**<u>Introduction:</u>**

This tutorial guide is for those wanting to use GIMP to create custom mods for Virtual Families. If you are using another image editor, the instructions regarding program commands will be very different for you, although the procedure for beginning a room will be the same. The techniques I describe for creating and drawing will also be the same. I am told that GIMP is a "clone" of Adobe's Photoshop. If that is correct, the commands for that program may be very similar.

The method I describe for beginning a room mod is the one that I developed when I began modding. It is by no means the only correct method. After you have some experience using the program you may find another way that works better for you. The purpose of this guide is just to help you get started.

The first thing you should do is read this *<u>Introduction to VF Mods</u></u> . Next, make a back-up copy of your game's images folder. Instructions for how to do this can be found **<u>here</u> . NEVER edit the files in your back-up folder. Finally, create a folder that will contain your mods. You can put this folder anywhere you like (in My Documents/My Pictures, in Program Files/VirtualFamilies, etc.) Just be sure that you can remember the location. 😵

In this guide, I will use mouse and menu commands and avoid keyboard shortcuts so that you learn what commands you are actually using and where to find them. You can memorize the keyboard shortcuts later. I believe it is much easier to understand what is going on in the beginning without shortcuts.

I will assume that you have read the Introduction to Mods linked above (so that you understand layering and transparency a bit) and that you are familiar with basic Windows commands (select, edit, copy, paste, save, save as, click, double click, drag, etc.) If not, you should see Windows help and learn those functions before continuing.

I will be showing you how to create your background map for all your mods and I will create a "tutorial" bedroom that will be intended to show you how to use as many basic tools and techniques as possible. While working on this bedroom, I will use techniques that are not necessarily the way I do things or the easiest way to get a certain thing done. I've chosen a method to do each task so that I can demonstrate as many of the basic tools and techniques as possible. Hopefully, by the end you will realize there are more ways than one to do certain things, and you will have gained a greater understanding of the tools and menu commands and how they function.

## * Introduction to VF Mod

I am just a mod-making newbie myself, so this is not a detailed guide and will not tell you how to use your specific image editor or make you a great artist. But, you asked for it, so I shall deliver as best I can. :P

### What is a mod?
For our purposes, it is a modification to one or more of the image files of the game. Mods allow you to change the way things look inside your game. They can be done of faces, clothing, homes (furniture, walls, floors, gardens,etc.) items, the user interface and just about any other image you see in the game. (The internet term "mod" also refers to a forum moderator, but that's not the one we're talking about.)

### How do I use a mod? Where do I get them?
Mods have their own forum. If you would like to use a custom mod for your game, be sure to read the instructions below (**) on how to make a backup copy of your original images and how to install mods correctly BEFORE attempting to use any of the mods posted in the forum.

The most commonly created, posted and requested mods are those of the house and lawn. You may see a room or items in someone's screenshots and decide you would just love to have them for your home. Visit the mod forum and see if you can find it posted. You may find other things you want as well.

### How do mods work?
Before installing house and lawn mods, and especially before requesting a mod, you should understand a little about how the game's layout is created. The layout of the house and yard is actually made up of 16 different images that are "sewn" together to make the "map" that we see in the game. The image on the right is courtesy of Cheezyfries:

Each square in this grid is a separate image file inside your game's image folder. The coordinates on each one are the actual file names and identifies their location in the overall map layout.

