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Docker & Containers

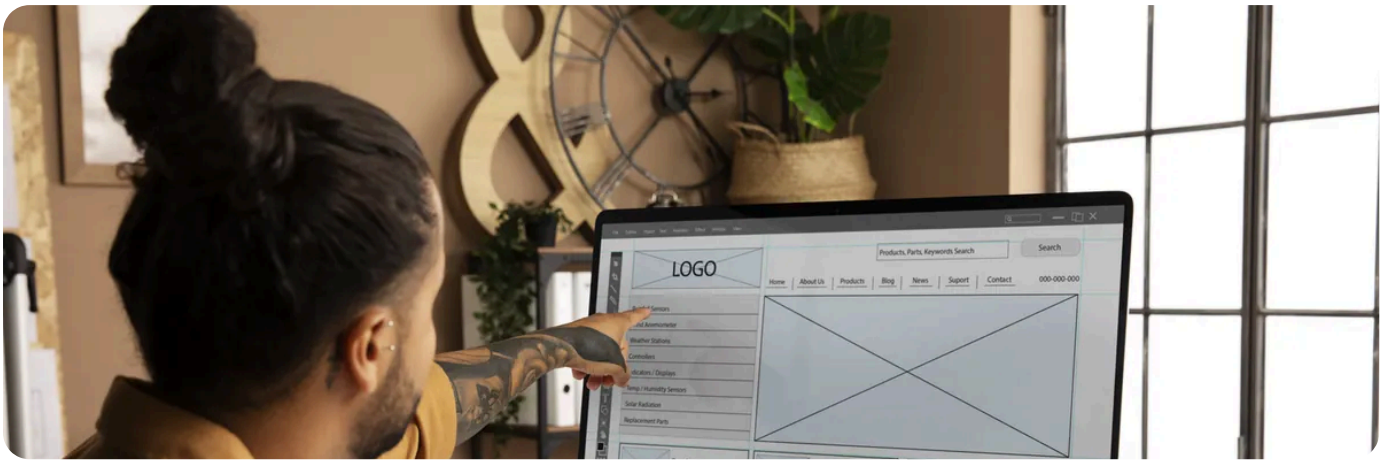
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Installing Docker and Docker Compose on a VPS

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Docker goes on a **VPS with root access over SSH**, never on shared hosting: there is no way to run it there. We recommend **Ubuntu 22.04 LTS**, the one with the most documentation. The right installation is the one in the **official Docker documentation** (Install Docker Engine, Ubuntu), which changes from time to time. So this article explains the order and the traps, and leaves the repository commands to the people who maintain them: Docker itself.

! **On an unmanaged VPS, installing and maintaining Docker and the applications running in it is your job.**

Our support looks after the server, the network and access; it does not install or repair third-party software. See **how far our support goes** and **managed or unmanaged VPS**.

The installation, in order

1 **Connect over SSH** as root, or as a user with `sudo`. If this is your first login, begin with **first steps with your VPS**.

2 **Update the system:**

```
sudo apt update
sudo apt upgrade
```

If the update brings a new kernel, reboot the server before going on.

3 **Remove old packages.** If the VPS already carries Docker packages from another source (for example `docker.io`), the official documentation lists the ones to remove first. On a freshly ordered server there is normally nothing to remove.

4. **Follow the official documentation** at docs.docker.com, “Install Docker Engine on Ubuntu”, using the **apt repository** method: it adds Docker’s key and repository and then installs. Copy the commands from there, not from an old article.

5. **Install the packages** (once the repository is set up):

```
sudo apt install docker-ce docker-ce-cli containerd.io docker-buildx-plugin docker-compose-plugin
```

6. **Check that it works:**

```
sudo systemctl status docker
sudo docker run hello-world
docker compose version
```

The `hello-world` image downloads a test image, runs it and prints a message. If you see it, Docker is up.

Installation methods

Method	What it is	When
Docker’s apt repository	The method the official documentation presents first.	The normal choice on a real server.
Convenience script	A script Docker publishes that does everything in one go.	The documentation itself presents it as for testing and development, not production.
The distribution’s `docker.io` package	A version packaged by the distribution, which may lag behind the official one.	Avoid it if you are following Docker’s documentation.

Compose comes included. The `docker-compose-plugin` package adds the `docker compose` command (with a space). The old `docker-compose` (with a hyphen) was a separate program, and it is what old guides still show. In this set of articles we always use the form with a space.

Using Docker without typing sudo

To let your own user (not root) run Docker directly:

```
sudo usermod -aG docker $USER
```

Log out of the SSH session and back in for the change to take effect.

Anyone in the `docker` group can, in practice, become root on the server.
Docker lets you mount any folder of the server inside a container. Add only people who would already have root, and read **the six things that keep a VPS secure**.

Containers come back by themselves after a reboot
if you give them a restart policy (`restart: unless-stopped` in Compose) and the Docker service is enabled at boot: `sudo systemctl enable docker` .

RECOMMENDED
Do not have a VPS yet? See the plans and pick the operating system when you order.
See the VPS servers →

In our plans

Docker needs a VPS: every VPS gives you full SSH access with KVM virtualization, which is what Docker needs. The range goes from VPS1 (1 vCPU, 2 GB RAM, 40 GB NVMe) to VPS6 (32 vCPU, 64 GB RAM, 1,280 GB NVMe). VPS1 is the entry point and is enough to learn and test; for real services, add up the memory each container needs and choose the plan from that. Images and volumes also eat disk, so count them in the NVMe figure.

SEE ALSO

- **Your first container, and what to look at when it will not start**
- **Which operating system to choose for your VPS or server**
- **First steps with your VPS**
- **VPS servers**

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