

Installing FEniCSx via Docker for use in VSCode on a Windows computer

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June 25, 2024

In this document, we describe the process of creating a new Docker container from scratch using the v0.8.0 release of FEniCSx / dolfinx and set up Visual Studio Code (VSCode) to have full functionality running FEniCSx codes in Jupyter notebook files with inline plotting and animations.¹

These instructions are written for installation on a Windows computer. The basic installation process is essentially identical for Mac and Windows machines, but the Screenshots in this version will be more directly helpful for Windows users.

1 Docker

In this Section, we provide some background information on Docker and walk through installing Docker Desktop. If you are familiar with Docker and have Docker Desktop installed, skip to Section 2.

1.1 What is Docker

Docker is a platform that uses containerization technology to simplify the deployment and management of software applications. In the context of software development, especially for complex engineering applications like FEniCSx, Docker offers several advantages:

- Containerization:
 - Containers are isolated environments where applications can run. They are lightweight because they share the host system's kernel (but not the OS itself) and are not burdened with the overhead of a virtual machine.
 - For FEniCSx, this means that each instance of the application runs in a consistent environment, irrespective of the underlying hardware or software configurations of the host system.
- Consistency and Reproducibility:
 - Docker ensures that FEniCSx runs identically on every machine, avoiding the common “it works on my machine” problem in software development.
- Ease of Distribution and Version Control:
 - Docker images (blueprints for containers) can be version-controlled and shared through Docker Hub or other registries, ensuring that all students and researchers access the same version of FEniCSx and its dependencies.

Because of these advantages, we will be using Docker to run FEniCSx.

¹Screenshots in this document may have references to a “nightly” release of FEniCSx instead of v0.8.0. You can safely ignore this difference.

1.2 Installing Docker

It is recommended that you install Docker desktop for first time use. You can find the download here:

- <https://www.Docker.com/products/Docker-desktop>

and download the appropriate version for your operating system. An account is not necessary for basic install and usage. After downloading, run the installer.

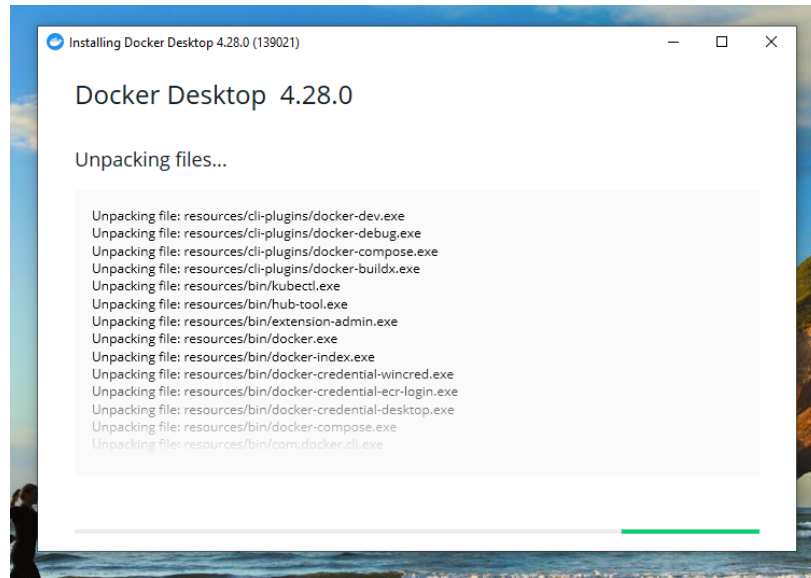
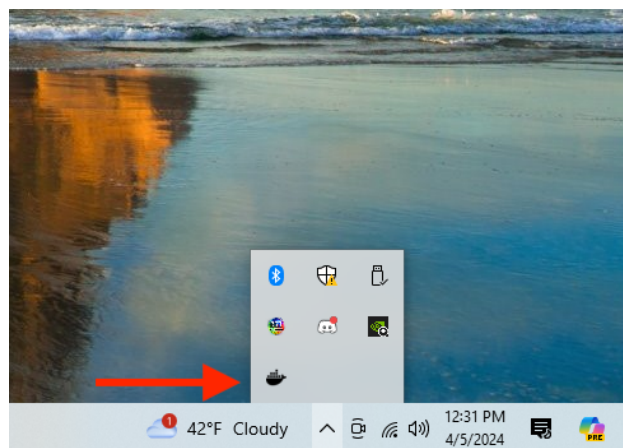
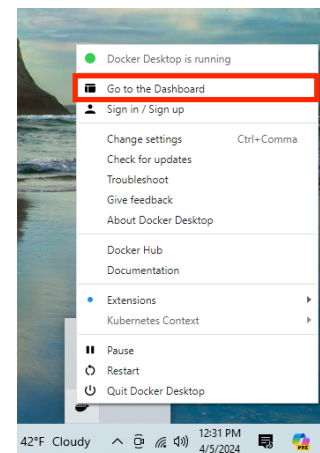


