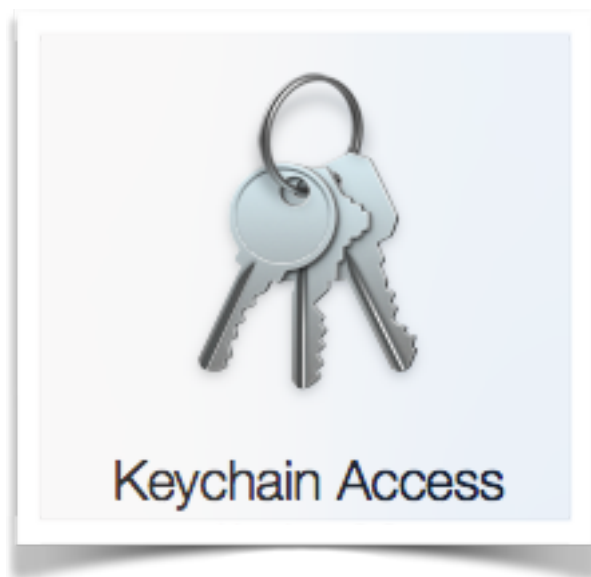# WORKING WITH KEYCHAIN ACCESS


Reviewed by

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WORKING WITH KEYCHAIN ACCESS

Keychain Access is an application on the Mac. It's purpose is to store sensitive information that can only be accessed using the user's login password. A separate password can be assigned to Keychain Access making it doubly secure.

The types of information that can be stored in Keychain Access are:

- Application/website passwords
- Digital Certificates
- File Server Logins
- Personal Information

Keychain Access is found in *Applications->Utilities*. The easiest way to open this - or any application or file - is to open Spotlight (clicking on the magnifying glass icon in the upper right corner of the Menu Bar, or hold down the Command key and tap the Space bar) and type in the first few characters of the application/file name.
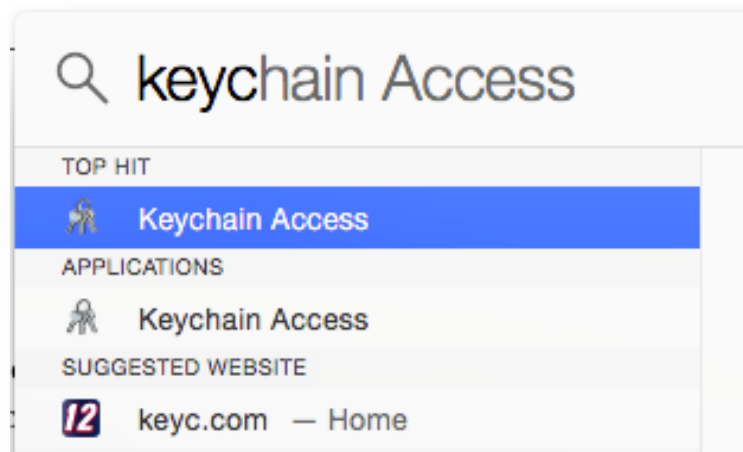
Notice that the TOP HIT is what OS X thinks you are looking for. Open the application/file by pressing the RETURN key (no need to enter the rest of the name). If what you really wanted is farther down the list, scroll down, find the item, and click on it.

(Tech note: The above is a rather neat method to find any file or application on your computer or a web page on the Internet. Spotlight will first search your computer, then search the Internet for a matching keyword/phrase and display what it finds in a list below the keyword/phrase search. *dirty old man* returns a different list than "*dirty old man*" which returns a different list than *dirty+old+man*. See *Keyword search examples using Spotlight* at the end of this article.)

