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Our phones are full of old files, apps, pictures, and other content that we don't even look at anymore. Anyone who owns an older Android phone or just puts a lot of stuff on their smartphone could probably benefit from some spring cleaning. The Clean Master app is one of the most popular phone cleaners, and it even comes pre-installed on select phones. CleanMaster has an impressive 4.5 star rating average, which is based on 31 million reviews, so you know it's got to be good. The question is, do you know how to use it to your best advantage? Clean Master is a comprehensive, but confusing app, so we've put together a guide on how to get the most from it. Whether Clean Master is your latest app installation, or one that has languished in the background on your new device, here's what you need to know about it. The Clean Master app is available for free through the Google Play Store, and is compatible with the vast majority of Android devices. Download, install, and run the app to get started. The initial scan looks at what the app describes as 'junk,' which includes cached files, data no longer needed by apps such as Twitter, and more. It provides a complete breakdown of all the files it wants to delete, and how much space will be freed up. Tap the big Clean Junk button, and it'll all disappear. The app frees up chunks of storage space on your phone, and could improve performance. That's the easy part. In the top right, there's a button marked Advanced. Tap it, and you're given a wide variety of additional options, all of which we'll address in later sections. Clean Master's features are often found in various sections, under different headings, and sometimes with different names. All the different sections make Clean Master a UI nightmare, and it's also filled with adverts for other apps and articles, as well as sponsored content. You'll run into the ads as you scroll down the page under the Home icon, but you really only want to pay attention to the top of this long page full of spam, where you'll see four main icons — Junk Files, Phone Boost, Antivirus, and App Manager — along with a quick overview of available RAM and storage space. Tap Junk Files, and Clean Master will perform the same test it did when you first open the app. Hit Phone Boost, and you get a list of running apps, and advice on whether they can be force closed to boost phone performance. There's a tool to check the temperature of your phone's processor, which closes the offending apps if the chip's running a bit too hot. Antivirus will scan your phone for possible security threats, and always advise you to do two things: Set up a passcode for apps containing private data using CM AppLock, and encourage you to download the CM Security app. That app is also produced by Cheetah Mobile, the company behind Clean Master. CM AppLock adds another level of security over apps you may want to keep away from prying eyes. It introduces a gesture unlock code when you try to open a particular app, just like the one you may use to unlock your phone in the first place. For example, it secures email, messaging, social networks, and Web browsers as standard. You can manually add the feature to any app installed on your phone. Once AppLock has been set up, it can't be turned off entirely, but the list of apps it locks is easily managed by tapping the padlock-like icon in the top right of the screen. Here, you'll also find the option to activate the front camera to snap a picture of anyone who gets the unlock code wrong on more than a set number of tries, plus more opportunities to install the CM Security app. Finally, tap App Manager and you're shown three different options: Uninstall apps, remove APK files, or move files from internal storage to a MicroSD card. Be careful here, because ticking the boxes alongside any apps can quickly uninstall them, and you'll lose any data you haven't backed up. Luckily, Clean Master also provides the option to save important data. Tap to select apps, hit the Backup button, select a destination for the backup, and you're done. All these features form the basis of Clean Master's functions. Manage, delete, and move data, apps, and files. The app performs all these actions without fault, and is very stable. Return to the main Home screen, and tap the Storage and RAM buttons for more features. Storage provides a shortcut to clean up any temporary app files, plus another way to delete apps and associated data. It lists apps by size, with the largest first. Tap one and tick each box, then the Delete button at the bottom of the screen. You're given a warning that by doing so, the app and its data will be gone forever. Scroll down this page and other options are available. Clean Master looks for duplicate photos to delete, and old APKs, plus it highlights music it thinks you don't listen to anymore, along with videos you haven't watched, and apps it thinks are 'old.' Get too click-happy, and you could delete important data by mistake. Clean Master would have happily deleted music I added to the MicroSD card the week before, if it was given the chance, and it was hardly what I'd describe as 'old' content. Go back to the Home screen and tap the RAM display. Anyone who has used a phone made by ZTE, Huawei, Xiaomi, or