

CHAPTER 1

Choosing Your Linux Journey

Understanding why Linux matters and finding the distribution that fits you

Let's start with something most Linux books won't tell you: there is no wrong choice here.

Ubuntu, Fedora, Arch Linux — each one is a legitimate path into the Linux world. Each has a passionate community, strong documentation, and real-world relevance for your career. This book covers all three precisely because the "best" distribution depends entirely on where you are right now and where you want to go.

But before we get into which distro is right for you, let's answer the bigger question first — why Linux at all?

Why Linux?

You're reading this book, which means Linux is already on your radar. Maybe someone at work mentioned it. Maybe you saw a job listing that required it. Maybe you're just tired of Windows and curious what else is out there. Whatever brought you here, the reasons to invest time in Linux are more compelling now than they've ever been.

Linux runs the modern world. About 90% of public cloud infrastructure runs on Linux. The servers behind your favorite websites, the systems powering AI and machine learning, the containers running in Kubernetes clusters — almost all of it is Linux underneath. If you want to work in cloud, DevOps, system administration, cybersecurity, or software development, Linux isn't optional. It's the foundation.

The job market is real. There are over 62,000 active Linux engineer positions in the United States alone, with median salaries around \$96,800 per year. Certified Linux

professionals earn significantly more than their non-certified peers. The Linux+ and LPIC-1 certifications this book prepares you for are recognized by employers across industries — from finance to healthcare to government.

Linux teaches you how computers actually work. Windows and macOS hide a lot from you. Linux doesn't. When you work in Linux, you interact directly with the system — the filesystem, the kernel, the network stack. That deeper understanding makes you a better engineer regardless of what platform you end up working on professionally.

It's free and open source. Every distribution in this book costs nothing to download and install. The source code is open for anyone to read, modify, and improve. That philosophy — that software should be transparent, shared, and community-driven — is part of what makes Linux more than just an operating system. It's an ecosystem built on collaboration.

Ubuntu, Fedora, or Arch — Which Is Right for You?

A Linux distribution — or distro — is a complete operating system built around the Linux kernel. Each distro makes different choices about package management, default software, release schedule, and philosophy. Those choices add up to very different user experiences.

Think of it this way: the Linux kernel is the engine. The distribution is the car built around it. A pickup truck and a sports car might share the same engine, but they're built for different purposes and different drivers.

Here's how to think about each one:

Ubuntu — The Approachable Starting Point

Ubuntu is the most widely used Linux distribution in the world, and for good reason. It's designed to be accessible. The installer is friendly, the hardware support is excellent,

and when something goes wrong there are more forum posts, tutorials, and Stack Overflow answers about Ubuntu than any other distro. If you've never used Linux before, Ubuntu removes as many barriers as possible so you can focus on learning the system rather than fighting the installation.

Ubuntu uses the APT package manager and releases a Long Term Support (LTS) version every two years — meaning you get five years of security updates on a stable, well-tested system. For beginners, that stability is a feature, not a limitation.

If you're new to Linux, starting a career in IT, or just want something that works without a steep learning curve — start here.

Fedora — The Cutting Edge with Enterprise Roots

Fedora sits in an interesting position. It's sponsored by Red Hat — the company behind Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL), one of the most widely deployed enterprise Linux systems in the world. Fedora is where new technologies get tested before they make their way into RHEL. That means Fedora users get access to the latest software, kernel features, and system tools before almost anyone else.

Fedora uses the DNF package manager and releases new versions every six months. It's not quite as beginner-friendly as Ubuntu, but it's far from difficult. If you have some technical comfort and you're aiming at a career in enterprise Linux environments — or if you want to eventually pursue the RHCSA certification after this book — Fedora gives you a head start.

If you're comfortable with computers, want newer software, and have your sights on enterprise Linux or Red Hat certifications — Fedora is your home.

Arch Linux — For the Tinkerer Who Wants to Understand Everything

Arch Linux is not for everyone, and it knows it. The Arch philosophy is simple: you build your system from scratch, piece by piece, making every decision yourself. There's no

graphical installer holding your hand. You partition your own disks, install your own bootloader, configure your own network. By the time you're done, you understand exactly what's running on your machine — because you put it there.

Arch uses the pacman package manager and follows a rolling release model, meaning there are no version upgrades. Your system updates continuously and always has the latest software. The Arch Wiki — the community documentation — is so comprehensive that Linux users from every distribution consult it regularly.

Arch requires more effort, but that effort is the point. Every hour you spend configuring Arch teaches you something fundamental about how Linux works. This book dedicates 16 pages to Arch installation alone, and we'll use the archinstall guided installer to make the process approachable without removing the learning.

If you want to truly understand Linux from the ground up, enjoy figuring things out, and aren't afraid of the terminal — Arch will reward you more than any other distribution.

Side by Side: The Quick Comparison

If you're a visual person, here's the full comparison at a glance:

	Ubuntu	Fedora	Arch Linux
Difficulty	Beginner friendly	Intermediate	Advanced
Package Manager	apt / dpkg	dnf / rpm	pacman / AUR
Release Model	LTS (2 yr) + Regular	Semi-annual	Rolling release
Software Age	Stable, tested	Recent, cutting edge	Bleeding edge
Default Desktop	GNOME	GNOME	Your choice
Community Support	Massive, beginner focused	Strong, enterprise leaning	Excellent, advanced users
Closest To	Debian / general use	RHEL / enterprise Linux	DIY / custom systems

Best For	First time Linux users, career starters	Intermediate users, RHEL prep	Tinkerers, deep learners
Cert Relevance	Linux+, LPIC-1	Linux+, LPIC-1, RHCSA prep	Linux+, LPIC-1

 **Still not sure? Start with Ubuntu.**

If you've read the profiles above and still can't decide, pick Ubuntu. It's the lowest barrier to entry and covers everything you need for both the Linux+ and LPIC-1 certifications. You can always install Fedora or Arch later — and many Linux users run multiple distributions across different machines or virtual machines.