The Keychain Access window is comprised of four main panes (aside from the Title Bar, Tool Bar, and Status Bar). (*Tech talk*: a Pane is an enclosed section of a Window.)
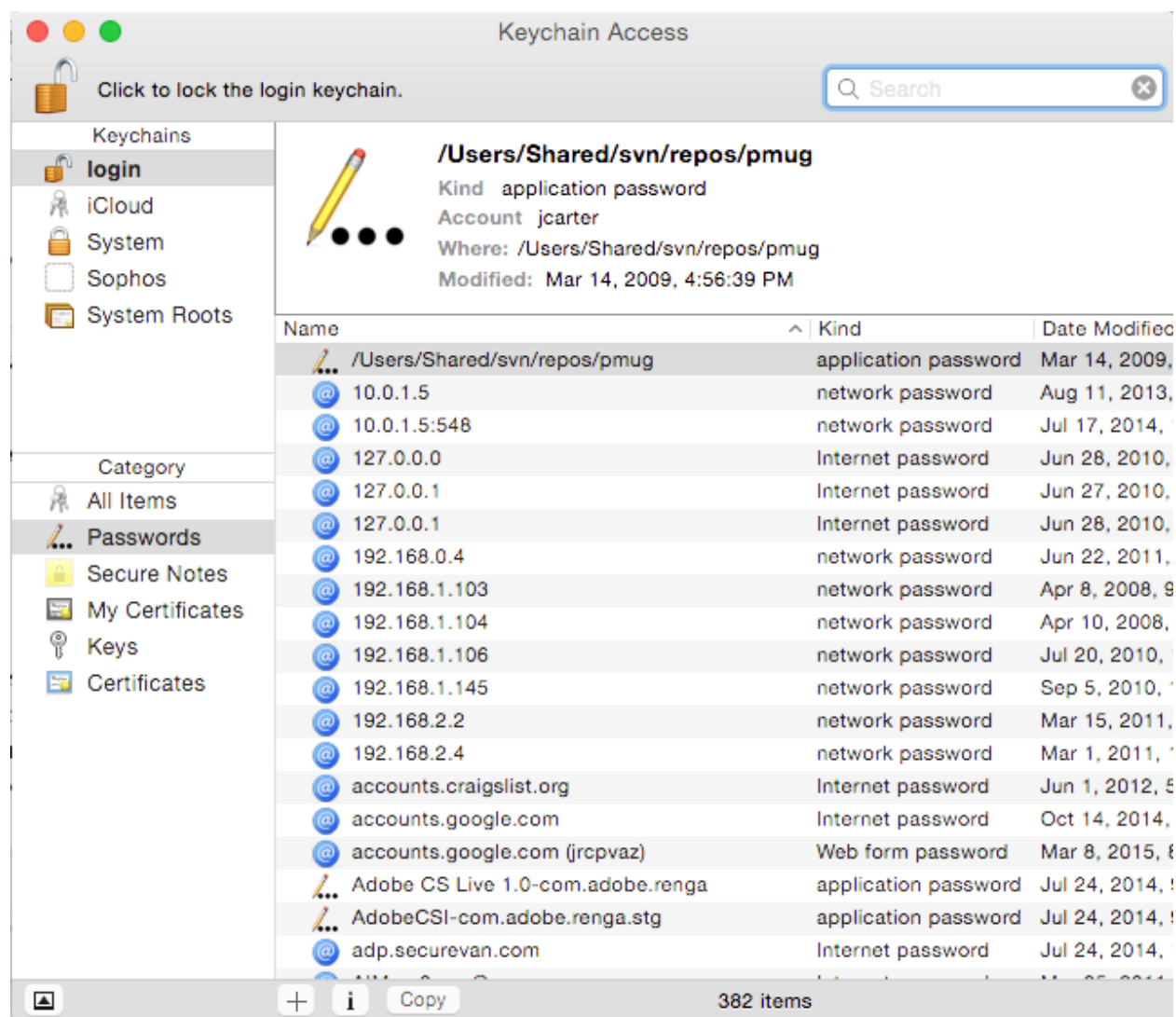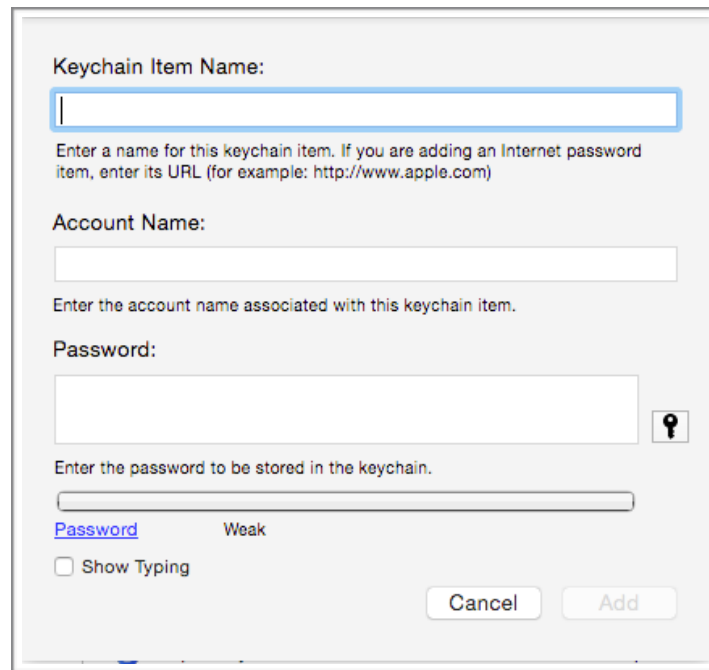

