Updating a WordPress Plugin Manually via FTP or File Manager: When the Automatic Update Fails or the Site Is Stuck in Maintenance

WordPress Guides · https://www.hyyat.com/en/knowledgebase/update-wordpress-plugin-ftp/

In short Download the latest version of the plugin and unzip it. Then over FTP or File Manager open `wp-content/plugins`, rename the old plugin folder (for example to `name-old`), upload the new folder with the original name, and open the Plugins screen to activate it if needed. Once everything works, delete the old folder.

Embedded media: https://www.hyyat.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/11/hyyat-wp-plugupd-en.mp4?_=1

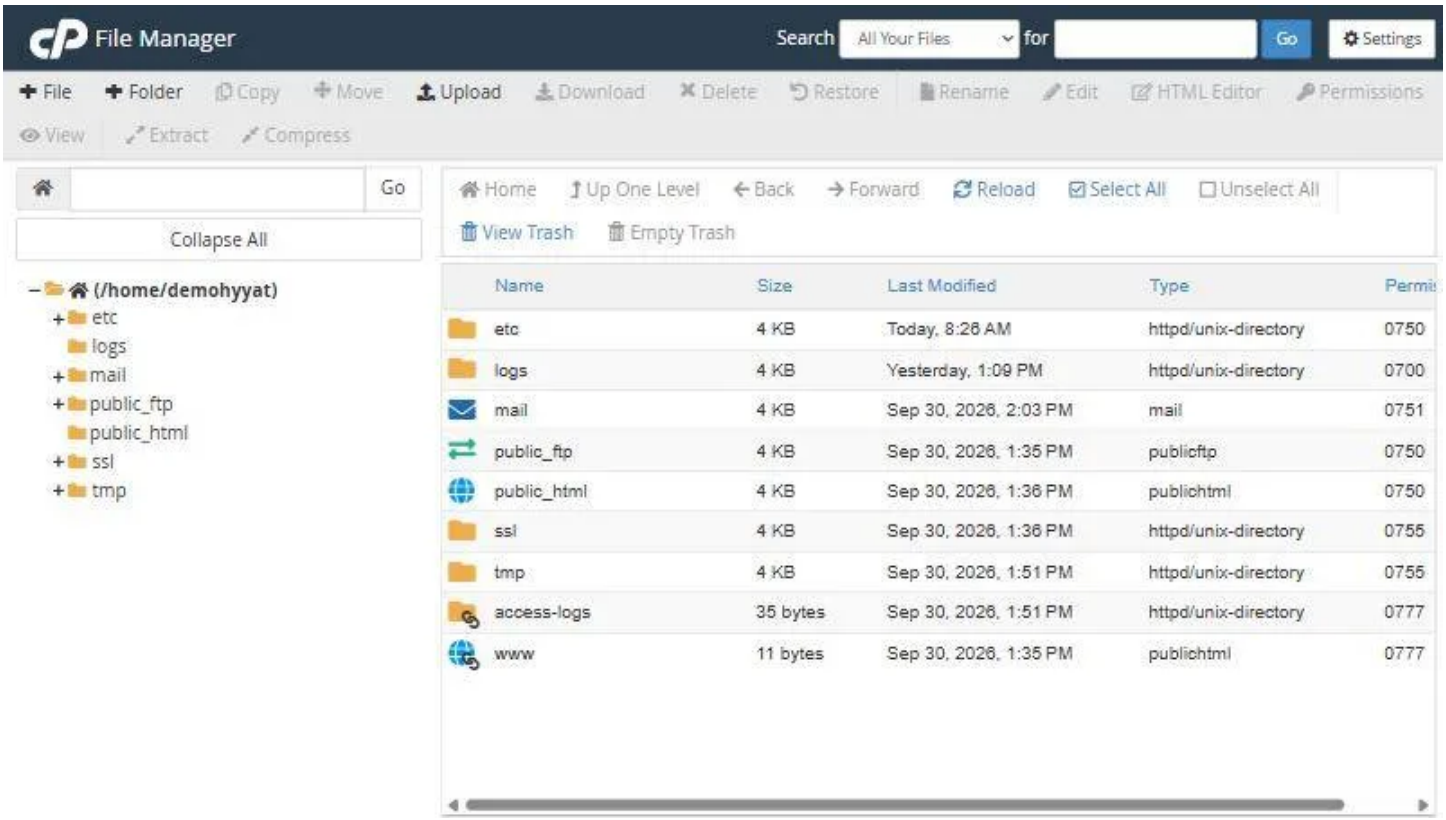
One-click updates work most of the time. They can stop halfway because of a dropped connection, file permissions, or a premium licence that does not allow updates from the dashboard. That is when you update manually.

