

My Four Go-To Plugins

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If you have a WordPress website, you've no doubt heard about "plugins" and "widgets." Plugins are simply little bits of packaged software that you add on to, or "plug in," to extend and expand the functionality of your site. You can think of plugins in terms of something like adding options to your car (except plugins are easier to add, and much less expensive).

Plugins cover a wide range of additional functionality: anything from Editorial Calendars to social media buttons, SEO to security, e-commerce to membership sites, and everything in between.

Widgets, in comparison, are made available by many plugins, and act as the interface or "face" of your plugin, and are the bits that users will see and interact with on the page.

A social media plugin would be the actual code that would add the functionality to your site, and the plugin will then make a widget available that you would drag to a sidebar, so users could then see and click the buttons on your website.

For example, if you add a social media plugin, then this widget would be available for your users:

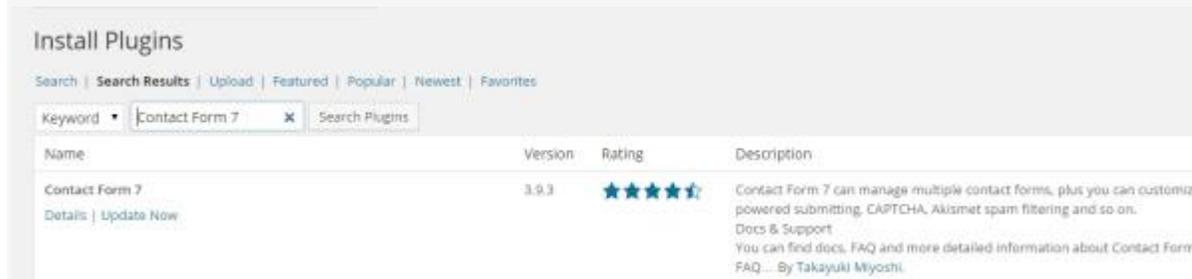


There are currently well over 30,000 plugins available, and a good two-thirds of those are free. Although I haven't used nearly that many, I have tried and used quite a few on the different sites I manage.

However, looking over my installations, there are four plugins/widgets I use consistently on all of my sites.

Here they are:

Contact Form 7



The screenshot shows the WordPress 'Install Plugins' interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Search, Search Results, Upload, Featured, Popular, Newest, and Favorites. Below this is a search bar with the keyword 'Contact Form 7' entered and a 'Search Plugins' button. The search results are displayed in a table with the following columns: Name, Version, Rating, and Description.

Name	Version	Rating	Description
Contact Form 7 Details Update Now	3.9.3	★★★★★	Contact Form 7 can manage multiple contact forms, plus you can customize powered submitting, CAPTCHA, Akismet spam filtering and so on. Docs & Support You can find docs, FAQ and more detailed information about Contact Form FAQ... By Takayuki Miyoshi.

Contact Form 7 is one of many available plugins that allow you to easily create a simple email contact form.

I use this plugin on all of my sites; it's free to use, well maintained, and has good reviews.

The fields can be edited, and it's easy to add text in addition to the form.

Here's what it looks like once it's installed:

Have a question? Want further information? Not sure where to start? I'd love to discuss it with you! Please contact me using the form below. I look forward to hearing from you!

Your Name (required)

Your Email (required)

Subject

Your Message

Send

I've read debates on whether or not people like to use contact forms, but every month I get emails through my contact forms, so as long as they work, I'll keep using them.

For visitors that don't like using them, I just make an email address available as well to cover all the bases.

Check out this 3-Minute Guru video showing you [how to install a contact form on your website](#).

Google XML Sitemaps

Install Plugins

Search | **Search Results** | Upload | Featured | Popular | Newest | Favorites

Keyword: Google XML Sitemaps Search Plugins

Name	Version	Rating	Description
Google XML Sitemaps Details Install Now	4.0.7.1	★★★★★	This plugin will generate a special XML sitemap which will help search engine It's much easier for the crawlers to see the complete structure of your site ar pages as well as custom URLs. Additionally it notifies all major search ... By #

This plugin helps with your SEO by cataloging the pages on your website, and submitting them to Google and other search engines for indexing.