many other Chinese manufacturers recently will recognize this feature, as it's often built into the device. It automatically scans running apps that it can close, in order to free up RAM. Tap the Boost button at the bottom of the screen to complete the action. The second option on the main menu is Tools. These are designed to further boost phone performance, starting with the battery. Battery Saver will hibernate apps it says are drawing energy by running in the background. These include Amazon's apps, video streaming apps, and social networks. To enable this feature, you'll have to give Clean Master permission to close apps, which is done under the Settings/Accessibility menu. Battery Saver also sends notifications about apps that use a lot of power, when the battery is running low, and will optimize usage overnight. These can be turned off using the menu icon in the top right of the screen. Return to the Tools menu, and there are shortcuts to many of the features found under the four main categories on the Home screen, including the CPU cooler, which is under Phone Boost, and the option to delete photos from the App Manager. Under this section are a few shortcuts to other Clean Master features. Quiet Notifications modifies the way Android delivers notifications. Activate it, and you can mute certain apps from cluttering up your notifications panel. Clean Master populates this for you, but check it over, because it erroneously added Android Wear, Hangouts, and Slack to the 'muted' list on our test phone. iSwipe is a custom, quick-start app launcher. A swipe from the side of the Android Home screen 'folds' it to the side like the pages in a book, revealing a few often used apps. It also provides some trending search results using Yahoo, and ads for games. The AppLock shortcut is the same feature seen in the Antivirus mode, Games is a series of ads, and the Check Network Traffic option is an invitation to download the CM Data Manager app. We'd say neither iSwipe, or these last features, are worth your time and effort. The third and final option on Clean Master's main page is labeled Me. The first option here is to sign-up for Clean Master's cloud storage platform, which comes with 2GB of free storage, plus the ability to automatically backup photos taken on your phone. Once you've filled up that 2GB, you have to pay for more. It costs $2 per month for 20GB or 1000GB for $6 per month. Probably the most helpful option under the Me menu is Settings, which provides the majority of Clean Master's settings in one place. Rather than digging through the menus trying to find whatever notification is annoying you, check here instead. Activating some of Clean Master's features adds a shortcut icon related to it on the Android Homescreen. The 1 Tap Boost button quickly closes any unwanted processes, while 1 Tap Hibernate makes sure those apps selected under Battery Saver are closed and not wasting precious battery power. Finally, a Games icon collects game apps installed on your phone, and has ads for others. While the 1 Tap options are vaguely useful, the Games one isn't, except you can't have one without the other. Worst of all, try to uninstall them, and Clean Master itself is deleted. Clean Master requires considerable access to your smartphone in order to function. Cheetah Mobile has a comprehensive privacy statement about Clean Master on its website, which states it never collects personal information. The statement hasn't stopped it from being singled out as a security threat in the past. There has never been any evidence Cheetah Mobile, or the Clean Master app, is a security risk. However, like any service that delivers ads for monetization — that includes Amazon, Facebook, Google, and others — it will use the information it anonymously and legitimately gathers to target ads for you. If this is a problem, Clean Master probably won't be for you. Similarly, if the thought of any app modifying your phone to tweak performance or change the UI brings on a cold sweat, it's not for you, either. However, for everyone not wearing tin-foil hats, Clean Master is likely safe to use. According to PrivacyGrade.com — a site run by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University — it has been certified with a grade A, Excellent rating. Snapchat gets a B, for comparison. That is the ultimate question. Clean Master promises some major benefits, ranging from improving phone performance to extending the life of its battery. Everyone wants that, but does it work? The answer is complicated. The general opinion is yes, it performs its functions correctly — deleting cached files, search history, and unused files — plus it closes apps effectively; but whether that makes any difference is still up for debate. At best, it'll speed things up for a while, and at worst, the effect may be short-lived because Android may re-open the apps and cancel the benefits, or you might have to refresh the cache when the app in question is used again. If you can get around the endless ads and confusing UI, Clean Master is a quick way to spring clean your Android phone. Think of it that way, and you won't be disappointed. If you've been using Clean Master and have seen a difference in the way your phone operates, then let us know in the comments. Editors' Recommendations