

Review: Need to scan your old photos? Epson FastFoto will make it fast and easy

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I would bet good money that everyone reading this has a box (or album) of old photos in their closet or attic.

Old photos are great, but enjoying them and sharing them can be a hassle.

I can't tell you how often I get asked about scanning old photos into digital files.

Scanning photos isn't all that difficult, but it can be expensive and time-consuming. Once the photos are scanned and organized, you can easily view them and share them.

In my line of work, I've been using scanners regularly for decades.

I've scanned slides, film negatives, printed photos, ads and even entire newspaper pages.

Lately I've been thinking about scanning documents to get rid of some files and papers that have been cluttering up my home office.

There are different types of scanners for different types of originals.

I've been reviewing the Epson FastFoto FF-640, which is a feed-through duplex [scanner](#) for scanning printed photos and paper documents.

The FF-640 is available from a variety of stores for about \$580.

As I said earlier, scanning isn't difficult. But better scanners and good scanner software can make the process a lot easier.

What the FF-640 has going for it is ease of use.

OUT OF THE BOX

Unwrap the box, and there are just two pieces to put together, the scanner and the feeder. Plug it in and connect to your Mac or PC via an included USB cable. This is a wired scanner that does require a connected computer, there's no wireless or scan-to-cloud options.

You'll be instructed to download and install the Epson scanning software, and you'll be walked through a setup wizard that asks you to make a few decisions about what you're scanning.

You can opt for easy options, or if you understand advanced scanning options, you can get into those and set your scanning preferences.

You can opt to have the Epson software make some adjustments (and improvements) to the scans, including color balance, reviving faded colors and eliminating red eye.

The software can save only the adjusted photo, or it can opt to save two versions - the original raw scan and the improved version.

You can also opt to scan the backs of the photos, which is great if someone's written names or other information on the backs of your pictures.

Even better, you can tell the scanner to ignore the blank backs of photos

if it doesn't detect writing, which it does by comparing contrast, which is user adjustable.

You have two resolution options - 300 or 600 dots per inch. The faster option is 300 dpi, but the better choice would be 600 dpi, which will allow you to crop or enlarge when you're making subsequent prints.

For a 4-by-6-inch print, scanning takes about 1.5 seconds at 300 dpi and about 4 seconds at 600 dpi.

GETTING READY

You can load up to 30 prints at a time in the feeder. You press the scan button when you're ready and the scanner will automatically launch the Epson FastFoto software.

You'll be asked to fill in a few blanks, such as the date or year when the pictures were taken, along with a month or season (Summer 1985) and then you can give the batch some descriptive keywords (Mom's birthday) before you begin.

You don't have to fill in anything if you aren't sure.

On my Mac, I could opt to have the pictures saved to a folder or saved directly into the Apple Photos app (or both).

It helps to have your batches of prints be the same size. You can feed pictures as small as 2 inches square and as large as 8.5 by 14 inches.

For very small or delicate photos, Epson includes a carrier sleeve so you can protect your originals as they feed through.

IN ACTION

When the scanner starts on your stack of photos, you'll be surprised how fast things go. If you opt for the post-scan processing, you'll hardly notice it, but it will add a few seconds to the end of the batch. If you have more photos to add to the batch, you can load them up and click the continue button and repeat until you're finished.

As a test, I scanned 150 photos from my brother's wedding in less than five minutes.

Indeed, once I got everything set up, the actual scanning was the fastest part. The fact I could add keywords before the scanning is a great feature that I've only seen on some high-end photo organization software.

Being able to easily search for your pictures after you scan them is incredibly helpful.

DOCUMENTS, TOO

I've tested some great document scanners from companies like Fujitsu that can also scan photos, but not at the highest quality.

The FF-640 is a photo scanner first, but it also does a very good of job scanning documents.

You can scan stacks of papers (both sides) and save them as a PDF as quickly and easily as you can with a stack of photos.

The Epson software can also convert the PDF scans into searchable text by using the included ABBYY FineReader Sprint software.

CONCLUSIONS

If I owned the FF-640, I'd be very popular with my family.

Once word got out how fast I could scan boxes of photos, I'm sure I'd be asked to bring it to family functions.

In fact, this would be the perfect thing to bring to my next family reunion. Set it up on a table with my laptop and ask the family members to bring in their old photos to make digital copies for everyone.

The FF-640 will make quick work of hundreds, or even thousands, of photos. If you've been meaning to organize your old photos to share with future generations, think about starting with the Epson FastFoto FF-640.

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Pros: Fast; great software for organization and adjustment; scans documents, too.

Cons: A bit expensive.

Bottom line: If you need to scan lots of [photos](#), this is the perfect machine.

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