

RLPlot

From Data to Graphs

Reinhard Lackner, Inst. f. Zoologie, University of Innsbruck

document last updated: 1-Oct-2024

Introduction

RLPlot is a tool to create graphs from data. This program was developed in a natural sciences environment. Imagine you have a piece of paper, a ruler, and a pocket calculator and you wish to create a graph using an ink pen. That's how it started off leading to the development of RLPlot.

RLPlot starts with a spreadsheet. This spreadsheet is intended to accept all the variables needed to create Graphs. RLPlot is not rivaling with other spreadsheet programs, RLPlot is a graphics program. However, you may find it useful to use the spreadsheet as a replacement for a pocket calculator. It may also serve as a replacement for statistical tables as all statistical functions and distributions are available.

There is a close relation between graphs and statistics. RLPlot offers both, graphs and simple statistics as needed especially for explorative approaches. Graphs are vector graphics for highest possible resolution, easy modification by other graphic programs to give ready to publish quality graphs. Please bear in mind that editors and publishers are not happy if statistical items of the graphs are a mere decoration.

Compatibility with prior versions: RLPlot is upward compatible. Any files written with an older version of RLPlot, from any platform, can be opened and processed with the most recent versions.

If you want to create an impressive chart based on few data RLPlot is probably the wrong choice for you. You should consider a simple table in your presentation containing the few data. This is probably not so impressive but more honest.

RLPlot was written in the hope that it is useful and easy to use. I hope you like it and I wish all much success.

Installing RLPlot

RLPlot is usually distributed as executable file. Thus, no specific installation is required. Just download the file, store it wherever you like, and execute it by double clicking the file.

Removing RLPlot from your System

RLPlot stores some user specific data in a file called RLPlot or .RLPlot. The actual position of this file can be found in RLPlot selecting from the menu ?/Configure on the Dialogs tab. Newer installations of Windows tend to offer a hidden directory for application specific data. RLPlot uses the path from the registry at `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Shell Folders` to read/write this file. It is a text file which can be opened or modified by a text editor. It can be safely removed. If you leave it, subsequent installations of RLPlot will use the information therein. If you delete the RLPlot executable and all shortcuts to it all of the program is removed.

RLPlot uses two types of files namely those with an extension *.rlp (graphs) and with an extension *.rlw (RLPlot workbook; a spreadsheet possibly containing graphs). To my knowledge no other program than RLPlot can operate on these files. When RLPlot writes a file and the file already exist it is renamed with an extension of the style *.001, *.002 ... *.003. They can be opened by RLPlot probably being renamed with an *.rlp or *.rlw extension. All RLPlot files are text files and can be examined with a text editor. If you are sure that you do not need the information in these files they can be safely deleted. RLPlot is upward compatible. So even very old files can be opened with newer versions of RLPlot. Drag and drop of files to the spreadsheet window usually works, also for backup files.

Known problems

MSVCR120.dll: When running the 32-bit version of RLPlot on Windows11 the error message 'MSVCR120.dll not found' may occur. Install a suitable version for your OS of this library or use the 64-bit version on this computer.

The RLPlot Spreadsheet

When RLPlot is executed, it will display a worksheet after displaying the welcome banner. This spreadsheet will contain the data from which you wish to create a graph.