Figure 1: Docker install process

After Docker has finished installing open up the Docker desktop application. The application window may not instantly open. Instead it may be in the background. Refer to Figure 2 to see if your Docker is running in the background.



(a) Docker Open in the background



(b) Clicking on the Docker Symbol

Figure 2: How to check if Docker is open in the background. Click on “Go to dashboard” to open up Docker.

1.3 Docker Layout

Once Docker is open you should see a window similar to this. This is the dashboard.

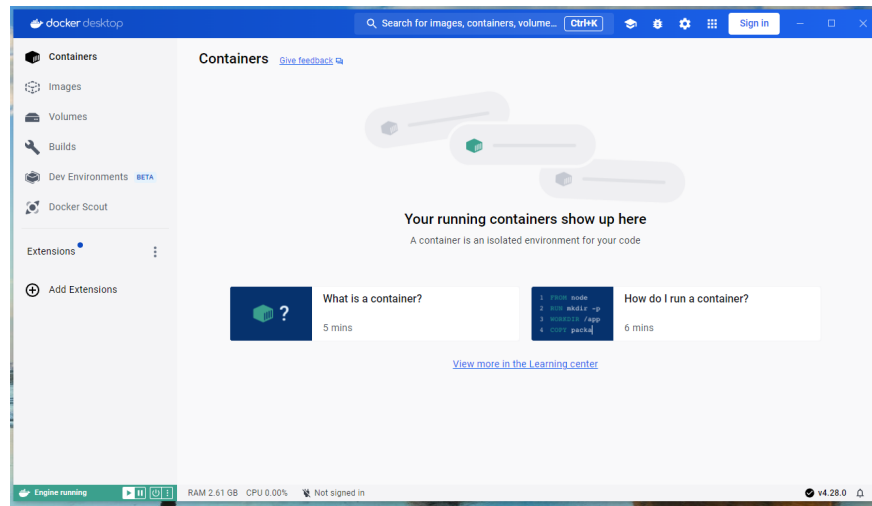


Figure 3: The Docker Dashboard

There are multiple tabs but we will only discuss two of them: the Containers tab, and the Images tab.

