

Encrypting files and folders. Here's help.

You keep reading about the necessity but how much encryption is needed? Someone steals your laptop and you know that if they can touch it, they can get into it. By now, you know with a simple Linux boot CD, you can reset the administrator password on any PC and take control. Identity theft. Serious financial and time loss. So one issue is that of encrypting an entire hard drive. I'm only going to mention **TrueCrypt** which is free and will do the job. In reality, you should read more thorough articles on encryption methodologies. So the issue of encrypting an entire hard drive is not what this note is about.

This is about smaller jobs. Encrypting a folder and everything in it or just one or a few files. That's where most of us live. We aren't working for the CIA and in reality, it is likely that we only need to "secure" a few files. Maybe your love poetry to your spouse or your soon-to-be-published best-selling novel. Perhaps a resume. Whatever it is, once in a while you want to insure that only you can get into it. It's also the case that you might want to encrypt a file and attach it to send someone else. Only they would be able to open it when you tell them the password that unlocks it.

Most .zip managers (like **WinZip** or the free one **7-Zip**), besides compression, can password-protect files. Waiting for compression isn't something you normally feel like doing

There are two heavier-duty encryption programs for people who do have a lot of needs involving encrypting files.

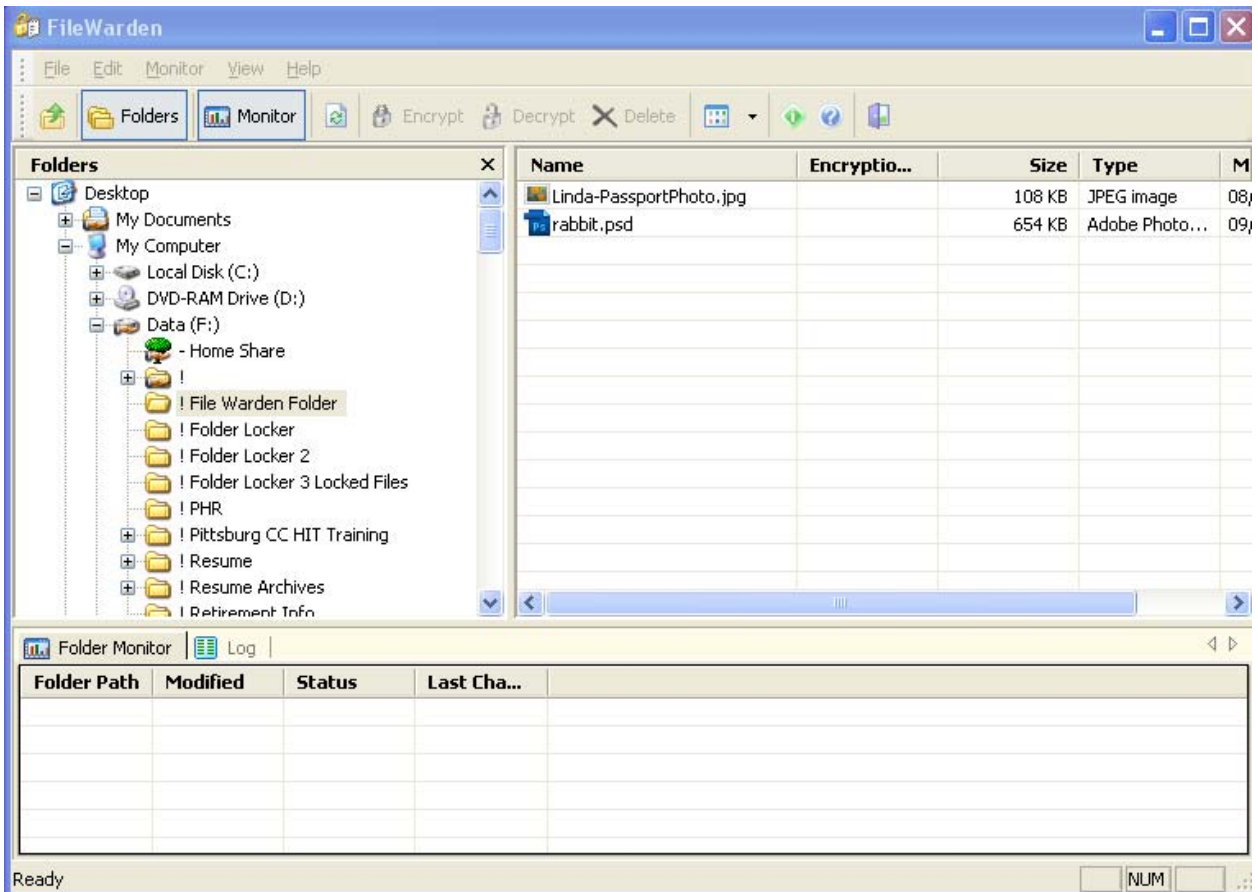
Folder Lock (<http://find.pcworld.com/721410>) costs \$40 and if you buy their encryption program to take care of an entire USB drive, there's another \$20. I dislike how Folder Lock visually hides files that are encrypted, making you have to remember the actual folder (on your hard drive) where the "vault" is located. I also dislike having to create vaults (files) to hold the encrypted files. Then there is portability option. You can create a "portable" vault which you can put on a CD or email. When you access it somewhere else and type in the password, it opens a temporary network drive letter which acts like an available unlocked editable folder holding your files. When you close the vault, that drive disappears and everything is back in the protected file (vault).