As you can see, the pictures the game uses have pieces of each room on them. So when one person modifies one room, they are actually modifying pieces of that room on more than one image file. On those same images are pieces of the surrounding rooms as well.
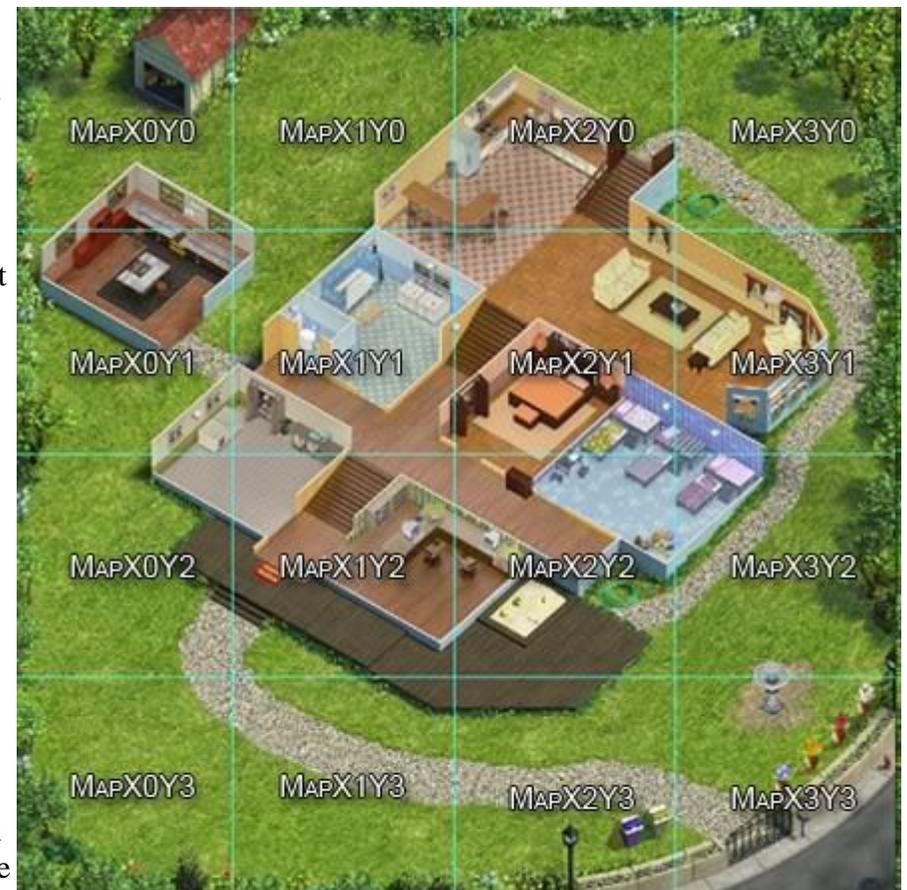


**ORIGINAL MAP PIECES**

The following image on the right is courtesy of Lyssaria and should help you understand what I mean a little better.

As you can see, the image is actually one piece of the overall map but it has two parts of the master bedroom missing and also contains parts of the kids room, master bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen.

Why do I have a line in the middle of my room/s? Combining Mods:
You may love this bedroom by Lyssaria but want to keep your kitchen from Lewanda. If you tried to do that (or tried to combine any other mods,) you probably ended up with a line in your home because the images do not match up. If you installed only a portion of the mod and are missing image files that contain the other portions of the same room, you will have a line where the images do not match. (In the example above, you would need three image files to have a complete master bedroom.)

Because the rooms are not separate on the images, customizing each room combination just the way each player wants it requires modifying several images and takes a lot of work. Our "modders" have been WONDERFUL about working together and sharing their work so that we can pick and choose a room from one and a different room from another, but it's a lot of work to change each map piece for each room that a person requests.

How do I make my own mods?
First, you need an image editor. Not just any image editor will do. You need to be able to work with transparency and layers (I'll explain those two things later.) Paint can't do this. There are many different image editing programs out there that can, and you may already have one on your computer. If you don't, and you want a free one, I recommend the GIMP. Not only is it free, it does everything you need to make your own VF mods. Just google "GIMP" or check any safe download site and you should find it easily.

Second, before attempting to modify anything inside the game folder, make a backup copy of the files.

What is layering?
Layering is just what it sounds like. It is creating an image by stacking several images on top of each other in layers. The easiest way to explain them to any LDW gamer is to think of collectibles. Collectibles are small images that suddenly appear "on top of" the normal image map. That's a layer.
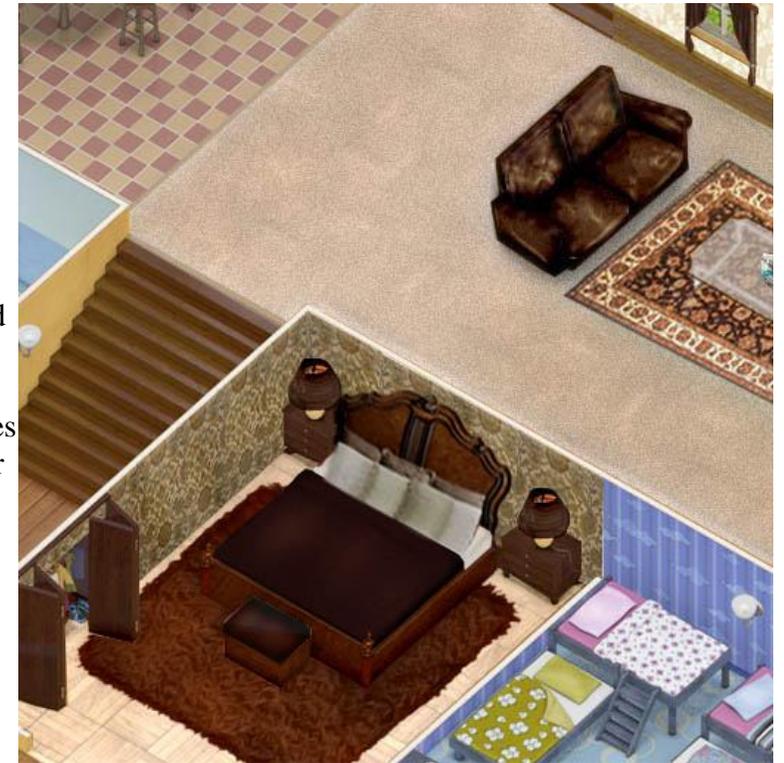
<u>What is transparency and why do I need it?</u>
Transparency is an invisible "color" that can be added to an image or used as the background for an image. It is important with layers because it makes one or more parts of a top layer "invisible," allowing the image layers below it to show through.
Images on your computer are actually made up of tiny dots called pixels. These dots are square, not round. Therefore, your computer likes for image files to be square too. Well, if that collectible image didn't have transparency, you wouldn't see the nice round shape of a coin or the shape of butterfly wings. You'd see a square. Everything outside of those pretty curving wings is transparent and needs to stay that way. 😬

