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Nginx or Apache on a VPS: which web server to choose

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Nginx or Apache on a VPS: which web server to choose

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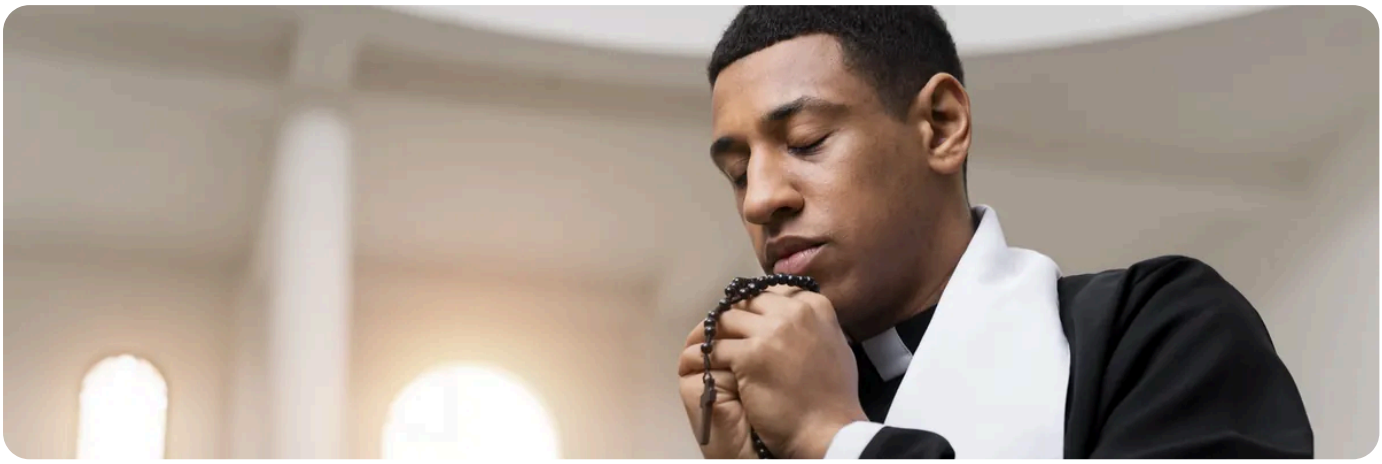

For an ordinary site **either one will do**, and the deciding factor is what your application expects and what you already know how to run. Apache is the natural choice when the site depends on `.htaccess` files; nginx is the usual choice for serving static files and for standing in front of an application (a reverse proxy). There is no universal answer, and running both on the same port does not work.

The differences that matter in practice

Point	Apache	Nginx
Per-folder configuration (.htaccess)	Reads `.htaccess` files in each folder, with no reload. It is what WordPress and many PHP programs assume.	Does not read `.htaccess`. Rules go in the server configuration, and you reload.
PHP	Can run PHP inside the server itself (`mod_php`) or through PHP-FPM.	Always hands PHP to a separate process (PHP-FPM).
Serving static files and acting as a proxy	Does both, and does them well.	Where it is usually picked: little memory per open connection and a short proxy configuration.
Modules	Switched on and off with one command (`a2enmod`).	Usually come with the package; adding one may need another package.
Documentation and answers online	A lot, from many years.	A lot, and more recent for proxying, containers and HTTPS.
Learning curve	More directives to learn; `.htaccess` is forgiving.	Leaner, but a syntax error stops the reload.

Choosing by what you will put on it

Your case	As a rule
WordPress or another PHP application with .htaccess	Apache is the path of least resistance. nginx works, but the `.htaccess` rules have to be translated by hand.
A Node.js, Python or container app that needs HTTPS	nginx (or Apache) in front as a reverse proxy: **nginx in front of a container**.
Lots of static files, images, downloads	nginx.
You will run a control panel on the VPS	Whatever the panel installs and expects. Check the panel's requirements before choosing the system: **which operating system to choose**.
You just want the site up and already know one of them	The one you know. An afternoon lost on the other is not worth it.

What about LiteSpeed? There is a server of that name that reads `.htaccess` files like Apache and is widely used on shared hosting; on your own VPS, installing and licensing it is your decision and it is not included. To start, stay with one of the two above.

Two web servers cannot use port 80 at the same time.
If you install one on top of the other, the second fails to start with "Address already in use". See who holds the port with `sudo ss -tlnp | grep :80`, stop and disable the one you do not want (`sudo systemctl disable --now apache2`), and only then start the other.

Switching later is possible, but it takes work.
A quiet weekend is the best time to try. Take a copy first (**backing up a VPS: snapshots or files**) and test with the hosts file before you change the DNS.

NEED A HAND?

Not sure which fits what you are about to install? Tell us what you plan to run and we will tell you what is on our side: the server and the network.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Installing nginx on Ubuntu**
- **Installing Apache and setting up a virtual host**
- **nginx as a reverse proxy in front of a container**
- **VPS, Cloud or Dedicated: how to choose**

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