There are several keychains (upper left pane). The **login** keychain is the user's storage space for application/website login IDs and passwords. The *iCloud* keychain is for synchronizing keychain information between Apple devices. The *iCloud* entry is only available if Keychain Access is set up in *System Preferences->iCloud* (another topic). The *Sophos* keychain is only available if you have installed the Sophos antivirus application. In this review, only the *login* keychain is discussed.
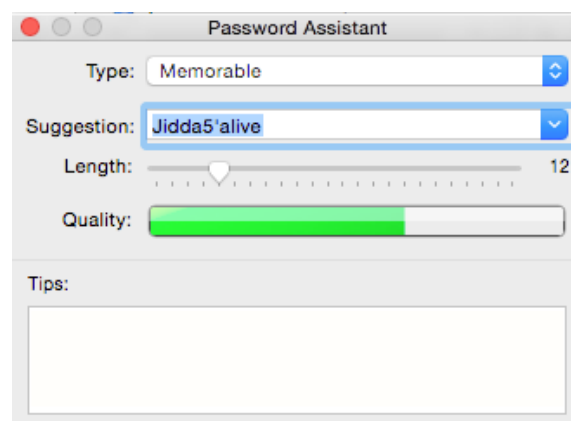
In the *Category* section, there are *All Items, Passwords, Secure Notes, My Certificates, Keys,* and *Certificates*. In this review, only *Passwords* and *Secure Notes* will be discussed.

The two left panes are similar in functionality as the Sidebar in Finder. The top right pane will show a more detailed view of the item that is selected in the bottom right pane.

Adding an item as a *login* (for an application or website) first requires that the *login* keychain and the *Passwords* category be selected. Then click on the '+' near the bottom left corner of the bottom right pane.


The field for *Keychain Item Name* is the URL for the website or the Application name. (Typically, you won't need to manually enter an Application item as it will most likely be entered for you.) The field for *Account Name* is your login name or user ID for that website or Application. The field for *Password* is your password for the website or Application. Click the *key* icon if you want Keychain Access to build a secure password for you.

The green bar shows you the strength of the password. Almost any complex password that is 12 characters long will be secure enough to take a modern computer well over 20 thousand years to crack.

Clicking on the *Type* field will give you even more options for creating a secure password.

Manual

✓ Memorable
Letters & Numbers
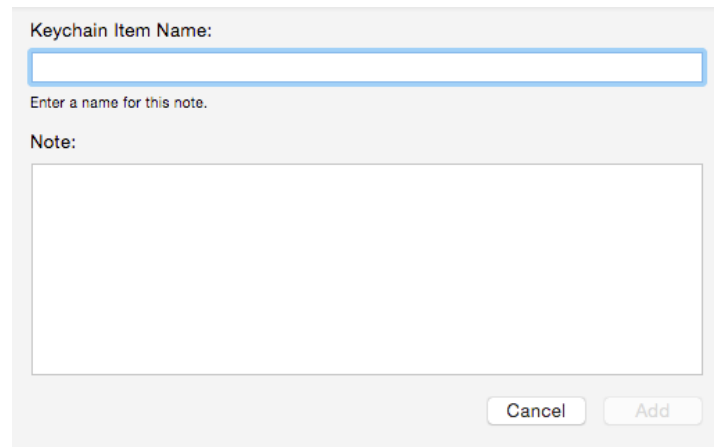Numbers Only
Random
FIPS-181 compliant
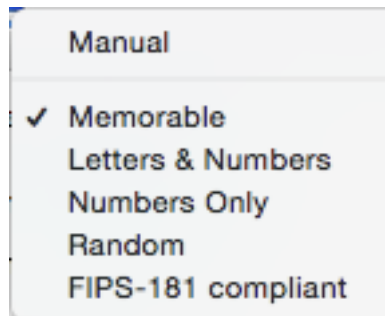
Of course, you can always create your own or use the password you previously created for an existing login ID for a website. Keep in mind that password MUST be complicated and long to be secure.