Transparency is also important when modifying room upgrades,heads, collectibles and just about any other image in the game. Each upgrade to the home is actually a new layer on the image map.

For example, the office upgrade changes the color of the furniture. This is the image file for it:

and you already know (hopefully) how it looks in the game.
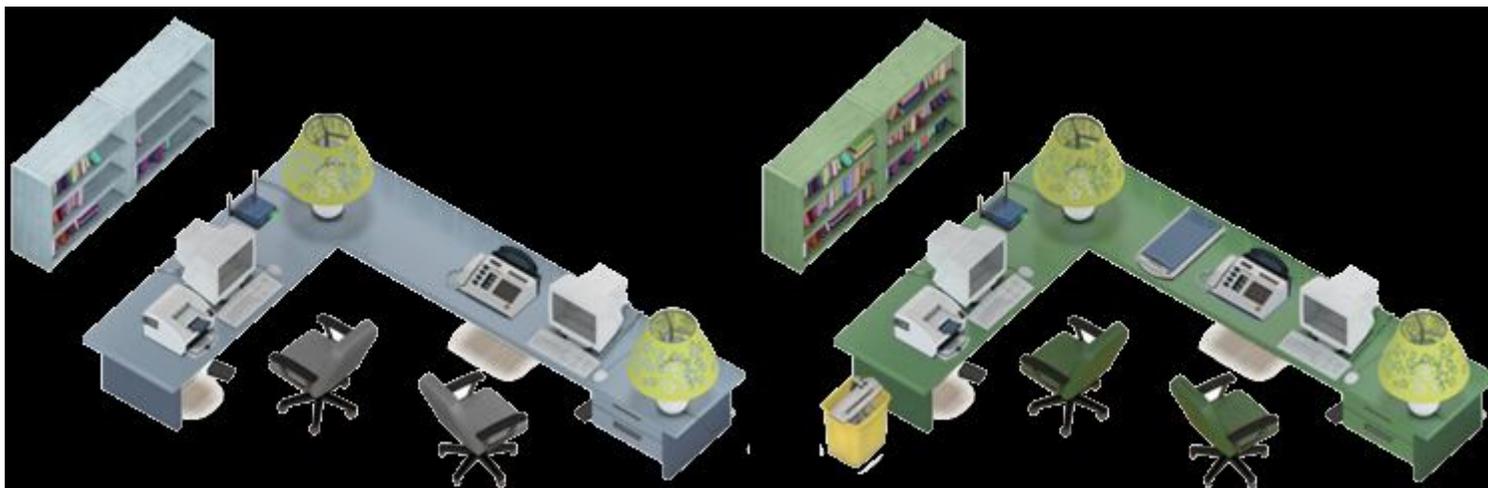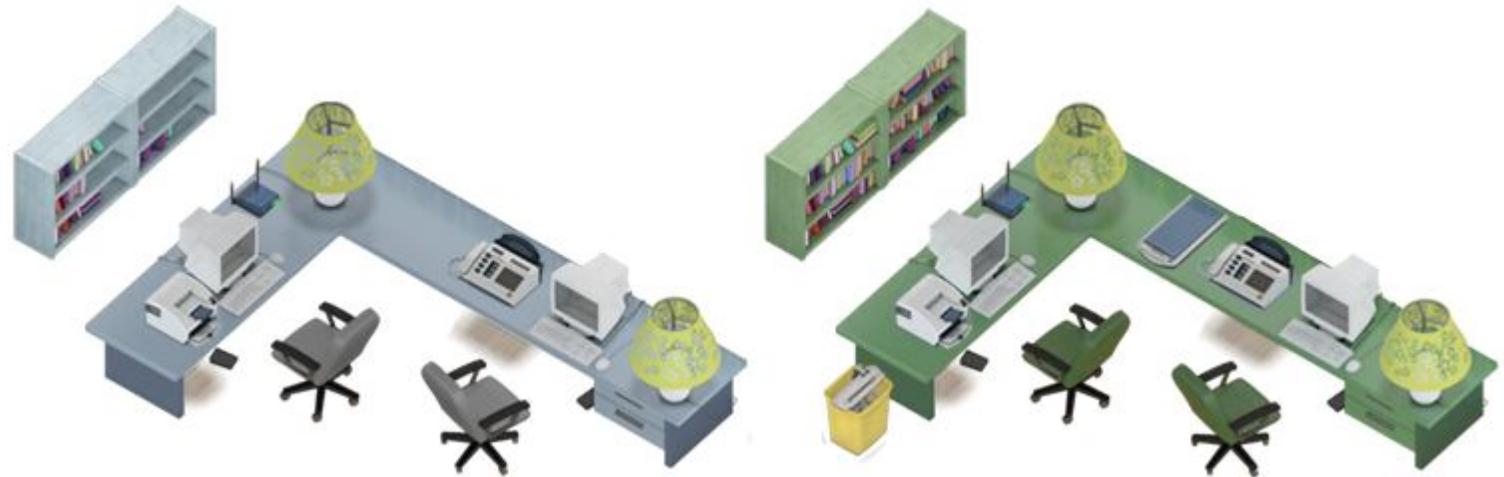
This is what it would look like without transparency: Imagine that on your pretty house. Ugghh.