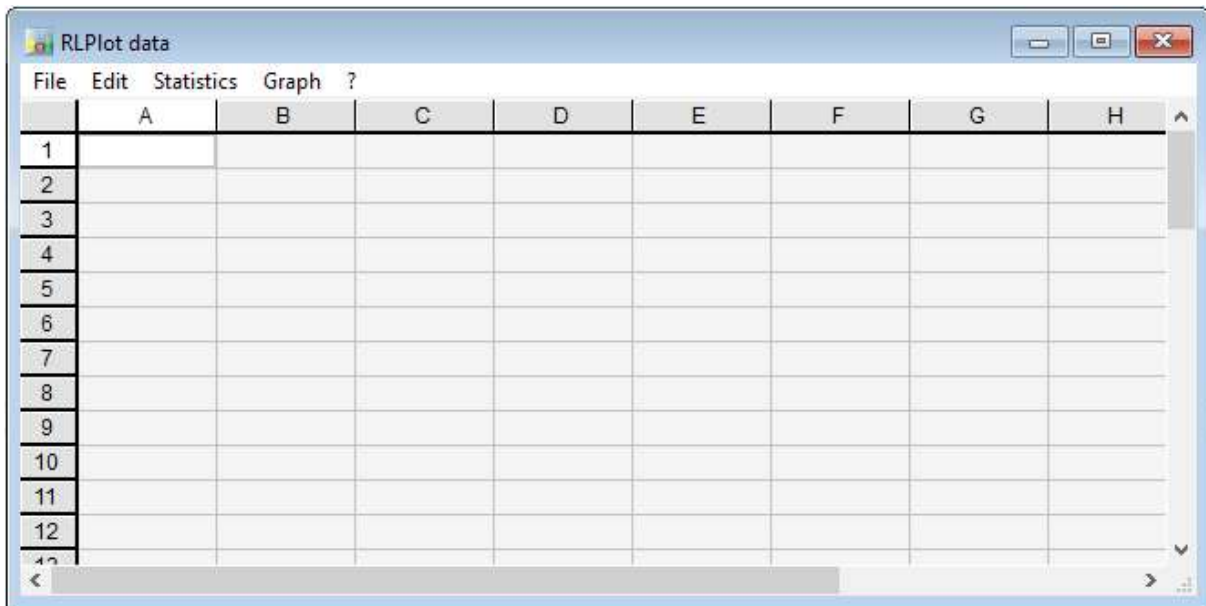
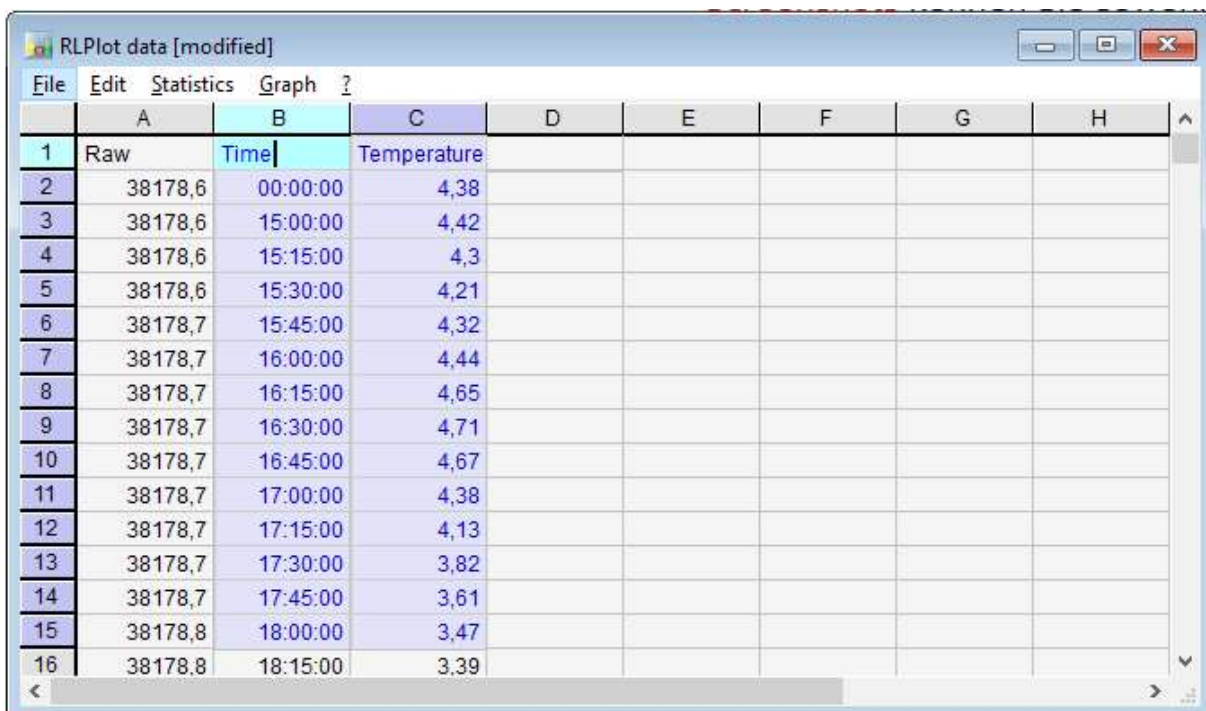


Fig. 1: The empty spreadsheet as displayed upon start of RLPlot.