I actually bought both and they work just fine. The portability of having the password protection on a thumb drive for the whole drive is convenient and it is actually serving me well. It's relatively easy to lose a USB drive because they are small. But soon into using both of these program aspects of Folder Lock, I started to look for something easier and faster.

The \$20 Iobit's **Protected Folder** (<http://find.pcworld.com/72141>) is relatively simple. You can drag files or folders into the window after you have set a password and "the door opens." Visually fun. But I don't do much with "secret" files so even this is a little much for my purposes. After trying this, I continued to look for a speedier and more efficient solution for encrypting one or two files (or folders). I also wanted to be able to easily send someone an encrypted file that they couldn't open without a password.

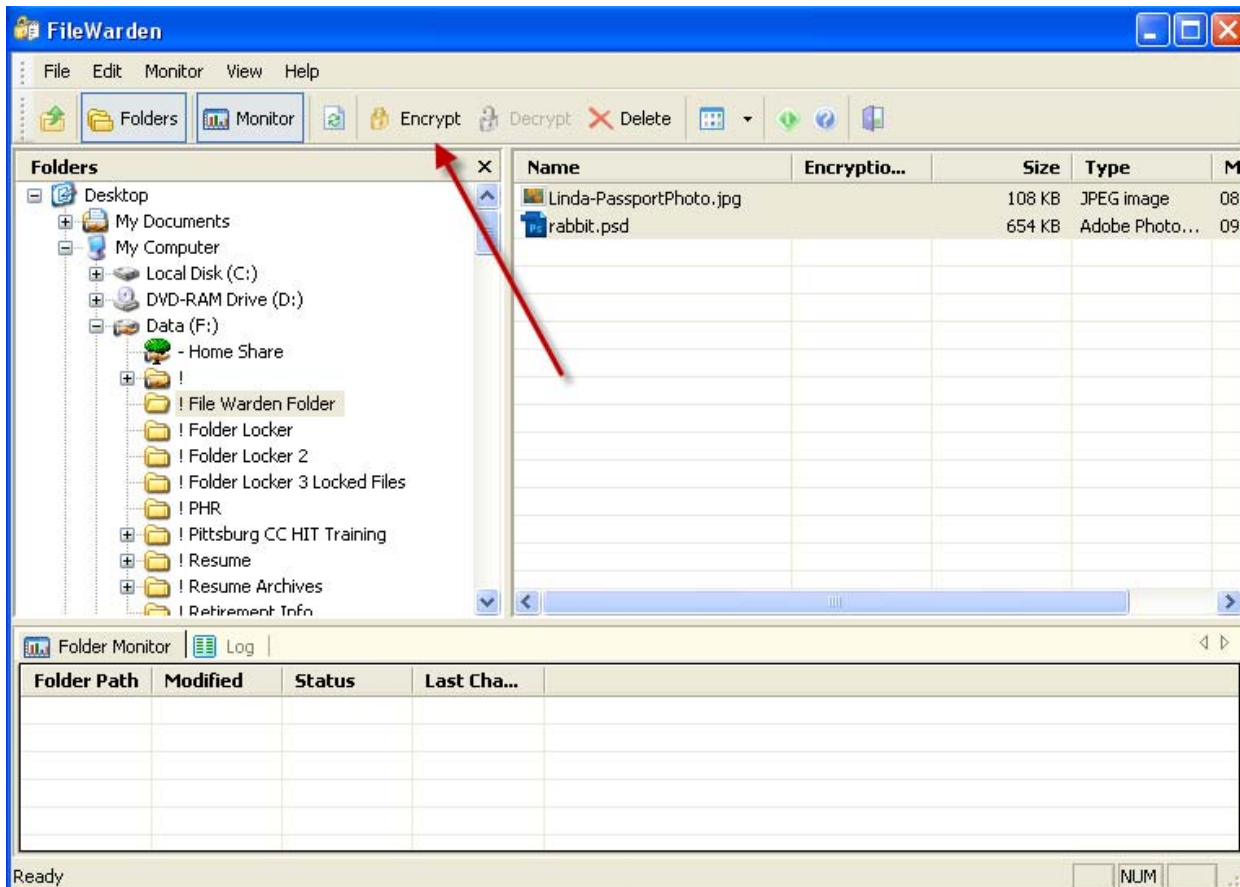
Of course, there's always the available option to encrypt with a password a **Microsoft Office** file. Solution found. Work done. But what about other types of files that aren't MS Office? How about Video, Photoshop or anything else?