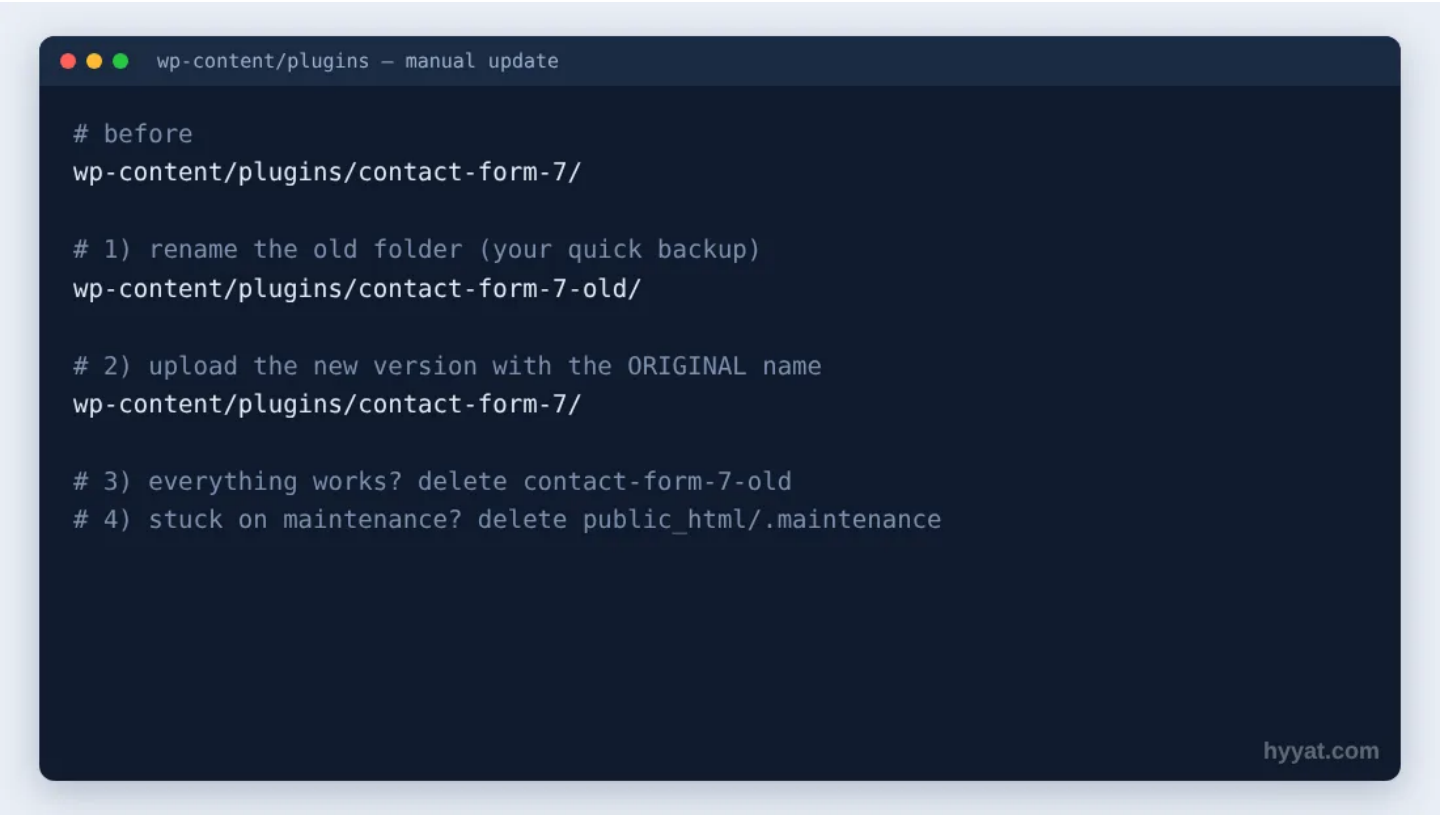
When do you need a manual update?

What you see	Likely cause
Update failed: Download failed	The server could not download the file from the plugin source
Could not create directory or Could not copy file	Permissions on wp-content, or disk space
The site shows Briefly unavailable for scheduled maintenance	The update stopped halfway and left a .maintenance file
No update button for a premium plugin	The licence is not activated on this site

Steps

1. **Download the new version** from the WordPress directory or your account with the developer, and unzip it on your computer.
2. **Open the plugins folder** via FTP or cPanel File Manager: `public_html/wp-content/plugins`.
3. **Rename the old one** for example `contact-form-7` becomes `contact-form-7-old`. That is your quick backup.
4. **Upload the new one** with exactly the original name. In File Manager, upload the .zip and click Extract.
5. **Check** open **Plugins** in WordPress. Activate it if it shows as inactive, confirm the version number, and browse the site.
6. **Clean up** if all is well, delete the old folder. If something breaks, delete the new one and rename the old one back.





A common mistake: Uploading the new folder next to the old one under a different name, such as `contact-form-7-5.9`. WordPress sees two plugins and the site can crash from duplicate functions.

The site is stuck on the maintenance message

During updates WordPress creates a file called `.maintenance` in the site's root folder and deletes it at the end. If the update is interrupted, the file and the message stay. Fix: delete `.maintenance` from `public_html`; in File Manager, turn on hidden files under **Settings** to see it.

Before any big update

- Back up the site; the easiest way is WP Toolkit: the WordPress Toolkit guide.
- Read the plugin's changelog if it is a major update.
- Update one plugin, then check, not ten at once.

To install a new plugin manually rather than update one: the manual install guide.

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Will I lose the plugin’s settings?

Usually not; settings live in the database, not the plugin folder. Back up before major updates anyway.

Can I update by uploading a .zip in the dashboard instead of FTP?

Yes. In Plugins › Add Plugin › Upload Plugin, WordPress offers to replace the current version with the uploaded one.

A fatal error appeared after updating

Rename the old folder back and delete the new one, then contact the developer. If you cannot reach the dashboard: disabling plugins from cPanel.

How long should I wait before deleting the old folder?

Until you are sure the site and plugin work; a day or two for important plugins.

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