Selecting a Range

The data which will be used in subsequent operations can be selected with the mouse or with the arrow keys | <PgUp> | <PgDown> Keys. Pressing the <Shift> or <Ctrl> key together with the mouse allows the selection of multiple ranges.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Raw	Time	Temperature					
2	38178,6	00:00:00	4,38					
3	38178,6	15:00:00	4,42					
4	38178,6	15:15:00	4,3					
5	38178,6	15:30:00	4,21					
6	38178,7	15:45:00	4,32					
7	38178,7	16:00:00	4,44					
8	38178,7	16:15:00	4,65					
9	38178,7	16:30:00	4,71					
10	38178,7	16:45:00	4,67					
11	38178,7	17:00:00	4,38					
12	38178,7	17:15:00	4,13					
13	38178,7	17:30:00	3,82					
14	38178,7	17:45:00	3,61					
15	38178,8	18:00:00	3,47					
16	38178,8	18:15:00	3,39					

Fig. 2: The RLPlot spreadsheet with some sample data. Note the selected range including column headers.

In the above image the range b1:c15 is selected. If you create a graph this selection is taken as variables for the graph. Note that the range includes column headers. This field is taken as a name for the column and used for labelling the graphs and reports.

Ranges can also be used to copy from and paste to the spreadsheet. You may prefer to copy data from your favorite spreadsheet program to the RLPlot spreadsheet and vice versa. For most users this may be superior to entering data via the keyboard.

Keyboard Usage

<Arrow keys>	Move the text cursor within the spreadsheet.
<PgUp, PgDown>	Scroll Spreadsheet up or down.
<Tab, Shift Tab>	Move to next column left or right.
<Esc>	Clear marks, empty clipboard ...
<Ctrl + c>	Copy data
<Ctrl + v>	Paste data
<Ctr + x>	Cut data
	Delete the character right of the cursor or the selected range.
<Backspace>	Delete the character left of the cursor or the selected range.
<Ctrl + z>	Undo last actions. There is a cache and you can undo several steps until the cache is empty.
<Pos1><Pos Last>	Position the cursor at the beginning or end of the text.

Most other keys input text or values into the spreadsheet.

Getting started: Your first Graph

Let's start with the spreadsheet as displayed in Fig. 2, including the selected range. We will turn this data into a Graph. Now, from the menu select Graph/Create Graph. A 'Create Graph' dialog will appear.

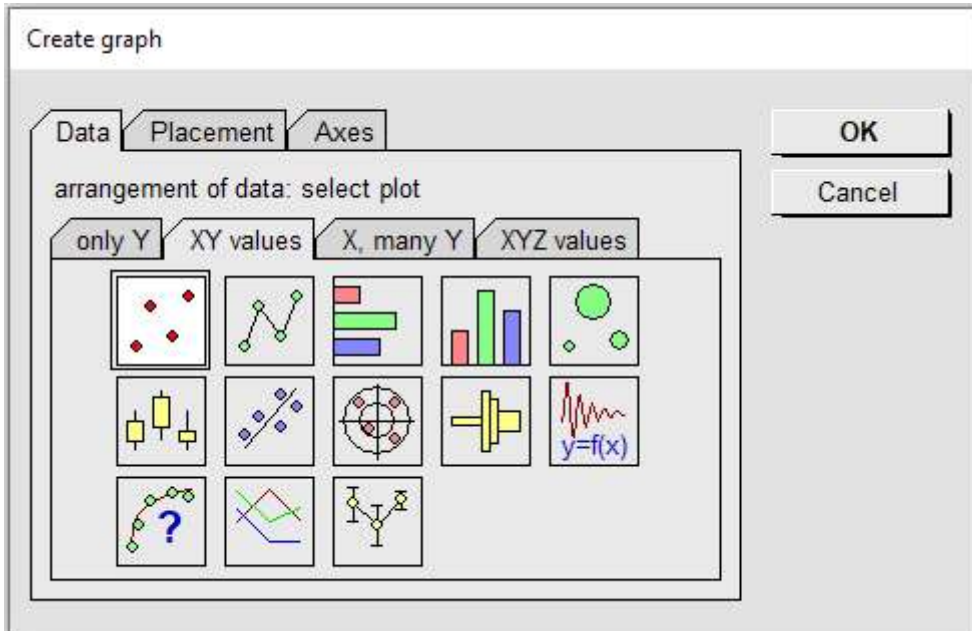



Fig. 3: The Create Graph dialog.



From the icons select the  icon if not already active. Click the [OK] button to continue. Clicking an active icon is equivalent to clicking [OK]. Also double clicking an icon is understood as select and OK. This will open the XY Plot properties dialog.