What I like best is a program I got from PC Magazine Utilities subscription (\$12 a year I believe) is **Folder Warden**. You can password-protect folders, individual or numerous files. You open the program and it looks like this:

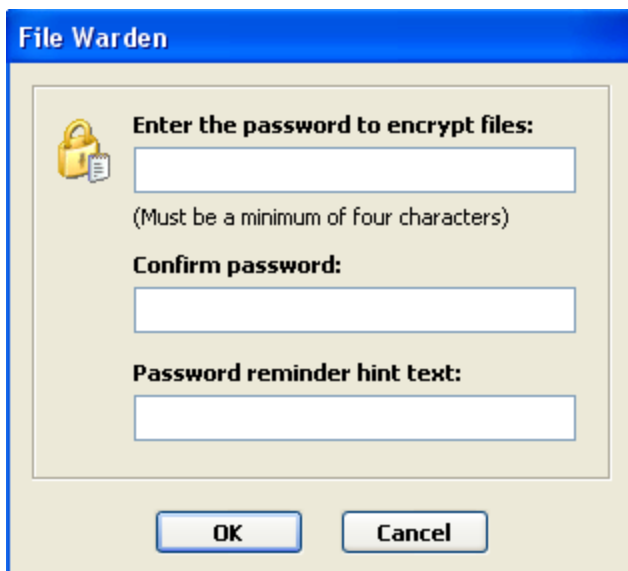


You use it to browse around on your drives and find folders and/or files you want to password protect. In this screen shot, it is looking at a folder named ! File Warden Folder. In that folder are two graphic files. So show how simple it is to use, I'll protect the two files individually (but I could do so for the whole folder).

The first thing I do is select (highlight) the two files and then click on the Encrypt button.



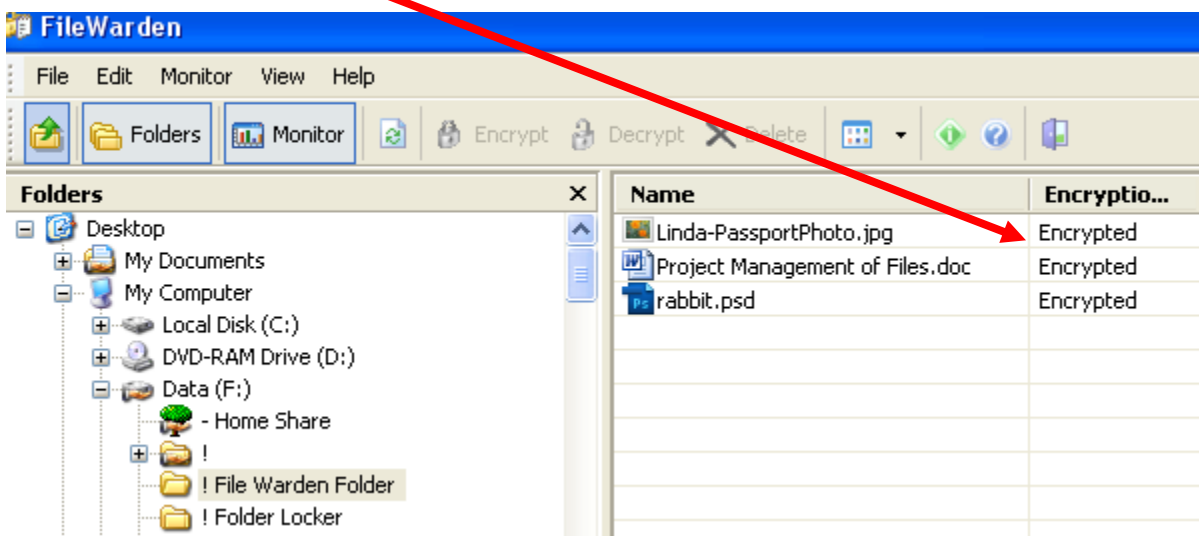
At this dialogue box, you type in a password, type it again in the second field below, and if you want, give yourself a hint as to what password you used. Then you press the OK button.



