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n8n Workflows

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n8n Schedule Trigger or a cron job: which to use

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Use the **n8n scheduler** (the Schedule Trigger node) when the job is about **connecting applications** and you want to see each run inside n8n. Use a **cron job** when the job belongs to the **server** (backups, clean-ups, certificates) or when you want it to run even if n8n is down. And the two can work together.

The difference, side by side

	n8n Schedule Trigger	Cron job
Where it runs	Inside n8n, which has to be up.	In the server's own system, independent of n8n.
Best for	Workflows between applications: sheets, e-mail, shops, messages.	Scripts and commands: backups, clean-ups, renewals.
What you see	Each run with the data of every step, in n8n.	Only what the command writes to a file or sends by e-mail.
How you change it	In the workflow design, without touching the server.	By editing the system's task list.
If n8n stops	It does not run.	It runs anyway, but only suits what does not depend on n8n.
On a shared hosting plan	Does not apply: there is no n8n.	Available in cPanel. See **cron jobs**.

How to decide

1. **Does the job pass through several applications?** (read a sheet, send e-mails, write to a shop). Use the n8n scheduler, since everything is already there.

2 **Is the job a server command?** (a backup, deleting old files). Use cron. See **automatic backups with cron**.

3 **Do you need to see each run and repeat one that failed?** n8n keeps the history; cron does not.

4 **Do you not want to depend on n8n being up?** Use cron for the essentials and leave n8n for the rest.

5 **Both at once:** cron calls an n8n webhook with `curl` at the set time, and n8n does the rest. The schedule lives in the system and the work in n8n.

The traps in timing

Trap	What to do
The hour is off	The n8n time zone, the container's and the server's may differ. Set n8n's time zone (the `GENERIC_TIMEZONE` variable) and check the workflow's own as well.
The scheduled workflow does not run	The workflow has to be **active**. One that is only saved does not fire.
A run was missed while n8n was down	It is not made up afterwards. If that matters, the workflow should know how to fetch whatever was left unprocessed.
Two runs overlap	If one takes longer than the interval, the next starts on top of it. Lengthen the interval or add a "running" marker.
Several workflows at the same hour	Spread out the times, so you do not fill the memory: **n8n running out of memory**.

! **Cron has five time fields**
(minute, hour, day of month, month, day of week) and a mistake in one changes everything. Test the command by hand before scheduling it, and check the time the task should have run.

To run a PHP script at a set time
, see **running a PHP script from a cron job**. For WordPress, **swapping WP-Cron for a real server cron job**.

RECOMMENDED

Want a machine where the jobs always run?

See the VPS servers →

SEE ALSO

- Cron jobs: what they are for and how to create one →
- Running a PHP script from a cron job →
- n8n webhooks: test URL and production URL →

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