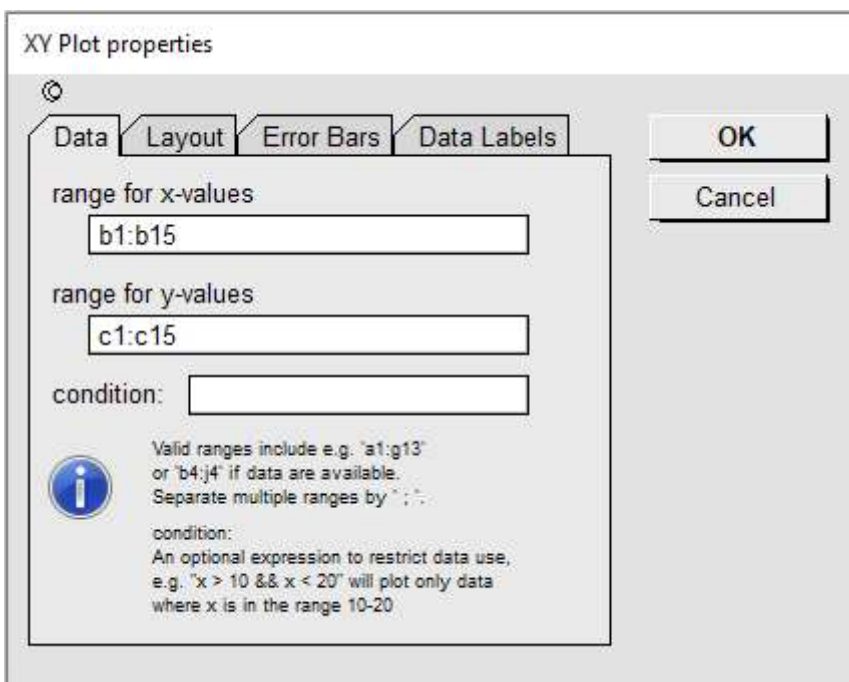


Fig. 4: Dialog to create an XY-plot or scatter plot.

The ranges selected in the spreadsheet are now copied to the range for x-values and range for y-values fields. The ranges for variables may also be entered manually into these fields. At this point you probably don't need any further adjustments: just click the [OK] button. The dialog reminds you that you should have visited the Layout tab because the default settings probably will not fit your desires. To continue, just press the [OK] button again.

A graph is created and displayed. The whole graph is like a graphical menu: double click any item to get another dialog where the settings of this item can be seen and modified. Alternatively, you may select an item and pressing [Return] will give the same dialog. Selected items can be deleted by pressing the [Del] button.

In most cases RLPlot accepts text values as variables. They are assigned ordinal values starting with one up to the last in the order of their appearance (1 .. n).

Zoom in and zoom out

Create a rectangular mark with the mouse and select <zoom in> from the menu or press <Ctrl>+ +. The area of the mark will be displayed as a magnified view to the graph. This piece of the graph maintains the original aspect ratio. Selecting <zoom out> or pressing <Ctrl>+ - will revert to the previous view. Several levels of zoom in and zoom out are supported. If no rectangular area is present before zooming in a magnifying glass cursor is displayed allowing you to select a rectangular region to be magnified. The <Ctrl>+ + command and <Ctrl>+ - commands are equivalent to the menu zoom in and zoom out commands

Copy and paste

RLPlot supports the clipboard to exchange graphical objects. Usually, the whole graph is copied. Select a graph and select <Copy> from the menu. Also <Ctrl>+c is understood. Pasting the contents of the clipboard to a word processor will usually insert a 300dpi bitmap into your text file. Some vector drawing programs will understand the SVG contents of the clipboard. In general, the SVG-format is recommended for any export from RLPlot. This format contains a maximum of information about a graph.

Pasting a graph into another graph may be used to create an inset into a graph. Pasting the graph to the spreadsheet will create a copy of the graph as a new graph. After issuing the paste command a small clipboard cursor allows to select a rectangle where the copied graph will be fitted in. If no rectangle is selected the graph is inserted with its original size.

RLPlot supports several different clipboard formats. Whenever you select copy RLPlot does not know which clipboard format will be preferred by the accepting program. When copying from RLPlot to RLPlot the preferred format is a specific RLPlot OEM format. A word processor might prefer text or a bitmap, a spreadsheet program might prefer the spreadsheet format SYLK, a graphic application might like the bitmap format, and some drawing programs even understand the SVG format. Thus, a negotiation may start and RLPlot creates the respective clipboard content on demand. Clipboard contents are volatile and intended for immediate copy/paste use.

