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How to install nginx on Ubuntu and serve your website from a folder

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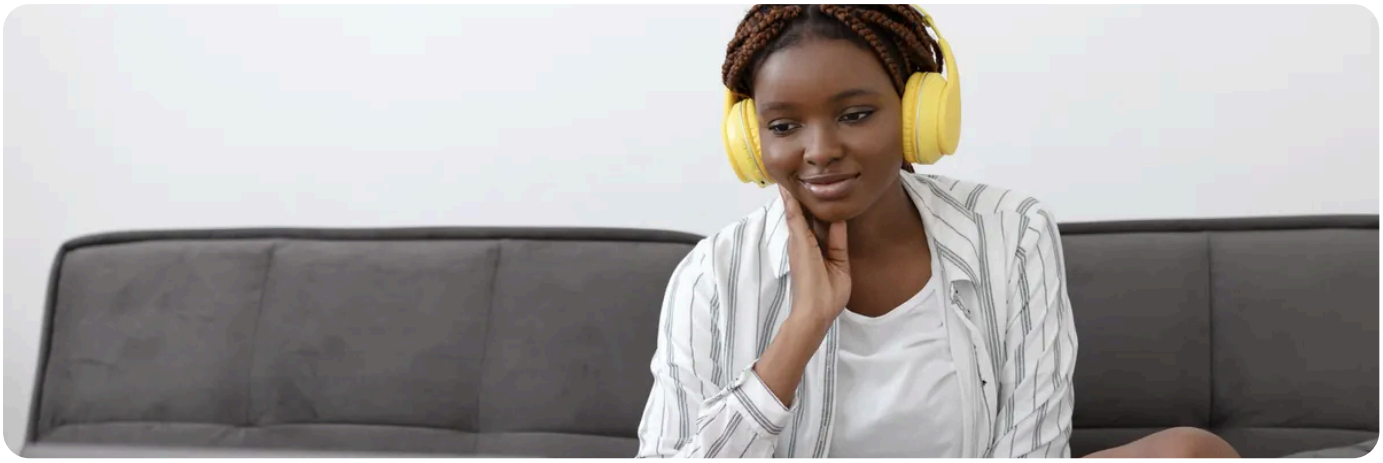
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How to install nginx on Ubuntu and serve your website from a folder

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On an Ubuntu VPS, you install nginx with `sudo apt install nginx`, create a site file in `/etc/nginx/sites-available/` that points at your folder, enable it with a link in `sites-enabled`, check it with `sudo nginx -t` and reload. And the site opens. This article is for an unmanaged VPS with root access: what runs inside is yours, and our support does not install or repair nginx (see **how far our support goes**).

The commands below are for Debian and Ubuntu. On AlmaLinux or Rocky Linux the installer (`dnf`) and the configuration folder differ; the table further down has them. Depending on your system, always check against the distribution's own documentation.

Install it and get the site opening

1. **Refresh the package list and install.** `sudo apt update` then `sudo apt install nginx`. The service starts on its own and is set to start at boot.

2. **Open ports 80 and 443** if a firewall is active (on Ubuntu, `sudo ufw allow 80/tcp` and `sudo ufw allow 443/tcp`). Without it the site opens only from inside the server. See **ports and firewall on a VPS** and **setting up ufw without locking yourself out**.

3. **Put the site in a folder.** For example `/var/www/yourdomain.tld/public`, with a test `index.html` in it. Create it with `sudo mkdir -p /var/www/yourdomain.tld/public`.

4 **Create the site file** with `sudo nano /etc/nginx/sites-available/yourdomain.tld` and this content:

```
server {
listen 80;
server_name yourdomain.tld www.yourdomain.tld;
root /var/www/yourdomain.tld/public;
index index.html index.php;

location / {
try_files $uri $uri/ =404;
}
}
```

5 **Enable it.** `sudo ln -s /etc/nginx/sites-available/yourdomain.tld /etc/nginx/sites-enabled/` . The `sites-enabled/default` link can stay or go; if the name in a request matches no `server_name` , the nginx welcome page is what answers.

6 **Test the configuration before reloading.** `sudo nginx -t` must say “syntax is ok” and “test is successful”. Only then `sudo systemctl reload nginx` . A reload keeps open connections alive; a restart drops them.

7 **Point the domain at the server.** The domain’s A record, and the one for `www` , must hold the VPS IP (see **where to find your VPS IP** and **pointing a domain at your own VPS**). To try it before DNS has spread, use the hosts file: **testing a site before you change the DNS**.

If the site uses PHP

nginx does not run PHP itself: it hands it to PHP-FPM. Install it (on Ubuntu, `sudo apt install php-fpm`) and add to the `server` block a `location ~ \.php$` with `include snippets/fastcgi-php.conf;` and a `fastcgi_pass` pointing at PHP-FPM’s socket. The socket name carries the PHP version, so look at what exists with `ls /run/php/` instead of copying it from a guide. A “502 Bad Gateway” here is usually a socket with the wrong name or a stopped PHP-FPM.

Debian and Ubuntu, or AlmaLinux and Rocky

	Debian and Ubuntu	AlmaLinux and Rocky Linux
Install	`apt install nginx`	`dnf install nginx` then `systemctl enable --now nginx`
Where sites live	`/etc/nginx/sites-available` and `sites-enabled`	`/etc/nginx/conf.d/name.conf`

	Debian and Ubuntu	AlmaLinux and Rocky Linux
Service user	`www-data`	`nginx`
Firewall	`ufw`	`firewalld` : `firewall-cmd --permanent --add-service=http`
Logs	`/var/log/nginx/access.log` and `error.log`	the same

On AlmaLinux and Rocky, SELinux can block nginx
without a word on the site: it will not read folders with the wrong label. If the file exists and the permissions are right but you still get a 403, see **when SELinux or AppArmor blocks a service**. And if the 403 is ordinary permissions, **file permissions on a VPS**.

The first place to look is the error log:
`Sudo tail -n 30 /var/log/nginx/error.log` . It nearly always says what is wrong (missing file, permission denied, missing socket).

NEED A HAND?

Server not answering even to a ping, or locked out by SSH after touching the firewall? That we can check from our side.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Installing Apache and setting up a virtual host →
- Several websites on one VPS →
- Redirecting to HTTPS and to the bare domain →
- Ports and firewall on a VPS →

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