After a pretty quick box telling you what it is doing, you get this finish box:

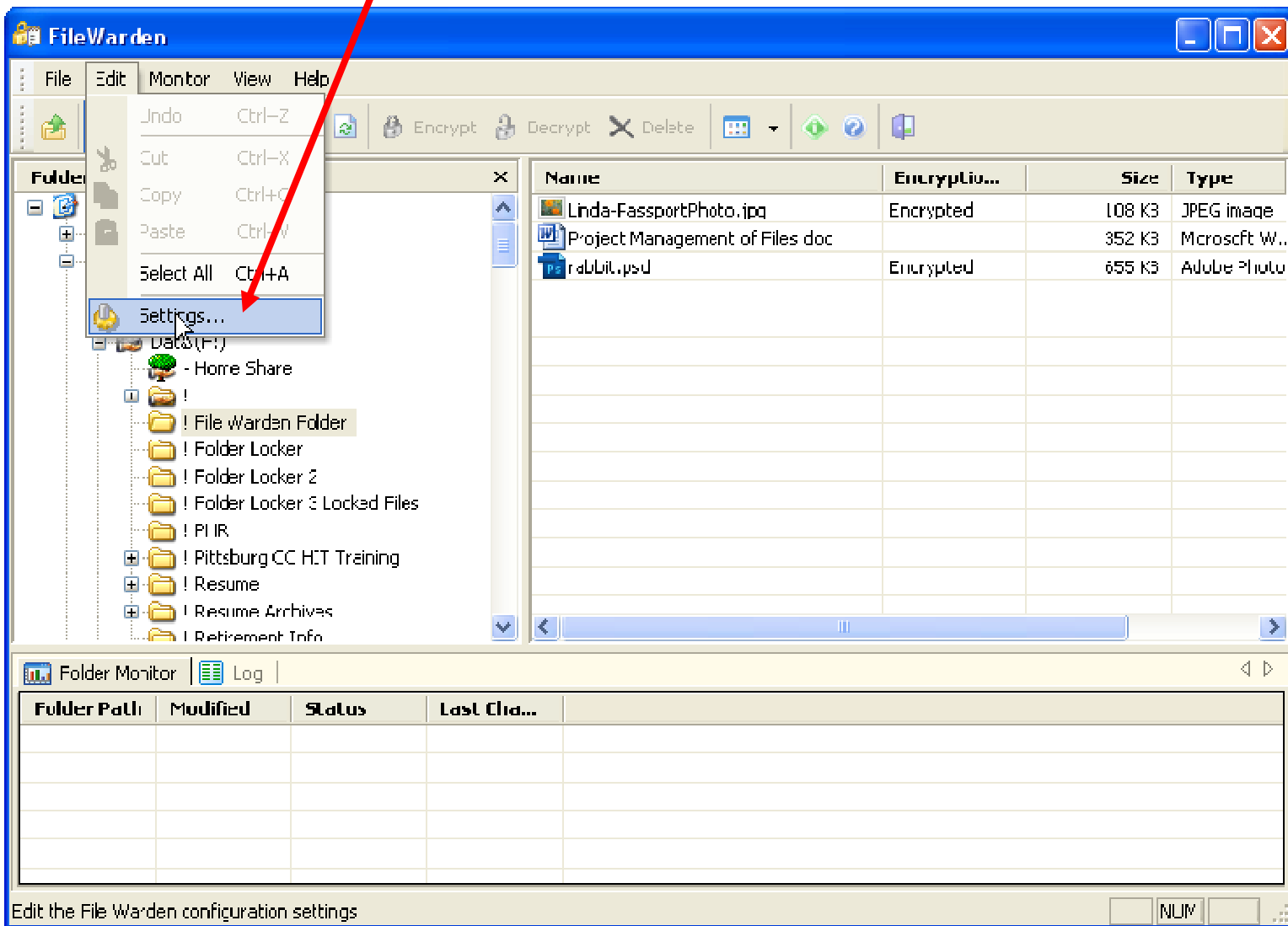


The Files show as they did before but those that are protected have Encrypted in that column to the right of the file name.