What You'll Need to Get Started

Before we move into the installation chapters, let's cover the basics of what you'll need. The good news is that Linux is remarkably hardware-friendly compared to modern Windows, and you likely already have everything required.

A computer. Any PC or laptop made in the last ten years will run all three distributions covered in this book. Linux runs well on older hardware too — one of its strengths is that it doesn't demand the latest processor or a mountain of RAM.

A USB drive (8GB or larger). You'll use this to create a bootable installer for whichever distribution you choose. We'll walk through exactly how to do this in each installation chapter.

A reliable internet connection. All three installers will download additional packages during setup, and you'll need the internet for package updates and software installation throughout the book.

Don't want to touch your current laptop or desktop? You don't have to. A Virtual Machine (VM) lets you run Linux inside a window on your existing Windows or Mac computer — no partitioning, no risk, no wiping anything. Software like VirtualBox (free) or VMware Workstation Player (free for personal use) creates a safe, isolated

environment where you can install and experiment with Linux as if it were a real machine. If you break something, you delete the VM and start fresh. Many readers work through this entire book using a VM before ever installing Linux on real hardware. We'll point you to a full VM setup guide on the website.

Patience and curiosity. This is not a joke entry. Linux rewards people who are willing to read error messages, search for answers, and try again. The discomfort you feel when something doesn't work is not a sign you're doing it wrong — it's the feeling of learning.

Certification Note

The Linux+ (XK0-005) and LPIC-1 exams both test your knowledge across multiple distributions and package managers. This is exactly why this book covers Ubuntu, Fedora, and Arch together — understanding the differences between APT, DNF, and pacman, or between UFW and firewalld, is exam knowledge as much as practical knowledge. See the Preface for the full certification roadmap and how each chapter maps to exam objectives.

A Quick Note on How This Book Works

Throughout this book you'll find code examples, commands, and configuration files. When you see a command in monospace font like this — `ls -la /home` — that's something you type directly into your terminal. We'll build up from simple commands to complex scripts as the book progresses.

Each chapter ends with a glossary of key terms introduced in that chapter. Don't skip these — the terminology you learn now will appear in certification exams and in real-world job interviews.

You'll also see Go Deeper callout boxes linking to nextsteplinux.com. The website expands on what's in the book with diagrams, downloadable scripts, interactive labs, and practice questions. The book teaches the concepts — the website gives you hands-on practice. For the full details on how to use this book and the website together, see the Preface.

 **Go Deeper** | The distro comparison diagram, Linux family tree, and Chapter 1 lab (setting up your first virtual machine) are at:

nextsteplinux.com/ch1

Scan the QR code or type the URL on your computer.

Chapter Summary

Linux powers the modern internet, drives the cloud, and opens doors to well-paying careers in system administration, DevOps, and cybersecurity. The three distributions covered in this book — Ubuntu, Fedora, and Arch Linux — each represent a different approach to Linux, and each prepares you for the same Linux+ and LPIC-1 certifications.

Ubuntu is your starting point if you're new to Linux. Fedora is your home if you want cutting-edge software and enterprise relevance. Arch is your path if you want to understand Linux at a deep level and don't mind building things yourself.

Whichever you've chosen — or even if you're still deciding — the next three chapters will walk you through installation step by step. Pick your distribution and turn to the chapter that's waiting for you.

Chapter 1 Glossary

Term	Definition
Virtual Machine (VM)	A software-based computer that runs inside your existing operating system. Tools like VirtualBox let you install and run Linux without touching your real system or risking your existing data.
Linux Kernel	The core of the Linux operating system. It manages hardware resources and provides services to software running on the system.
Distribution (Distro)	A complete operating system built around the Linux kernel, including a package manager, default software, and configuration choices. Examples: Ubuntu, Fedora, Arch Linux.

Package Manager	A tool for installing, updating, and removing software on a Linux system. Ubuntu uses APT, Fedora uses DNF, and Arch uses pacman.
APT	Advanced Package Tool. The package manager used by Ubuntu and Debian-based distributions. Common commands: apt install, apt update, apt upgrade.
DNF	Dandified YUM. The package manager used by Fedora and Red Hat-based distributions. Replaced the older yum package manager.
pacman	The package manager used by Arch Linux. Known for its speed and simplicity. The AUR (Arch User Repository) extends its software library significantly.
AUR	Arch User Repository. A community-maintained repository of build scripts for software not available in the official Arch repositories.
Rolling Release	A release model where the operating system is continuously updated rather than releasing major new versions. Arch Linux uses this model.
LTS	Long Term Support. A version of a distribution that receives extended security and maintenance updates. Ubuntu LTS releases are supported for five years.
Open Source	Software whose source code is publicly available for anyone to view, modify, and distribute. Linux is open source under the GNU General Public License.
Terminal	A text-based interface for interacting with your Linux system by typing commands. Also called the command line or shell.
Shell	A program that interprets your commands and passes them to the operating system. The most common shell on Linux is bash (Bourne Again Shell).
RHEL	Red Hat Enterprise Linux. A commercially supported Linux distribution used widely in enterprise environments. Fedora is closely related to RHEL.
Linux+	CompTIA Linux+ (XK0-005). An entry-level Linux certification that validates core system administration skills across multiple distributions.
LPIC-1	Linux Professional Institute Certification Level 1. A vendor-neutral Linux certification covering system architecture, installation, package management, and more.

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[Continue to Chapter 2: Installing Ubuntu](#)