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Installing Docker and Docker Compose on a VPS

Node.js, Python & Docker

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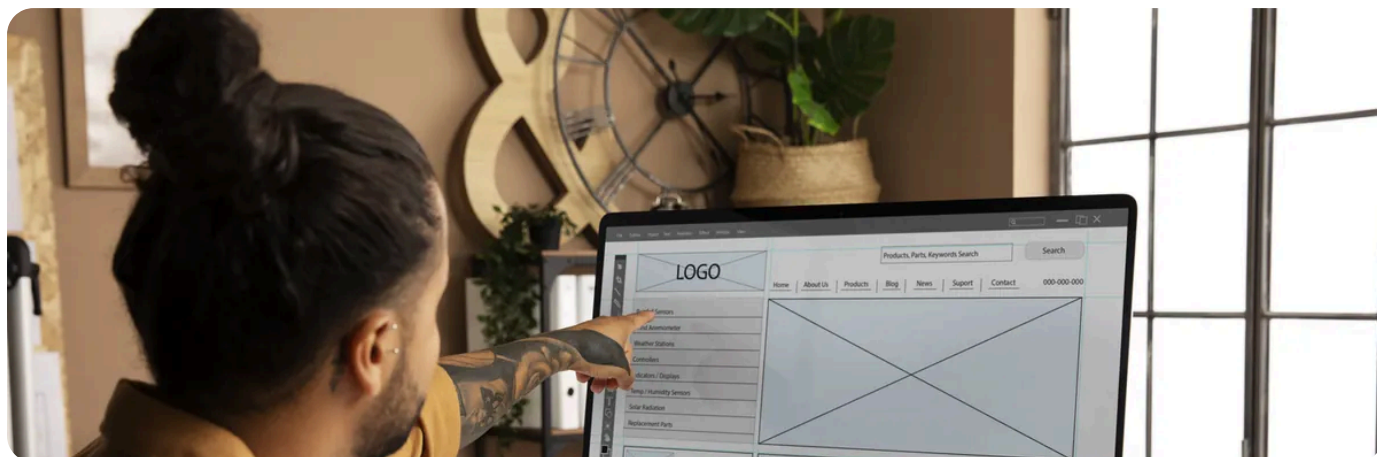
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Installing Docker and Docker Compose on a VPS

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3 min read



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 <code>docker.io</code> 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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