

Essential WordPress plugins – Hostinger Learning lab

CONTENTS

What's inside

01	Essential WordPress plugins by category REFERENCE GUIDE	p.03
02	SEO	p.04
03	Speed and performance	p.05
04	Security	p.06
05	Backups	p.07
06	Forms and lead capture	p.08
07	Ecommerce	p.09
08	Maintenance and utilities	p.10

— REFERENCE GUIDE

Essential WordPress plugins by category

The plugins worth knowing about, organized by what they do. Use this as your go-to reference when deciding what to install and what to skip.

How to use this guide: Find the category that matches what you need. Each plugin includes a plain-language description, a pricing label, and a note on who it's best suited for. Start with the categories that matter most to your site right now – you don't need all of these at once.

☐ **Only install what you need**

Every plugin adds weight to your site. Install for a specific reason, not just in case.

☐ **Keep everything updated**

Outdated plugins are the most common entry point for hackers. Update regularly.

☐ **Delete what you don't use**

Deactivated plugins still pose a security risk. If you're not using it, remove it.

SEO

Recommended plugins

Yoast SEO

Freemium

The most widely used SEO plugin. Handles title tags, meta descriptions, XML sitemaps, and gives a readability score for every post. The traffic light system makes it beginner-friendly. **Best for:** beginners who want guided SEO on every page

Rank Math

Freemium

A powerful alternative to Yoast with more features in the free tier — including schema markup, keyword tracking, and Google Search Console integration built in. **Best for:** those who want more SEO control without paying

All in One SEO

Freemium

One of the original WordPress SEO plugins. Covers all the essentials with a clean setup wizard. Good for users who want a simple, no-fuss configuration. **Best for:** beginners who want a quick, clean setup

Broken Link Checker

Free

Scans your site for broken links and missing images and alerts you when it finds them. Broken links hurt SEO and frustrate visitors — this catches them automatically. **Best for:** sites with lots of content or external links



You only need one main SEO plugin. Pick either Yoast, Rank Math, or All in One SEO — installing more than one will cause conflicts.

Speed and performance

Make your site load faster — for visitors and for Google

Recommended plugins		
WP Rocket	Paid	The gold standard for WordPress caching and performance. Handles page caching, file minification, lazy loading, and a CDN setup from one clean dashboard. Minimal configuration needed. Best for: anyone who wants the best results with the least effort
W3 Total Cache	Free	A free and highly configurable caching plugin. More complex to set up than WP Rocket, but covers all the same bases including browser caching, minification, and CDN support. Best for: experienced users who don't want to pay for caching
Smush	Freemium	Automatically compresses and resizes images as you upload them, without noticeable quality loss. Can also bulk-compress your existing image library. Supports lazy loading out of the box. Best for: image-heavy sites — blogs, portfolios, online stores
Imagify	Freemium	Converts images to WebP format automatically and compresses them on upload. WebP files are significantly smaller than JPEG or PNG, making pages load faster with no visible quality difference. Best for: sites that want to adopt modern image formats easily



Only install one caching plugin. WP Rocket and W3 Total Cache do the same job — running both will break your site.

Security

Safeguard your site from attacks, malware, and unauthorised access

Recommended plugins		
Wordfence Security	Freemium	The most popular WordPress security plugin. Includes a firewall, malware scanner, login security, and live traffic monitoring. The free tier is comprehensive enough for most small sites. **Best for:** anyone who wants a complete security solution in one plugin
Sucuri Security	Freemium	Covers security hardening, malware scanning, and activity auditing. The paid plan adds a website firewall (WAF) that blocks attacks before they reach your server. **Best for:** sites that need professional-grade firewall protection
WP 2FA	Freemium	Adds two-factor authentication to WordPress logins. Works with Google Authenticator, Authy, and email-based codes. Simple to set up and one of the most effective ways to prevent unauthorised access. **Best for:** any site — two-factor authentication should be standard
Limit Login Attempts Reloaded	Free	Blocks IP addresses after a set number of failed login attempts, preventing brute force attacks. Simple, lightweight, and effective — does exactly one thing well. **Best for:** beginners who want basic login protection with zero setup



Choose either Wordfence or Sucuri as your main security plugin — not both. Layer on WP 2FA and Limit Login Attempts for extra protection.