Layers are useful when modifying images in case you change your mind about something and want to go back to the way things were. You should save your base map as a layer of it's own and not change it at all. All your mods should be done as new layers on top of the base map, so the first thing you will do when creating a mod is to create a new layer with an invisible (transparent) background. Let's say we want to give our lil peeps a a few plants and flowers, to make them feel even more special. :P (Plants and flowers courtesy of Lewanda.)

These plants are saved as a new layer on top of the map. So if we change our mind, all we have to do is move the layer so that is is beneath the saved background map, move it to a new file, or delete the layer.

Be sure to save using a file type that will keep your layers in place, for when you want to edit again. To actually use your modified images in the game you will have to use "save as" and change the file type. Because the image formats used in the game do not recognize layers, you will need to "compress" or "flatten" the layers when changing the file type. Do this before moving your modded images into the game's image folder.

Of course the easiest mod to do is to just cut and paste new items from outside the game into your house. There are many other techniques and things you will learn how to do to make your mods look great. Adding textures, using patterns and tiles, stretching and changing perspective of layers, etc. Instructions for doing these things will depend on the image editing program you decide to use. You should consult the help manual for your program or search online for tutorials for your specific program, to get the best results.

Hopefully this has helped you to understand mods and how they work. If you decide to try to make your own mods, you may find that changing things for your lil peeps can be just as addictive as the game itself.

*Please don't pm me asking for mods. I'm not an artist and have never uploaded to the mod forum. At this time, I am just learning how to do them myself. However, there are many artists on our forums who would be happy (and much more capable) to fulfill your requests. I'm sure now that you understand a little more about what it takes to create a mod, you will be patient with them. As always, I'm more than happy to answer your questions if I can, so feel free to pm or post and I'll do the best I can to help you out.*

Have fun creating a dream house for your lil peeps! 😛 *~BayouBlonde*

\*\* Instructions for making a back-up copy of your game's images folder. (*by Barbara*)

This forum contains user modifications for Virtual Families. These modifications (or Mods) have all been created by users and are **not** supported by LDW. Use these modifications at your own risk. If using them causes problems for your game, please do **not** request support from LDW. It is always a good idea to back up the game's original images before you install an image mod, which will allow you to easily restore the game's original images.

To back up the images folder and install image mods on a **Windows** computer, perform the following steps. (You may use any method of your choosing to back up the images, of course, but the procedure below is a very simple, step-by-step process for people who need some help backing up files and installing the mod.)

