

Do-it-yourself · about 15 minutes

Set Up Your Own **AI Assistant**



A plain-English quick-start to get a real AI teammate running — no tech background required. You've got this.

BEFORE YOU START — JUST 2 THINGS

Node.js **FREE**

The free engine it runs on. Download from **nodejs.org**, pick the version 24 installer, and click through.

A Claude subscription **FLAT MONTHLY**

The "brain." Get a **Claude by Anthropic** plan at **claude.ai** — Pro **\$20/mo**, or Max **\$100–\$200/mo** for heavy use. You'll **log in** with this account — flat price, no surprise per-use bills. ⚠️
See page 2 — connect it the right way.

INSTALL IT — 6 STEPS

1 Open PowerShell & install

Start menu → type "PowerShell" → open it. Paste this and press Enter:

```
iwr -useb https://openclaw.ai/install.ps1 | iex
```

2 Run the setup wizard

It asks a few questions and guides you (~2 min). When it asks how to connect the AI brain, choose the **subscription / account login** — **not** a pay-per-use API key (see page 2):

```
openclaw onboard --install-daemon
```

3 Check it's running

You should see it listening on port 18789:

```
openclaw gateway status
```

4 Open the dashboard

Opens the control panel in your browser:

```
openclaw dashboard
```

5 Say hi

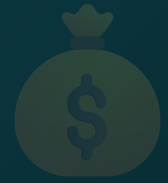
Type a message in the dashboard chat. If it replies, your agent is alive. 🎉

6 Chat from your phone (optional, but great)

In Telegram, message **@BotFather**, send **/newbot**, copy the token, and connect it. Now you can text your agent from anywhere.

Connect the AI brain · the most important choice

Pay the **Right Way**



Do this right and you pay a flat, predictable rate. Do it wrong and you can rack up **\$30+ a day** in surprise charges.

TWO WAYS TO CONNECT THE AI — PICK THE SUBSCRIPTION

✓ **Subscription login**

Flat: \$20 · \$100 · \$200 / mo

Log in with your **Claude account** (Pro or Max) from claude.ai. One flat monthly price, no matter how much you use it. Predictable. This is the “OAuth” login.

BEST FOR DAILY USE — USE THIS

⚠ **API key (pay-per-use)**

Metered — can be \$600–\$1,200 / mo

A key from **console.anthropic.com**, billed for every word in and out, with **no cap**. Heavy daily use often runs **\$20–\$40/day**. Only worth it for very high-volume servers.

AVOID FOR A PERSONAL ASSISTANT

► **Real example:** a teammate was paying **~\$30/day (~\$900/mo)** without realizing it — because the agent was running on a **metered API key** instead of her subscription login. Switching to the subscription login fixed it instantly.

LOG IN THE RIGHT WAY — 4 CHECKS

- 1 Have a Claude subscription**
At claude.ai, get **Pro (\$20/mo)** for normal use, or **Max (\$100 or \$200/mo)** if you use it hard all day.
- 2 Log in with the account — not a key**
In the agent (Claude Code), run `/login` and choose **“Log in with your Claude account.”** Do **not** paste an API key.
- 3 Remove any leftover API key (the #1 cause of surprise bills)**
If **ANTHROPIC_API_KEY** is set anywhere (a Windows environment variable, or a **.env** / profile file), **delete it**. As long as that key exists, the tool keeps billing per-use **even after you log in**.
- 4 Verify it's on the subscription**
Run `/status`. The auth should read **oauth** — not **api**. If it says api, the key is still overriding: remove it and check again.

🔒 auth: oauth → you're on the flat subscription ✓

Rule of thumb: for a personal, daily AI assistant, **always use the subscription login**. Only use an API key if you're running

ACCOUNTS CHECKLIST

① Must-haves

- OpenClaw **FREE** — the agent software
- Claude subscription **FLAT** — the brain (log in, don't use a metered key)
- Node.js **FREE** — the runtime

② Chat from your phone

- Telegram **FREE** — make a bot with @BotFather, copy the token

③ To build & host websites

- GitHub **FREE** — code storage + backups
- Cloudflare **FREE** — free hosting + API token (or Hostinger)

④ Optional power-ups

- Gmail **FREE** — email triage
- OpenAI key **PAID** — AI images (tiny per-image cost)
- GoHighLevel — CRM (if the company has it)
- ElevenLabs **PAID** — AI voice · ffmpeg/LibreOffice **FREE**

 **Keep secrets safe:** store all keys and tokens in an encrypted local vault (a “Lockbox”) — a private repo plus a key file that never leaves your machine. Never paste keys into public places.

WHERE SHOULD THE AGENT LIVE?

Your Windows PC

Most familiar, and it can touch your desktop apps & files (Excel, Word, Outlook, OneDrive). Downside: it sleeps & reboots — not “always on.”

A cloud server

A rented computer in a data center — always on, reachable anywhere (~a few \$/month). Best for 24/7 work. Downside: no desktop apps.

“Separate computer” doesn’t mean disconnected. An always-on agent still reaches everything through the cloud — your files, email, CRM, GitHub, hosting — and you talk to it from Telegram anywhere. The only thing a separate box can’t do is drive desktop-only apps on your physical PC.

Simple rule: mostly local files/apps → run it on your PC. Want it available 24/7 → add a cheap always-on mini-PC or small cloud server. The ideal setup eventually uses both.