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Deactivating or deleting a WordPress theme

Content, Themes & Plugins

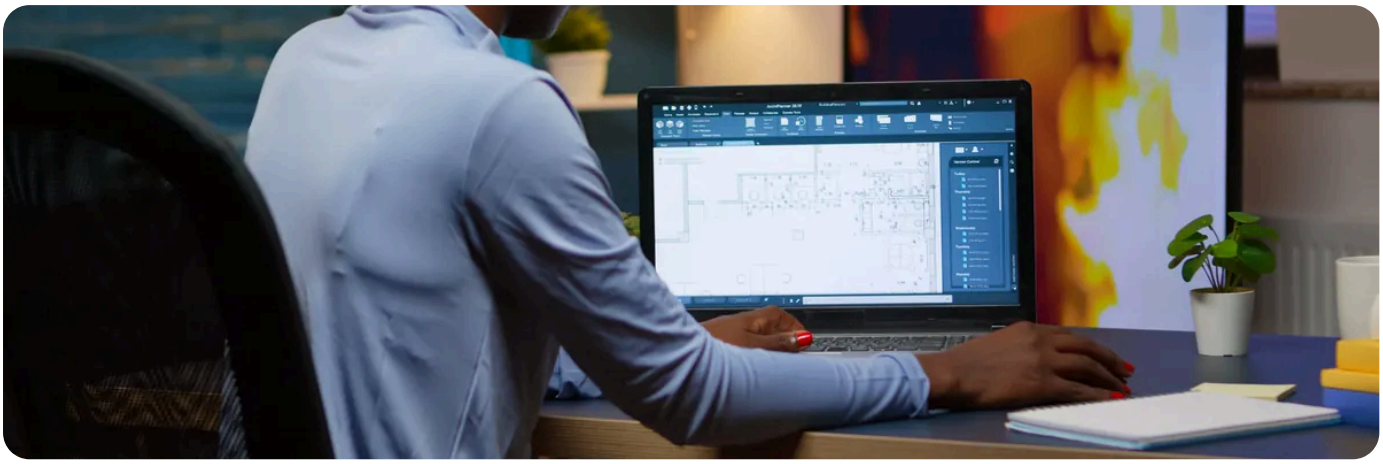
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Deactivating or deleting a WordPress theme

Content, Themes & Plugins Created on **September 27, 2026** 2 min read



WordPress has no button to deactivate a theme, and that is not an oversight: **there is always exactly one active theme**. Deactivating the one in use means activating another. What you can do, and should do, is **delete** the themes sitting there serving no purpose.

Stopping the use of a theme

1. In the WordPress dashboard, open **Appearance** and then **Themes**.
2. Hover over the theme you want to switch to and click **Activate**.
3. The previous theme goes inactive at that moment and simply sits in the list.
4. Walk the site and put menus and widgets back, since they almost never carry over unchanged.

Deleting the ones you do not use

An inactive theme is still code inside your site. It does not run for visitors, but it is on disk, it keeps asking to be updated, and a flaw in it can be exploitable even while inactive. Deleting what you do not use is one of the best returns on a few minutes of tidying.

1. Under **Appearance**, **Themes**, click the theme you want gone to open its details.
2. The **Delete** option sits in the bottom right corner of that window.
3. Confirm. WordPress removes the theme folder from disk.

The WordPress tool in cPanel, in the **Domains** section, manages themes too. Handy for tidying several sites without opening each one.

What not to delete

Do not delete	Why
The active theme	WordPress will not let you, and rightly so. Activate another one first.
The parent of a child theme	The child inherits everything from it. Delete the parent and the site is left with no appearance at all.
One default theme	Always keep one of the plain themes that ship with WordPress. It is the safety net: when your theme breaks, WordPress falls back to it and the site stays up.

Deleting a theme deletes its customisations.
Colours, logo, header images and layouts made in that theme's customiser go with it. If there is any chance you will go back, do not delete: leave it inactive and updated until you are sure.

When a theme will not go

When the dashboard will not open, or the delete option is missing, the theme folder can be removed straight from `wp-content/themes` using File Manager, in the **Files** section of cPanel, or over FTP: **FTP accounts and FileZilla**. Copy the folder somewhere before deleting it.

NEED A HAND?

Deleted a theme and the site lost its appearance? We can put the folder back from yesterday's backup.

Open a support ticket →

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