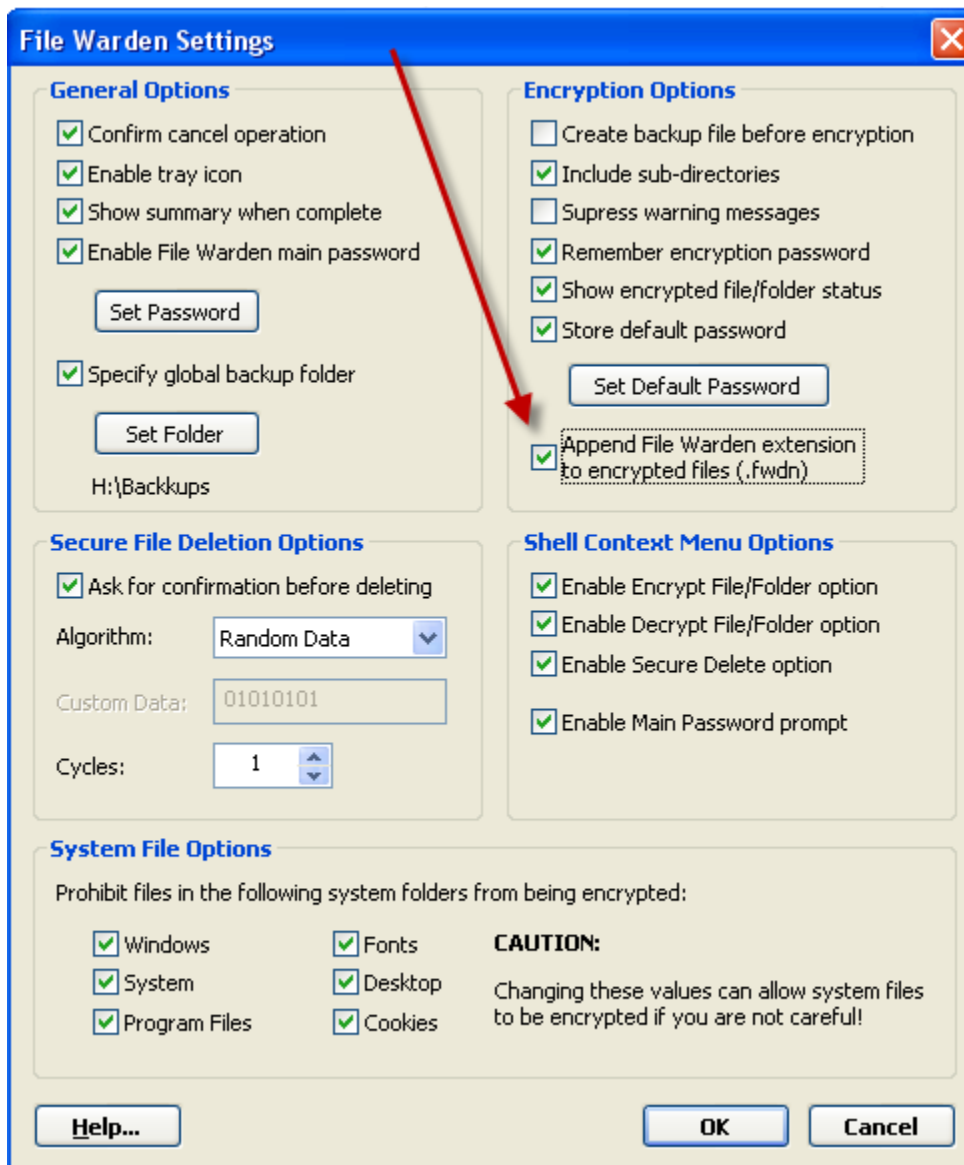


If you went into the settings, you could choose to have a special ending added on to the end of the file name to further show a file is encrypted.