Exporting graphs

If you need to polish your graphs with some different software you will need to export graphs from RLPlot. RLPlot supports bitmap and vector formats for export. If possible, the suggested format for

export is SVG. This is the most powerful vector format supported by RLPlot. For example, with this format vectorized fill patterns are grouped and may be handled as such. You may give your Graphs a final touch with programs like Inkscape, Corel Draw, or any other vector drawing program.

Using graphs as templates

Assume you have a bunch of data all with an equal layout and you want to create equal graphs for each data set. In this case create a graph from one data set. Open a new instance of RLPlot with another set of data. Now copy the graph of the first instance to the spreadsheet of the second instance. This copy of the graph does not update the values. Now select Update values from the menu and the Graph will be updated with the values of the new instance.

Mouse Usage

<Left button single click> Select object

<Left button double click> Select object and open the properties dialog for this object

<Right button single click> This is equivalent to <Left button double click>.

<Left button press and move> This marks a rectangular range as needed for zoom in operations. Some objects are marked as moveable. If such an object is selected subsequent press and move actions will reposition the object. Some objects have drag handles. They may be used to resize, move, or rotate the object, plot, or graph.

Keyboard Usage

<Arrow keys> Most 2D graphs will scroll up/down/left/right if the graph is selected. In 3D graphs these keys rotate the image. Some objects are marked as moveable. If one of these objects is selected the arrow keys move these objects accordingly.

<Pg Up><Pg Down> Scroll the image up or down.

<Esc> Clear marks, empty clipboard ...

<Ctrl + c> Copy

<Ctrl + v> Paste

<Ctrl + z> Undo the last operation

<Tab><Shift Tab> If an object like a symbol or bar out of list is selected, these keys select the next or previous object of the list. If no object is selected the graph is scrolled left or right.

<r><l> Specific for 3D graphs: Rotate the graph left or right.

<Enter> Display the properties of a selected object

About Dialogs

RLPlot has about 100 different dialog windows used to create graphs or to modify or inspect details of a graph. We have seen a typical dialog before. Let's go to some details of this dialog.