1.3.1 Images

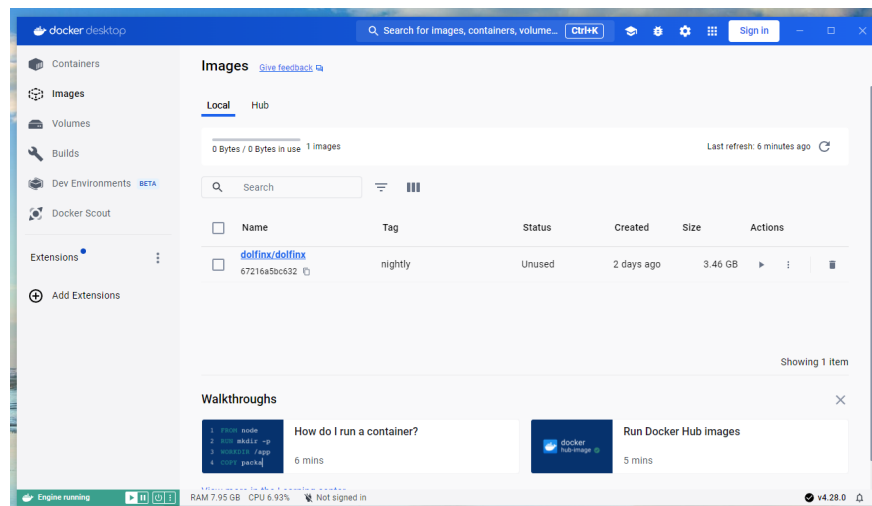


Figure 4: The Docker Images Tab

The Docker images tab contains all of the Images you currently have installed. Image are essentially different operating systems you can have. If you want to run multiple versions of FEniCSx for example you could have multiple images of it.

1.3.2 Containers

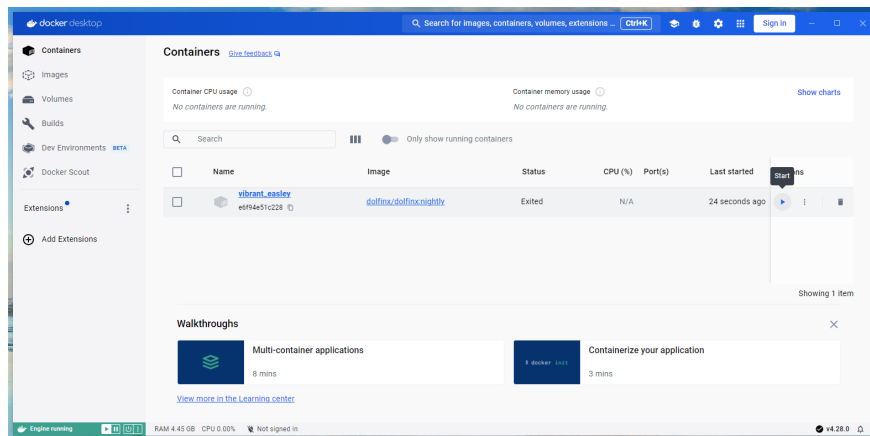


Figure 5: The Docker Containers Tab

The Docker containers tab has all of the containers that you have setup. Each container is essentially a different instance of a specific image. It is normally recommended that for every project you have a different separate container made, though those containers could use all the same image.

2 FEniCSx Container Setup

In this section we will be setting up the FEniCSx image and container so that it runs properly. We will also explain how to mount a folder in the volume so that it is shared between the host and Docker container.

2.1 Building a FEniCSx v0.8.0 installation

1. Pull the Docker image of the v0.8.0 release of dolfinx using this command in a PowerShell terminal:

```
1 > Docker pull dolfinx/dolfinx:v0.8.0
```

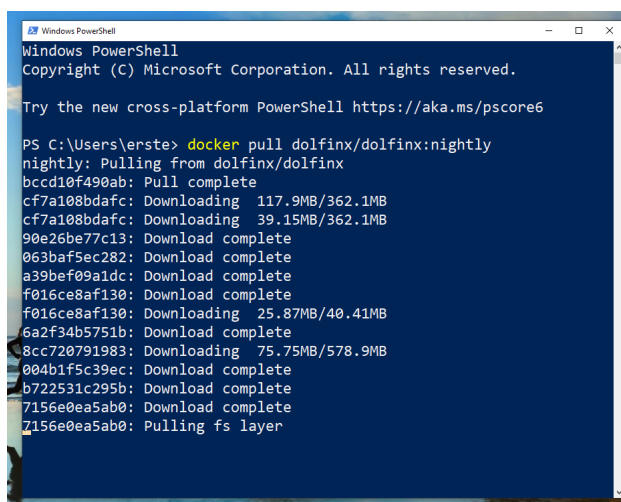


Figure 6: Pulling the FEniCSx (dolfinx) image. The image is a few GB in total, so download may take a while depending on your internet speed.