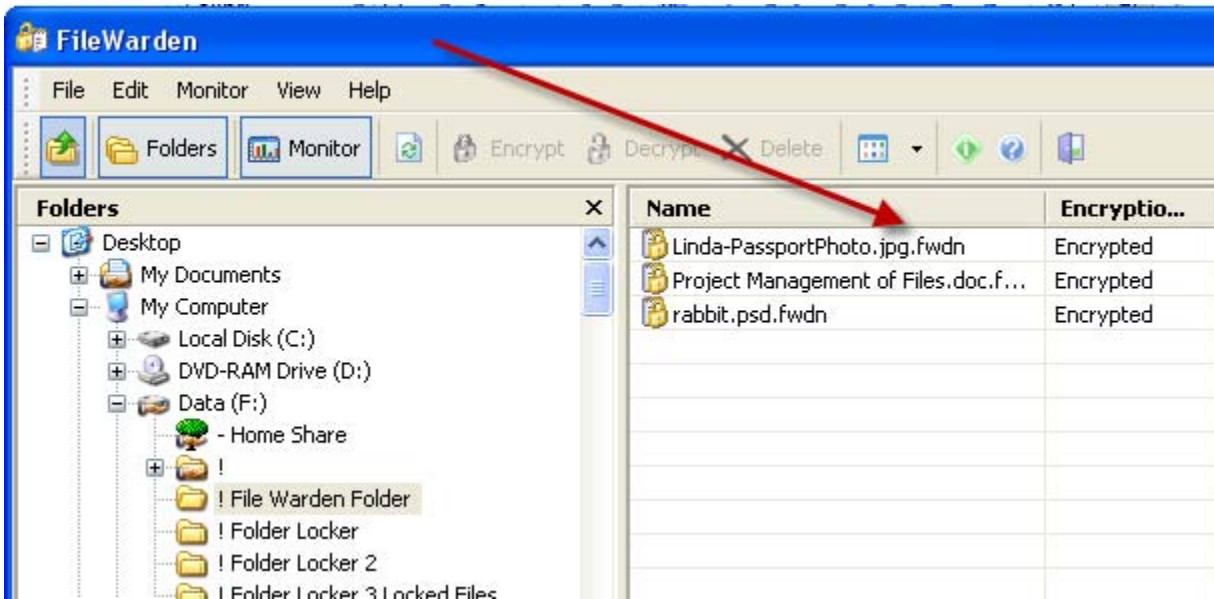
To get there, do Edit / Settings



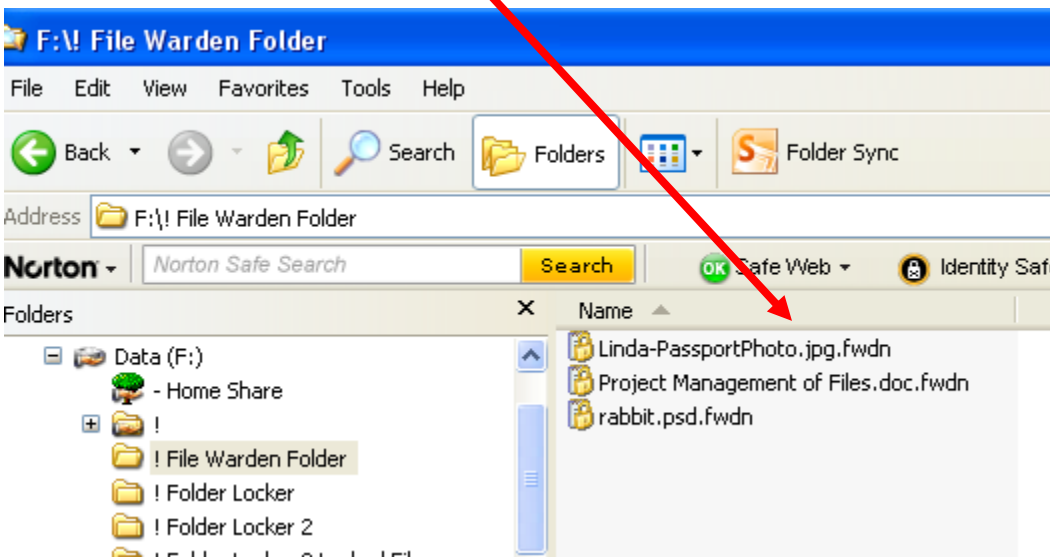
Checking this “Append File Warden extension to encrypted file (.fwdn)”