Backups

Make sure you can always restore your site if something goes wrong

Recommended plugins

UpdraftPlus

Freemium

The most trusted WordPress backup plugin. Backs up your entire site — files and database — and sends it to remote storage like Google Drive, Dropbox, or Amazon S3. Scheduled backups run automatically. Restoring is straightforward, even for beginners. ****Best for:**** anyone who wants reliable, automated backups with remote storage

BackupBuddy

Paid

A premium backup solution that also handles site migration — useful when moving WordPress to a new host or domain. Offers real-time backups, malware scanning, and one-click restores. A good all-in-one option for serious site owners. ****Best for:**** those who also need to migrate sites or want premium restore options



Check whether your hosting plan already includes automatic backups — if it does, a plugin may not be necessary. Hostinger plans include daily backups.

Forms and lead capture

Collect enquiries, signups, and feedback from your visitors

Recommended plugins		
WPForms	Freemium	A beginner-friendly drag-and-drop form builder. Great for contact forms, survey forms, and newsletter signups. The free Lite version covers most basic needs; paid plans add payment and conditional logic. Best for: beginners who want to build forms without writing any code
Gravity Forms	Paid	A powerful paid form builder used by developers and agencies. Supports conditional logic, file uploads, payment integrations, and complex multi-step forms. The go-to when you need more than a basic contact form. Best for: complex forms — applications, bookings, order forms
Contact Form 7	Free	One of the most installed plugins in WordPress history. Lightweight, free, and reliable for simple contact forms. Less polished than WPForms but does the job without bloat. Requires manual shortcode setup. Best for: simple contact forms with minimal setup
OptinMonster	Paid	A lead capture and pop-up tool focused on growing your email list. Offers exit-intent pop-ups, slide-ins, and inline forms with A/B testing and targeting rules. More marketing tool than form builder. Best for: sites focused on growing an email list

Ecommerce

Sell products or services directly from your WordPress site

Recommended plugins

WooCommerce

Free

The industry standard for WordPress ecommerce. Adds a fully featured online store with product pages, a shopping cart, and checkout. Free to use; paid extensions available for subscriptions, bookings, and more. ****Best for:**** anyone building a serious online store on WordPress

Easy Digital Downloads

Freemium

Built specifically for selling digital products — ebooks, software, templates, music files. Simpler than WooCommerce for digital-only stores, with built-in licence key delivery and download tracking. ****Best for:**** selling digital downloads rather than physical goods

WooCommerce Stripe Gateway

Free

Connects WooCommerce to Stripe for card payments. One of the most widely used payment gateways — supports credit cards, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and buy-now-pay-later options. ****Best for:**** WooCommerce stores that want to accept card payments

YITH WooCommerce Wishlist

Freemium

Lets shoppers save products to a wishlist and share it with others. A small feature with a measurable impact on conversion rates — especially for gift-focused or seasonal stores. ****Best for:**** WooCommerce stores with a gift or seasonal audience



WooCommerce adds significant weight to your site. Make sure your hosting plan can handle ecommerce traffic — shared hosting may slow under load.

Maintenance and utilities

Keep your site clean, healthy, and running smoothly over time

☐ Recommended plugins

WP-Optimize

Freemium

Cleans up your WordPress database by removing post revisions, spam comments, transients, and other junk that accumulates over time. A bloated database slows queries and affects page speed. ****Best for:**** established sites with lots of content or high post volumes

WP Maintenance Mode

Free

Displays a maintenance or coming soon page to visitors while you work on the site. You stay logged in and can see the real site; everyone else sees the holding page. Simple and does exactly what it says. ****Best for:**** anyone doing major updates or redesigns

Redirection

Free

Manages 301 redirects without touching server config files. Essential when you rename pages, restructure URLs, or migrate content. Also logs 404 errors so you can spot and fix broken links quickly. ****Best for:**** any site that has changed URLs or restructured its content

Query Monitor

Free

A developer tool that shows database queries, PHP errors, hooks, and performance data for each page load. Invaluable for diagnosing slow pages or debugging plugin conflicts. Admin-only — invisible to visitors. ****Best for:**** developers and technically confident site owners troubleshooting issues

This list covered the plugin categories most critical to running a healthy, effective website. But depending on what you're building, you may also want to explore plugins for forms and lead capture, page building, membership and access control, multilingual content, or social media and sharing.

The WordPress plugin directory has over 60,000 options, so the key is to install only what you genuinely need – each plugin adds weight to your site and a potential point of vulnerability.

Start lean, test thoroughly, and add only when there's a clear use case.

Need a faster, reliable home for your WordPress site?

The right hosting makes plugins like caching and backups work better – or unnecessary altogether. Hostinger Managed WordPress comes with built-in caching, daily backups, free SSL, and one-click staging out of the box.

[Get started →](#)