2. Create a Docker container with a shared volume with the following command:

```
1 > Docker run -it -v C:\FenicsWrk:/home/shared dolfinx/dolfinx:v0.8.0
```

- Replace the example filepath `C:\FenicsWrk` with the desired location of the shared folder on your local machine. You will need to create this folder before running this command.
- After running this command, the container will be running in the terminal. Type in `exit` to stop the container instance running in the PowerShell terminal.

3. Open up the Docker Desktop dashboard. Make sure the new environment is running (the one with the `dolfinx/dolfinx:v0.8.0` image, as shown in Fig. 7. Open up the command line interface for this container by clicking the three-dots icon and selecting “Open in terminal” as shown in Fig. 7.

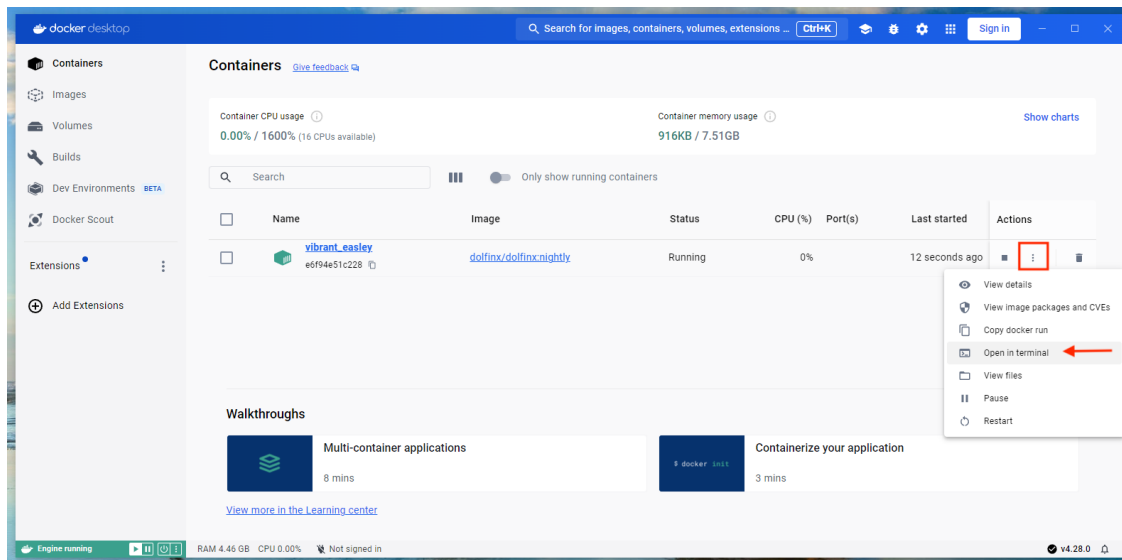


Figure 7: Opening the command line interface in Docker Desktop.

4. In the container’s terminal window, run the following commands to install some extra packages which are needed for running the Jupyter notebooks and visualizing results. First,

```
1 apt-get update && apt-get clean && apt-get install -y xvfb vim ffmpeg
```

Then,

```
1 pip3 install "pyvista[all,trame]" jupyterlab ipython ipywidgets
```

5. Your Docker container is now properly set up for running Jupyter notebooks with code for FEniCSx (version 0.8.0), with PyVista visualizations. You can connect to this container in an instance of VSCode using the instructions below.

3 Editing and running code in Visual Studio Code

We use Visual Studio Code (VSCode) to edit and run FEniCSx codes in the form of Jupyter notebooks (.ipynb) and Python scripts (.py). If you do not have VScode, install it on your system:

- <https://code.visualstudio.com/>

Open up VSCode, click the extensions tab (icon on the far left with three blocks and a fourth block clicking into place). Search for the **Docker** extension published by Microsoft shown in the Figure below, and install it. Also, search for and install the **Dev Containers** extension which allows us to use the full suite of VSCode development tools within a container.

