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Which operating system to choose for your VPS or server

VPS & Servers

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Which operating system to choose for your VPS or server

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When you order a VPS or a dedicated server you choose the operating system, and the list is long. The choice matters more than it looks: it decides how many years the server keeps receiving security fixes, and changing it later means reinstalling.

The word that decides nearly everything: LTS

LTS means *long-term support*. An LTS release gets security updates for five years or more; a normal release gets them for nine months to a year, and then stops.

> **A system with no updates is a server ageing on its own.**
> When support ends, flaws found from then on are **not fixed** - they stay open. It is not a problem you can see: the server keeps working normally right up to the day someone walks in. So the rule is simple: **always pick an LTS release**, even when there is a higher number in the list.

What we recommend

Choice	Who it suits
Ubuntu 22.04 LTS	The default choice for most people. It is the system with the most documentation and the most answers written on the internet - when something breaks, you find help
AlmaLinux 9 or Rocky Linux 9	If you are coming from CentOS, or the panel you will use is cPanel. They are CentOS's direct successors and cPanel runs on them
Debian 12	If you prefer a conservative system that changes little between releases. Very stable, a little more austere
CloudLinux 8	If you are going to resell hosting. It isolates accounts from each other, which on a server shared with clients makes a difference

Choice	Who it suits
Windows Server 2022	Only if you genuinely need Windows - ASP.NET, MSSQL, or an application that runs nowhere else. See **connecting to a Windows VPS**

Versions to avoid, even though they are listed

The panel's list includes old releases that no longer receive updates.
They are there for compatibility with legacy systems, but they are **not a good choice for a new server**. If you are building from scratch, ignore them. If you genuinely need one because of an old application, tell us first - there is nearly always a better way.

Do not pick for a new server	Why
Ubuntu 23.04 and 21.04	Not LTS, and support has ended. The higher number misleads - 22.04 is more current *in support* than 23.04
CentOS 7	End of life. Anyone coming from CentOS should go to AlmaLinux or Rocky Linux
Fedora	About a year of life per release. Fine for experimenting, not for putting a real site online
Windows 2008 R2 and 2012 R2	Out of support for years. For Windows, choose 2019 or 2022

Control panel: it counts before you choose

If you intend to install a panel, the panel decides the choice, not the other way round:

1. **cPanel/WHM** runs on AlmaLinux, Rocky Linux and CloudLinux. Recent cPanel versions also run on Ubuntu LTS, but not on Debian or on non-LTS releases: check cPanel's list of supported systems before you build the server, because you only find out once it is built.
2. **Plesk** runs on almost everything, including Ubuntu, Debian and Windows.
3. **No panel** - command line only - and any of them will do. Ubuntu LTS is the one with the most answers written about it.

And if you choose wrong?

It is not irreversible, but it costs: changing operating system means **reinstalling**, and a reinstall wipes everything on the server. If you have not put anything there yet, it is painless; if the site is already running, you have to copy it off first.

How that is done is in **reinstalling or changing your VPS operating system**. It is worth deciding well the first time.

Who handles the updates

On an **unmanaged** server, you do - picking LTS helps, but the updates still have to be applied by someone. On a **managed** server, we do. The difference is in **managed or unmanaged VPS** and the first steps in **first steps with your VPS**.

NEED A HAND?

Torn between two systems for what you are going to run?

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