Adding an item as a secure note (as for a credit card or any other personal information) first requires that the *login* keychain and the *Secure Notes* category be selected.
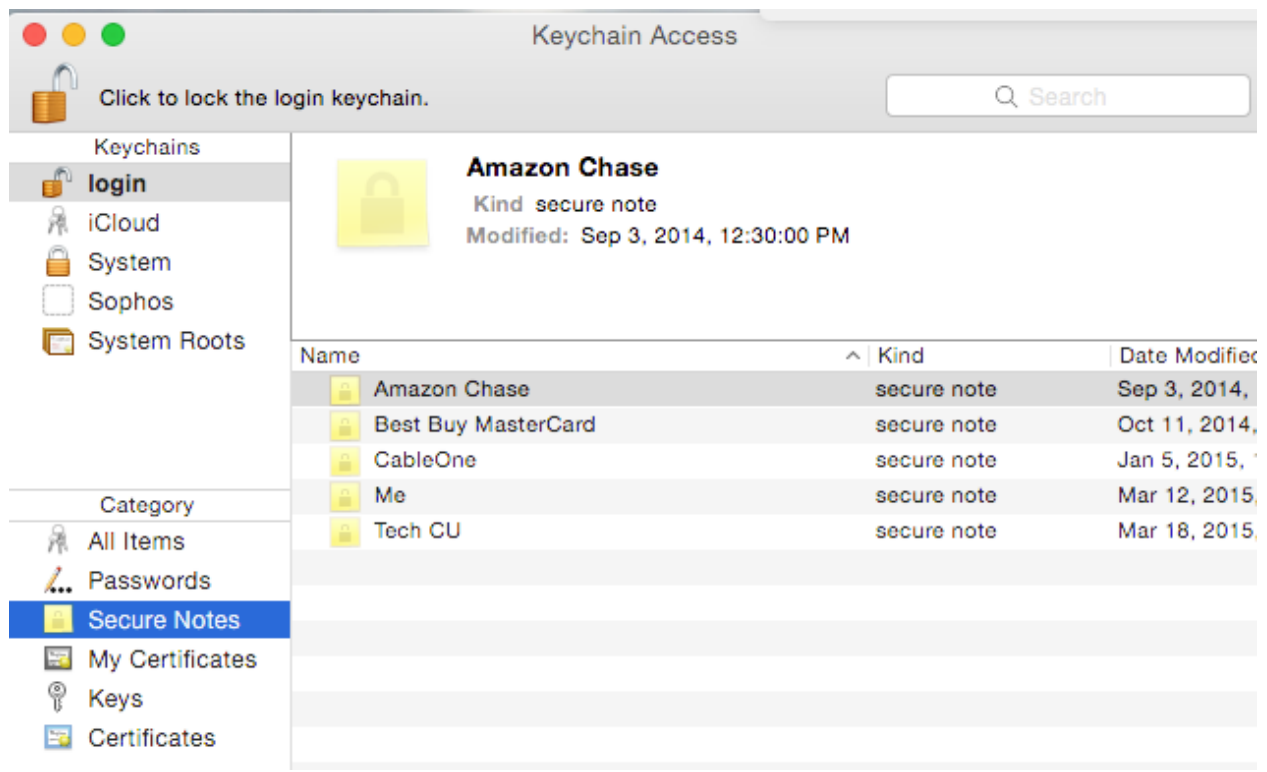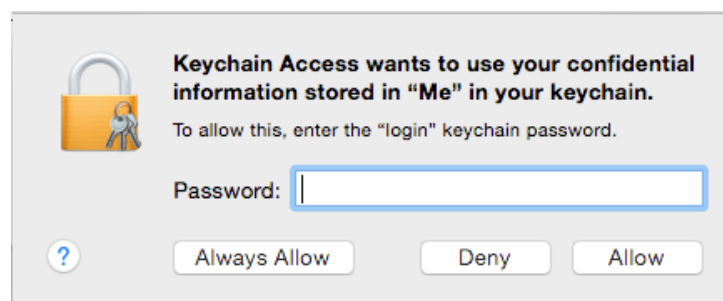
Click on the '+' near the bottom left corner of the bottom right pane to add an item.