- Make sure that Virtual Families is not running (quit the game, if it is)
- Open My Computer and navigate to the folder where Virtual Families is installed (usually c:\Program Files\Virtual Families)
- Open the Virtual Families program folder
- Create a new folder and call it something like Images-Backup
- Open the Images folder
- Ctrl-A to select all of the images in the folder, then Ctrl-C to copy them
- Open the new backup folder that you created previously and Ctrl-V to paste all of the images into the backup folder
- Download the mod that you want to install and save it to a location of your choosing using one of the following methods:
    1. If the mod is a zip file, simply click on the attachment link to download the mod, following your browser's instructions.
    2. If the mod has been posted as image files, you will need to right-click on the image and select the option to save the image to your computer. The exact method depends upon the browser you're using, but a context menu should open giving you an option to save the image (e.g. Save Image As...).
- If the mod is contained in a zip file, follow these steps to extract the mod's images and apply them to your game:
    1. Right-click the downloaded mod file and select Extract all... from the popup menu
    2. Follow the instructions in the wizard and allow the wizard to show the extracted files
    3. Ctrl-A to select all of the images in the folder, then Ctrl-C to copy them
    4. Open the original Images folder and Ctrl-V to paste all of the images into the game's Images folder
    5. When asked if you want to replace the existing file(s), click Yes to All
- If the mod was posted as individual images, you will need to copy them into the game's images folder in a manner similar to steps 3 through 5 above
- Launch Virtual Families and enjoy the new images in the game!

To back up the images folder and install image mods on a **Macintosh** computer, perform the following steps. (You may use any method of your choosing to back up the images, of course, but the procedure below is a very simple, step-by-step process for people who need some help backing up files and installing the mod.)

- Make sure that Virtual Families is not running (quit the game, if it is)

- Open Finder and navigate to the game folder for Virtual Families (it is placed on the desktop by default, but you may have moved it to Applications or another location)
- Open the Virtual Families folder
- Create a new folder and call it something like Images-Backup
- Right-click (ctrl-click) on the Virtual Families application icon and click Show Package Contents
- Open the Contents folder, then the Resources folder, then open the Images folder
- Command-A to select all of the images in the folder, then Command-C to copy them
- Open the new backup folder that you created previously and Command-V to paste all of the images into the backup folder
- Download the mod that you want to install and save it to a location of your choosing using one of the following methods:
    1. If the mod is a zip file, simply click on the attachment link to download the mod, following your browser's instructions.
    2. If the mod has been posted as image files, you will need to right-click on the image and select the option to save the image to your computer. The exact method depends upon the browser you're using, but a context menu should open giving you an option to save the image (e.g. Save Image As...).
- If the mod is contained in a zip file, follow these steps to extract the mod's images and apply them to your game:
    1. If the zip file isn't automatically uncompressed, use an extraction application, such as BOMArchiveHelper or Stuffit Expander, to extract the mod files from the zip file
    2. Open the extracted folder to view the mod files
    3. Command-A to select all of the images in the folder, then Command-C to copy them
    4. Open the original Images folder and Command-V to paste all of the images into the game's Images folder
    5. When asked if you want to replace the existing file(s), click Apply to all and click on Replace
- If the mod was posted as individual images, you will need to copy them into the game's images folder in a manner similar to steps 3 through 5 above
- Launch Virtual Families and enjoy the new images in the game!

**Note: If you did not back up the original game images, the easiest way to restore your game to original condition is to back up your savegame files and reinstall the game. You may also post a request for help on the game forum and you will usually get help from our community.** 😊

**Special note for Windows Vista users:** Windows Vista incorporates security features that can interfere with installing, updating, or removing mods. Once an application is installed in Windows Vista, file changes may be "redirected" to a special user area called VirtualStore, and you may find that the image changes that you've made in Program Files/Virtual Families are not showing up in the game. You can correct this problem, but you will need to delete files from the VirtualStore to do it. The VirtualStore is a hidden folder, so you will need to change the folder view options to allow you to see VirtualStore. To do that:

1. Open Control Panel
2. Type "folder options" in the search field in the upper right of the window

3. Click on the Folder Options icon
4. Click the View tab
5. Click the radio button next to "Show hidden files and folders"
6. Click Apply

Now that you have the ability to view hidden files and folders, you can look at what's in VirtualStore. To see that folder, do the following:

1. Click Start
2. Click Computer
3. Open Users
4. Open the folder for your user name
5. Open AppData
6. Open Local
7. Open VirtualStore

If you see any files in VirtualStore that are mod images, you can safely delete those and cause the game to use the images that you put in the application folder in Program Files. If you make further changes to the mods that you have installed, you may need to check VirtualStore again to make sure that there aren't game image files there.