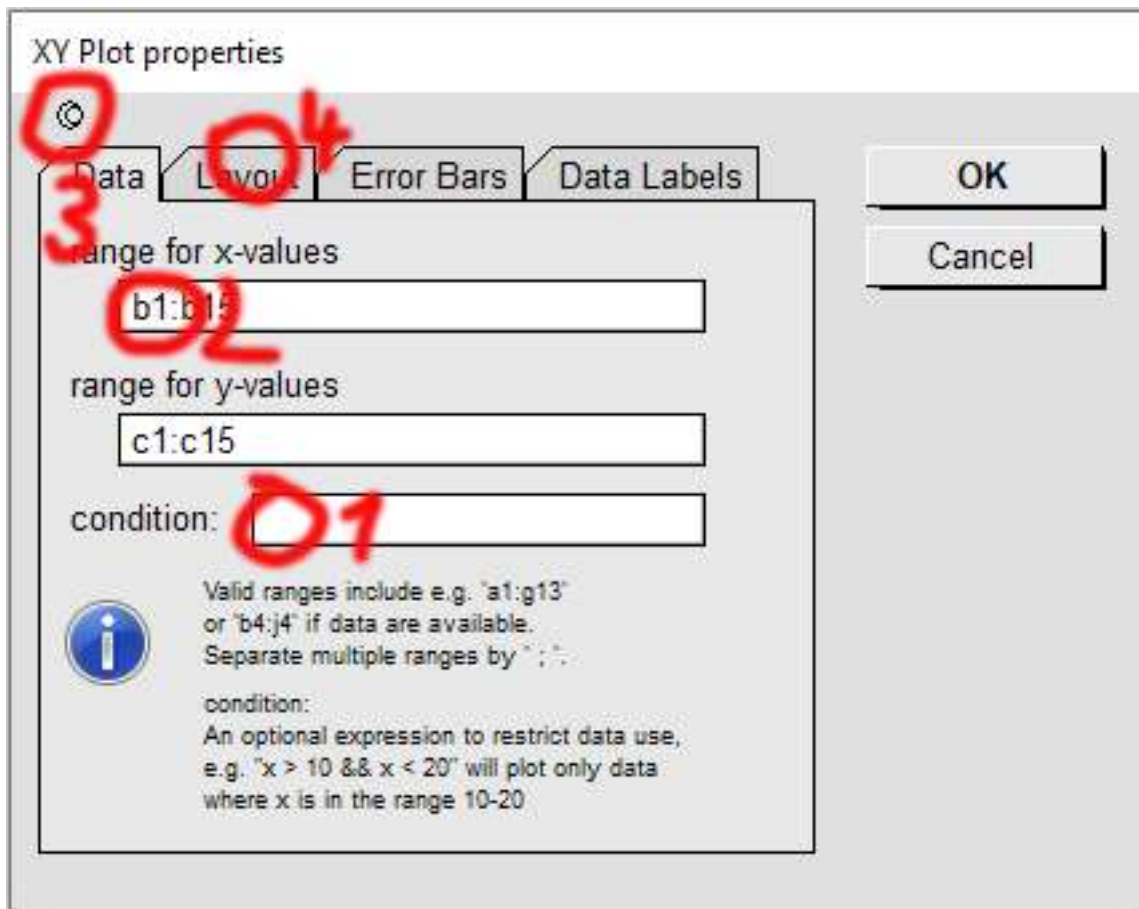


Fig. 4: Some features of a RLPlot dialog. 1 an input text field; 2 an input range field; 3 a check pin; 4 a dialog tab.

1) Input text fields are used to manually enter text and/or values. This field behaves identical to a cell of the spreadsheet. You may copy and paste to this field. Also, formulas may be entered but these will be evaluated and only the result of this evaluation used as argument.

2) The input range field is a special input text field. It gives a reference to the spreadsheet data being used. It is filled with this range identifiers if in a previous operation ranges have been selected in the spreadsheet. Certainly, ranges can be also entered manually via the keyboard. Dialogs with an input range field usually also have a check pin (3).

3) The check pin. The default behavior of dialogs is that they are closed upon loose of focus. This behavior is modified by the check pin. You may toggle it on or off. If this pin is active the following procedure is possible: Place the text cursor into the input range field, go to the spreadsheet and select a range. This selected range descriptor is now copied to the input range field.

4) Some dialogs expand functionality by the use of tabs. The information within is usually optional and not always required. Have a look what's behind.

Formulas and Functions

The RLPlot spreadsheet has some basic functionality as known from other spreadsheet programs. Formulas start with an equal sign. E.g., the expression `=sum(a1:a10)` will display the sum of all variables in the range a1:a10. Formulas may contain references to cells and constants. `=sum(100; a1:a10)` will add 100 to above sum. Spread sheet cells are read/write. `=d1 = sum(a1:a10)` will display the sum of all variables in the range a1:a10 and additionally place the result in cell d1. `=1+2` will display 3 but `=”1”+”2”` will display 12. The syntax `=<cell>=<any function>` can be useful to copy the result of a function to a different cell without coping the formula.

For a detailed list of available functions visit <http://rlplot.sourceforge.net/Docs/index.html> .

Date and Time Functions

RLPlot supports full calendar and time support. Date and time values are internally represented as days after 1900 with the fraction of the day behind the decimal point. Thus, these values may be used like numerical values. If you enter e.g., '28.2.21' let's say into cell c1 it is recognized as a date value and displayed as '28.02.2021'. The actual display formats may be set in the menu `?/Configure/Date Time`. You can use it for all operations. If you enter let's say into cell c2 `'=c1+1'` the displayed value in c2 will be '01.03.2021'. Changing the value of c1 into '28.2.20' the display in c2 will change to '29.2.2020' as the year 2020 is a leap year.

Sorry to those working with historical dates. Date values before 1900 are not supported and the calendar is Gregorian.

The rationale of implementing calendar functionality in RLPlot is to enable true date/time axes in graphs using date or time values as variables.

Spreadsheet Error Messages

#ERROR: There is a syntax error in the formula.

#CIRC: Circular reference in a formula. This message can occur when a formula is executed in a cell and the cell itself is referenced from inside the formula. In most cases there is a workaround inside RLPlot returning the last valid result of this cell.

#VALUE: The formula could not be evaluated. This is probably due to a corruption of internal data structures. You probably should never see this message.

#ARRAY: This is actually not an error message but indicates that the cell contains an array of data which cannot be displayed.