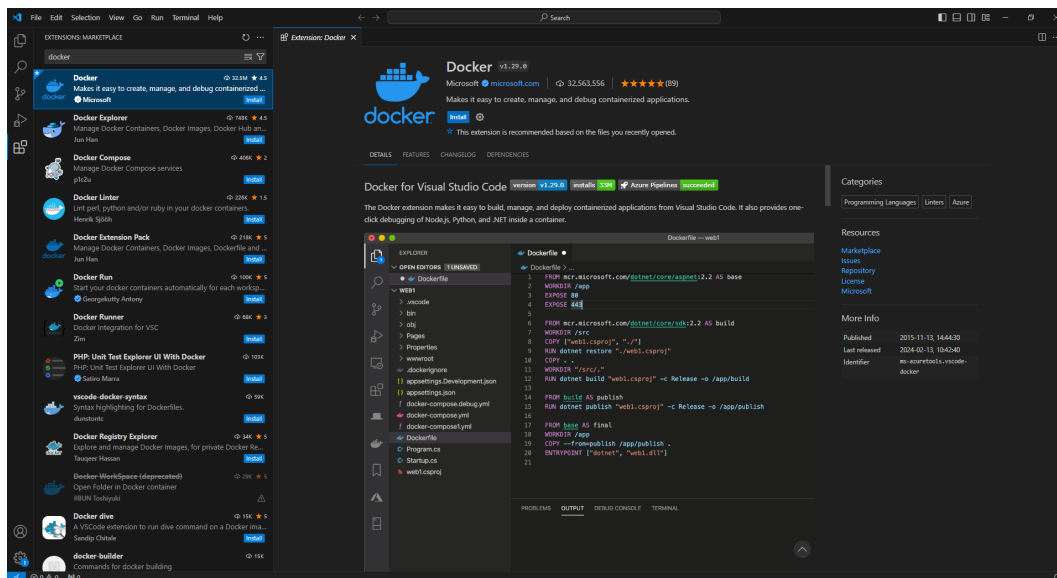


Figure 8: Installing the Docker extension.

3.1 Connecting to the Container through VSCode

We now launch VSCode and connect to the container we just created.

1. We can go to the Docker extension, and find the container we just launched. Right clicking on any of the containers will allow us to attach a VSCode instance.
2. Right click on the v0.8.0 FEniCSx container and then click **Attach Visual Studio Code**. This will open a new window of VSCode.

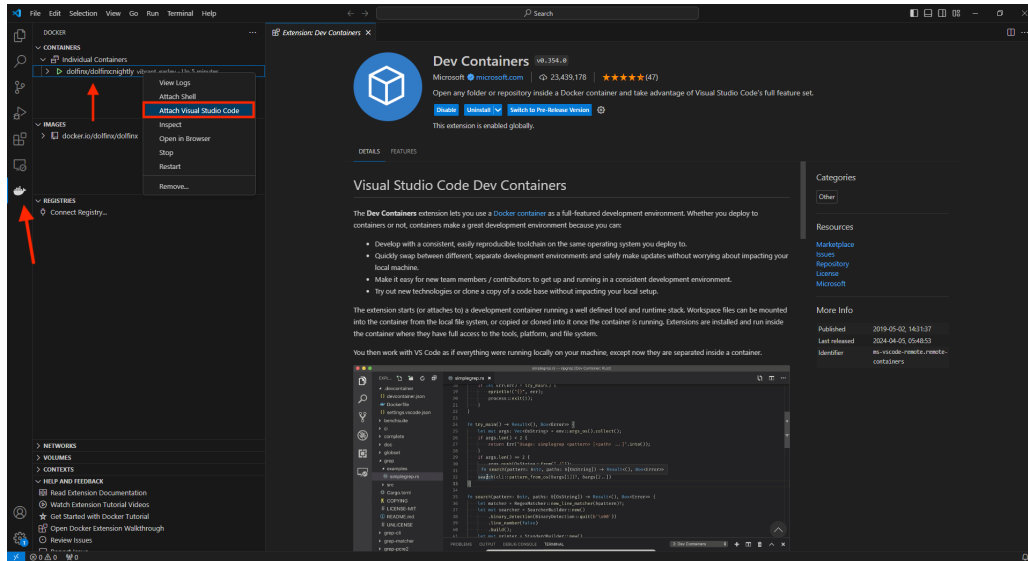


Figure 9: How to open up the Docker extension and launch into the file. Right clicking on any of the containers will allow us to attach a VSCode instance.

