

Back up the Thunderbird profile with Thunderbird closed if you have important comments or text blocks. This version has no dedicated export/import function for those records. Do not rely on extension data surviving uninstallation. You do not need to uninstall for updates or performance tests; fully restarting Thunderbird is enough to reset in-memory conversation caches.

Common questions

- No conversation visible? Select one message and enable the reading pane, or open the message in its own tab. Check that Topics is enabled. A single indexed message without known relationships may have no conversation bar.
- Sent message missing? Check that the message exists in Thunderbird, then choose Refresh conversation. Messages in Local Folders can include related mail from other accounts using message references; ordinary accounts remain separate.
- Incomplete search index? Keep Thunderbird and the account online, then use Check changes in settings later. Not every problem requires rebuilding the index.
- Message text cannot be found? Check body-index folder selection and the index profile. Encrypted or unavailable messages may have missing information.
- Shortcut not expanding? Save the text block, enable its module, and type the shortcut with # directly in the message body, followed by Space.

Sending useful feedback

Include the add-on version, Thunderbird version, operating system, affected module and steps leading to the problem. For delays, include the approximate duration and whether it happens only on first use. Remove confidential mail content and addresses from screenshots.

Mozilla installation help: https://support.mozilla.org/en-US/kb/installing-addon-thunderbird

Guide version 0.2.47. This guide describes the bundled version; features and menu labels may change in later versions.

Comment reminders

Enabling and setting a date

MailTools settings contain Reminders & scheduled sending. Enable Comment reminders and save settings. The Comments module must also be on. This new feature starts disabled.

Add a task description to a message comment and enable Reminder. New reminders have today's date prefilled; saving uses that date unless it is changed. Existing dates remain unchanged. A time is optional. Without a time, the reminder is due from the start of the chosen day. In the separate time field, 1900 becomes 19:00 on leaving the field. Save stores the comment and reminder together. Due instants stay fixed across time-zone changes; date-only reminders also retain the selected calendar date in their label.

Overview and completion

The popup shows due reminders with a subject and View reminder. This button opens and highlights the matching entry. Reminders & scheduled sending or Open overview shows all pending dates. Open comment takes the reader to the message. Change date sets a new date; Mark done completes the reminder while keeping the comment text. Show completed items reveals closed entries.

Completed shows the date and time of completion, not the scheduled date. Later comment edits do not change this timestamp. The original scheduled date remains stored. If an older completed item has no recorded completion time, this is stated explicitly; the time is not estimated retrospectively.

Each history loads at most 50 items, newest first. Older items and Newer items switch pages. Filter history searches older items too and restricts the completion date. Items without a completion date remain searchable without date filters. Pending tasks and sending issues stay visible; nothing is deleted automatically.

A newly received message with a matching reply reference adds a reply indication. The reminder stays pending until you decide whether the matter is resolved. The indication is not proof of authenticity and does not retrospectively detect all older replies. There are no read receipts or tracking pixels.

Notifications and closed Thunderbird

Due items are counted on the MailTools toolbar button. Allow notifications optionally enables local desktop notices. These do not include a subject or comment text. Operating-system settings may suppress notifications; the overview remains authoritative.

When Thunderbird is closed, no notification appears. Due reminders reappear at the next start. Turning the module off pauses notices and editing while preserving comments and dates. Deleting a comment also removes its reminder.

Reminders do not depend on the search index. Rebuilding that index does not remove comments or dates. Back up the Thunderbird profile for important entries; no separate reminder export is included.

Scheduled sending

Granting permission and scheduling

MailTools uses Thunderbird's explicit immediate-send command from version 140. The draft is sent only at the chosen time using the selected identity. Thunderbird must be open, connected and ready to send.

In MailTools settings, Reminders & scheduled sending explains each permission: Save drafts keeps a message ready for its scheduled time, Send messages enables automatic sending, and Move messages clears the successfully sent source draft. Grant sending permissions requests these permissions. After confirming Thunderbird's prompt, select Schedule sending and Save settings. Notifications for reminders are optional and independent.

In the compose window's MailTools popup, select Schedule sending. Today's date is prefilled and used unless another day is chosen. A future time is still required. Save draft and schedule briefly opens and closes a verification copy. The message stays in Drafts; the compose window closes after successful scheduling. Nothing is sent during this check and no external sending service is used.

Sending and later changes

Thunderbird must be open, connected and ready to send immediately at the chosen time. MailTools verifies the saved draft and uses the chosen identity. Changes to the saved draft require scheduling again. Encrypted or signed messages are excluded from scheduled sending.

The Reminders & scheduled sending overview can open the draft, change its date or Cancel scheduled sending. Cancelling does not delete the message. After confirmed sending, the unchanged source draft is explicitly moved to Trash in the same account. If no unique Trash folder is available, the draft is retained and an indication is shown.

Show completed items also reveals Completed sending plans, limited to 50 items per page. Search and date filters apply here too.

Missed dates and uncertain results

Missed sending times are not caught up automatically; the draft is retained. There is no offline queue. The popup shows sending issues with a subject and View problem, which opens the matching plan. Only plans from test builds before 0.2.47.3 require scheduling again; plans from later builds are retained.

Needs review after an attempted but unconfirmed transmission: check Sent first. MailTools does not retry that transmission automatically, avoiding duplicate mail.

A reminder after sending

When Comments and Reminders are enabled, scheduling can also include Remind after sending (optional) and a comment. A time is optional. A timed reminder must follow the sending time; a date-only reminder cannot precede the sending day. It is associated with the confirmed sent copy. If no suitable copy is available, the overview shows a notice; the comment can then be added in Sent.