Keychain Item Name:

Enter a name for this note.

Note:

Cancel   Add

For the *Keychain Item Name* field, enter a keyword or phrase that identifies what the secure note is about. For the *Note* field, enter as much detail as you want.

To access a saved Password or Secure Note, double-click on the item to display its contents. For a Password, the actual password will not be displayed until you click on the box for *Show password* and then enter your computer login password when prompted. For a Secure Note, you will not see the content of the note until you click on the box for *Show note* and then enter your computer login password when prompted.

Keychain Access wants to use your confidential information stored in "Me" in your keychain.

To allow this, enter the "login" keychain password.

Password:

?   Always Allow   Deny   Allow

If you click on *Always Allow*, then you will never again be asked for your password when accessing that item. If you click on *Allow*, your password is only valid for this one time access. If you click on *Deny*, then you are simply saying that you don't want to access the password or note.

As mentioned before, you can set up Keychain Access to have its own password for accessing passwords or notes. If you do this, please - please write both your login password and Keychain Access password down on paper and save is a secure place in your home.

Prior to the introduction to Yosemite, iOS devices did not have the ability to access the Keychain Access information. At that time, some people used third party applications like 1Password and LastPass to be able to access secure information on their mobile devices. With Yosemite, although 1Password or LastPass are no longer needed, it might still be useful for mobile devices because accessing Keychain Access information on an Apple mobile device is not displayed in a user-friendly format and there is no search function for the mobile devices. In fact, the only way to access the Keychain Access information in iOS 8 is through *Settings->Safari->General->Passwords & Autofill->Saved Passwords* (for just passwords) or *Saved Credit Cards* (for just credit card info). In other words, you cannot access secure notes in iOS notes, which is another reason you might want to keep your 1Password or LastPass app.

But wait! Notice that iOS 8 can save credit card information but that Yosemite does not! At least not directly. You have to add credit card information manually as a secure note in Yosemite, whereas in iOS 8, it is done automatically - as long as you choose to let it happen.

References (for people who like videos):

Keychain Access on Mac OS X - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og2RA10HW6U
Introduced with Mavericks. Icons and names will differ for Yosemite.

Unlocking the Keychain - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PenAD7JqWH4
With reservations that some of the tips discussed may not work.

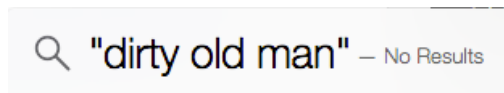Fixing Keychain Issues - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiwc9ODCSmQ

Intro to iCloud Key Chain Step by Step - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th6H_vIKgBo
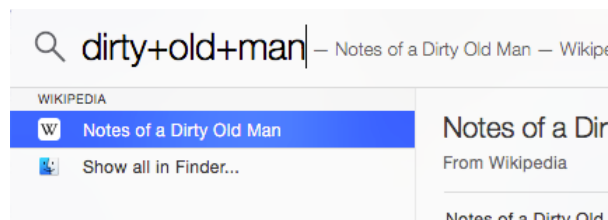*Introduced with Maverick and iOS 7, but applicable to Yosemite and iOS 8.*

Keyword search examples using Spotlight:
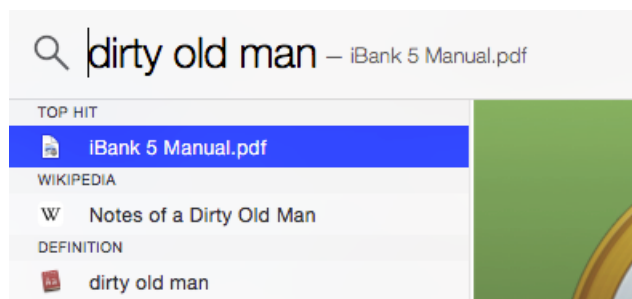
The iBank 5 manual contains all of the keywords listed, including **man** from **man**ual.

Nothing found.

Specific item found.