3. Ensure we are connected by looking at the bottom left corner of the screen (e.g. the bottom left corner of Fig. 10 which says `Container: dolphin/dolphin:v0.8.0`).
4. You can now close the original window of VSCode which is not connected to the Docker container.
5. To run FEniCSx codes, search for the **Python** and **Jupyter** extensions and install them. These extensions will also automatically install their dependencies, which contain the tools necessary to run Jupyter notebooks and produce interactive in-line plots.²

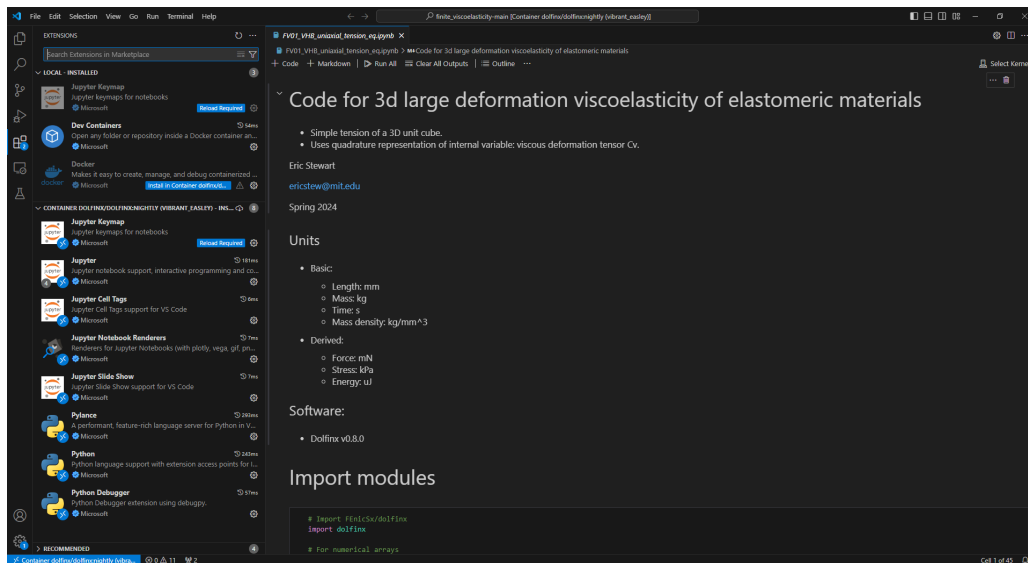


Figure 10: Extensions in the host are not automatically carried over to the container. The first time you attach to a container, you will need to install any extensions you wish to use. Installing the **Python** and **Jupyterlab** extensions will result in all necessary dependencies — the 8 individual extensions shown — being installed in the container.

²Some extensions may require you to reload the VScode window and re-attach to the Docker container to install properly.

4 Quick usage guide for the v0.8.0 FEniCSx container

After the container has first been created and set up as described in this document, you can use the Docker container to run FEniCSx codes in the future by following these steps.

1. Start up Docker Desktop. In the Docker dashboard, Click the “play” button next to your `dolfinx/dolfinx:v0.8.0` container to start it.
2. Open VSCode. Attach an instance of VSCode to the running FEniCSx Docker container using the Docker extension (cf. Section 3.1).
3. In the VSCode window connected to your FEniCSx container, navigate to your shared directory `/home/shared` using **File -> Open Folder**, and open up and run the FEniCSx code of your choice.
 - This directory will be populated with the contents of your local machine’s folder which is shared with the container, e.g. your `FEniCSWrk` folder from Section 2.1. Put your FEniCSx codes here to run them.
 - The first time you run a code, a pop-up menu may ask you to choose which Python kernel to use. Select the option for the python kernel installed in the Docker container, in the location `/usr/bin/python3`.

Note that:

- The first time you attach VSCode to this container, you will have to install the **Python** and **Jupyter** extensions (which automatically also installs their dependencies, a total of 8 packages).
- After these packages have been installed once, future instances of VSCode that attach to this container will already have the extensions installed.