Again, I've read differing opinions on whether or not a plugin like this is necessary; Google finds pages on its own by crawling the Web and following links, but leaving it to Google may take time depending on the structure of your site and links.

Besides, this debate was resolved for me once I read that Google recommends you do this!

It's free, easy, and can make a difference to your SEO efforts. No-brainer.

If you're using an SEO plugin already (like All-in-One SEO or Yoast), it's likely that the sitemaps functionality will be built in, so check with your existing plugin.

Image Widget



The screenshot shows the 'Install Plugins' interface in WordPress. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Search', 'Search Results', 'Upload', 'Featured', 'Popular', 'Newest', and 'Favorites'. Below these is a search bar with the keyword 'Image Widget' and a 'Search Plugins' button. A table lists the search results:

Name	Version	Rating	Description
Image Widget Details Install Now	4.1	★★★★★	A simple image widget that uses the native WordPress MU Compatible Handles image resizing and alignment Link the image Title and Description Very versatile. All fields are optional.

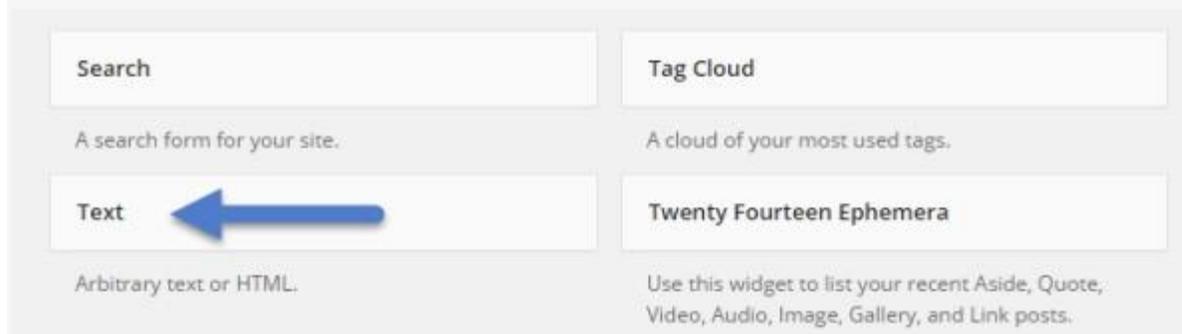
This is another plugin I use on almost every one of my sites.

It's also free and simple to use, and lets you easily add images to your WordPress sidebars.

It's great for adding head shots, logos, or badges, and it allows you to do it by quickly selecting images from your WordPress gallery without having to use any coding.

This Tech Corner article gives you detailed information on [how to use the Image Widget](#).

Text Widget



The screenshot shows a grid of four widget options in the WordPress dashboard:

- Search**: A search form for your site.
- Tag Cloud**: A cloud of your most used tags.
- Text**: Arbitrary text or HTML. This widget is highlighted with a large blue arrow pointing to it from the right.
- Twenty Fourteen Ephemera**: Use this widget to list your recent Aside, Quote, Video, Audio, Image, Gallery, and Link posts.

The Text Widget can be found in the "Widget" area under the "Appearance" menu, and is the easiest to find since this plugin is already included in a basic WordPress installation.

All you need to do is drag it to the sidebar position you want to use (see links to 3-Minute Guru or the Image Widget Tech Corner article above to see how it's done).

Although it's simple, it's also very versatile, as you can include both plain text and HTML.

For plain text, it's as easy as typing in a headline and some text.

Primary Sidebar ▲

Main sidebar that appears on the left.

Text ▲

Title:

... and type some text here!

Automatically add paragraphs

[Delete](#) | [Close](#) Save

If you're wise in the ways of the code, you can enter any HTML code you like to add images, links, or whatever you wish.