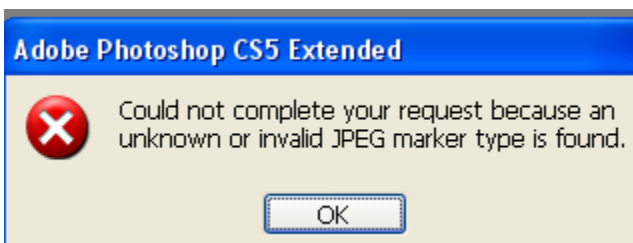
It will cause files to look like this:



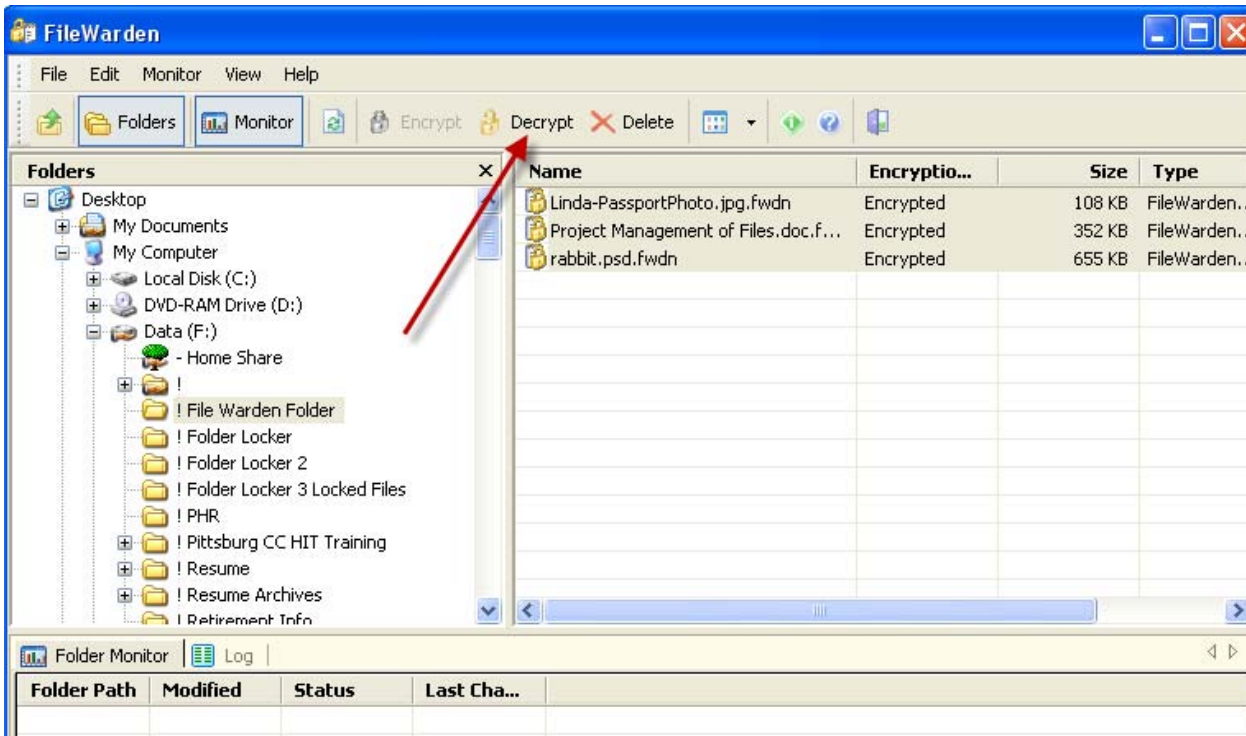
Out in Windows Explorer, they look the same, letting you visibly know that they are protected:



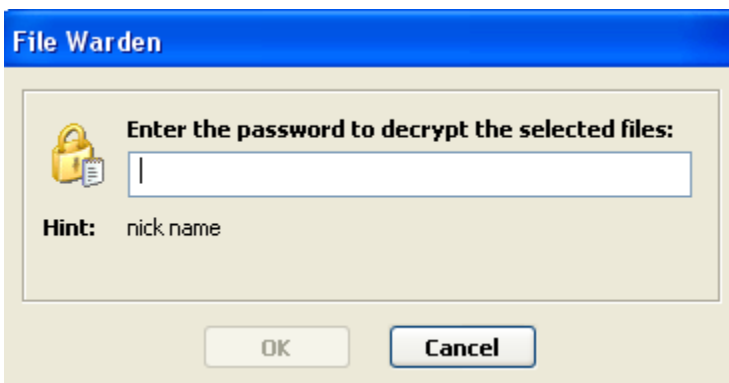
If you try to open one of them up, you get error messages telling you the program is unable to open it for one reason or another:



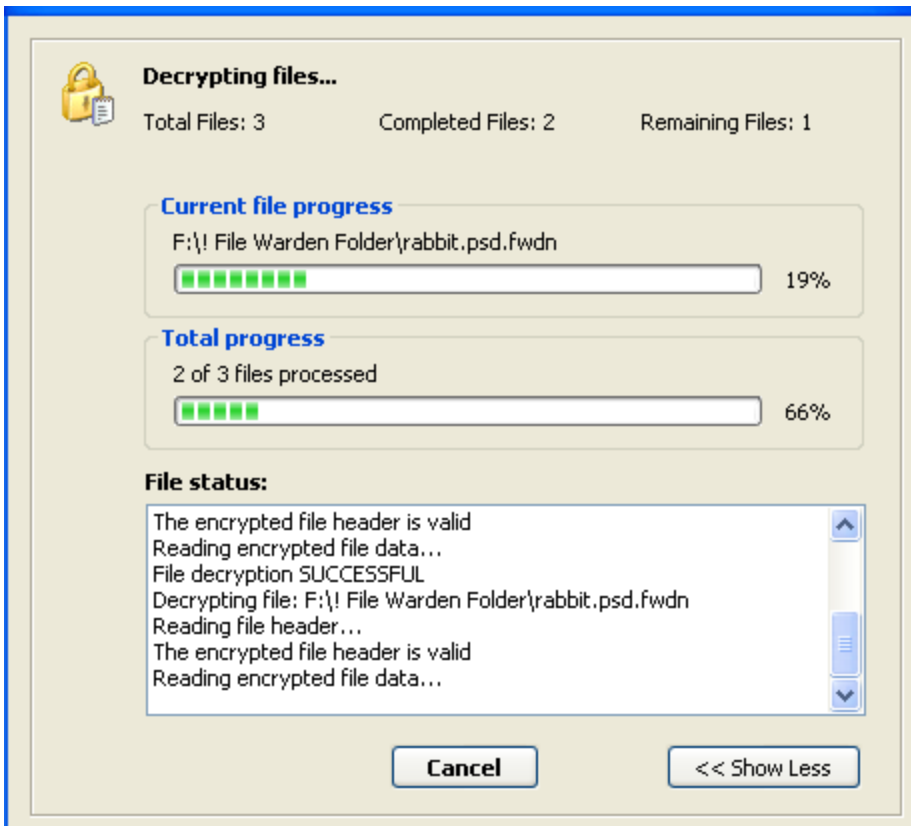
To unencrypt the file or files, select them from within File Warden and click on the Decrypt button.



Before the program sets them free, it will ask you for your password:



Once you give it your password and press the OK button, the program will show you progress as it Decrypts the files, making them available to edit and manage them like normal files.



When it is done, it lets you know:




The program information appears here from the Help menu

The program can most safely be obtained by going to:

<http://www.pcmag.com/>

clicking on the Downloads tab (at the top) and then subscribing to PC Magazine's software download service.


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Version:

Released: September 26, 2011

Supported Platforms: Microsoft Windows XP, Vista, & 7 (32 &

In 2007 we released our folder hiding program, Folder F utility that allowed you to protect folders from prying ev