

Best Free Jira Alternatives for Agile Teams

Compare free Jira alternatives by agile features, user limits, boards, backlogs, automation, reporting, and upgrade paths.

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TL;DR A free Jira alternative either lives on a vendor's free-forever plan (with seat or feature caps) or runs as self-hosted open source. Both models can support real agile teams up to a point. ClickUp, Trello, Asana, Linear, Shortcut, GitHub Projects, and GitLab Free are the strongest commercial free tiers in 2026. Plane, OpenProject Community, Taiga, and Redmine are the credible self-host picks. The honest question is not "what is free?" but "what gates show up after a quarter of real use?" — usually SSO, automation runs, audit history, and integration depth. Pricing, free-tier caps, and feature availability verified against vendor pages on May 20, 2026; recheck the vendor page before procurement.

Quick Comparison Table

A shortlist of free Jira alternatives that survive past the first week of real team use, with the gates that typically trigger an upgrade or migration later.

Every row below has a real free plan or a free self-host path. The "first upgrade trigger" column is the cap most teams hit first — not the only one.

Tool	Type	Seat cap on free	First upgrade trigger
ClickUp Free	SaaS	Unlimited members	Storage and view limits
Trello Free	SaaS	Unlimited users, 10 boards / workspace	Workspace limits, advanced views
Asana Free	SaaS	Up to ~10 users	Timeline, dashboards, rules
Linear Free	SaaS	Small team cap	Cycles, automation, SSO
Shortcut Free	SaaS	Small team cap	Integrations, history
GitHub Projects	SaaS	Tied to GitHub plan	Advanced project fields, insights
GitLab Free	SaaS	Per namespace	Epics, roadmaps, SAML SSO
Plane Cloud Free	SaaS / OSS	Small team cap	Workspaces, advanced features
OpenProject Community	Self-host	Unlimited	Operations cost, enterprise modules
Taiga / Redmine	Self-host	Unlimited	Operations cost, plugin maintenance

Verify exact caps on each vendor page — free tiers are the most volatile part of SaaS pricing, and several of these limits have moved twice in the last year.

Free is real, but the upgrade trigger is what determines whether free actually stays free in year two.

Why Teams Look Beyond Jira

Free-tier evaluators usually leave Jira for one of three reasons: the free plan itself is too restrictive once a few power features are needed, the paid step-up is steep, or the admin work outweighs the value.

Complexity and setup friction

Jira Software's free plan covers up to 10 users on the cloud product. The friction shows up when those 10 users want roadmaps, audit history, or advanced permissions — every one of those features starts on a paid tier. Smaller teams hit the configuration tax before they hit the seat cap.

Cost, performance, and admin overhead

- Paid step-up jumps from \$0 to per-seat pricing on Standard, then again on Premium for roadmaps and sandboxes.
- Workflow schemes, screen schemes, and field schemes need an owner; nobody is the owner on a free plan.
- Page-load speed deteriorates as the issue count climbs into the thousands.

When Jira still remains the right choice

Even on the free plan, Jira stays viable for teams committed to the Atlassian ecosystem: Confluence for docs, Bitbucket for source, Jira Service Management for tickets. If you would migrate the whole stack to leave Jira, the migration cost usually beats the daily friction.

Stay on Jira if the cost of leaving the Atlassian stack outweighs the tax of running it.

Best Free and Open-Source Options

Free comes in two flavors: hosted SaaS free tiers and self-hosted open source. The right pick depends on whether your constraint is budget, sovereignty, or operational capacity.

Free tiers with usable limits

- **ClickUp Free** — unlimited members, generous on tasks, capped on storage and view types.
- **Trello Free** — unlimited cards across a small board count; the best fit for board-only teams.
- **Linear Free** — full issue model with cycle limits; the best fit for engineering teams under ~10 people.
- **GitHub Projects** — free when you already pay for GitHub; the lowest-friction option for SCM-native workflows.

Open-source Jira alternatives to compare

- **Plane** — modern, Linear-style tracker; cloud or self-host.
- **OpenProject Community** — long-running, German-engineered; strong on roadmaps and Gantt.
- **Taiga** — Scrum and Kanban model; lower operational overhead than Redmine.
- **Redmine** — old but stable; plugin ecosystem still active in regulated industries.

When free plans become expensive

The hidden cost of free is operational. SaaS free hides per-seat cost but exposes you to feature gates. Self-host free hides feature gates but exposes you to ops cost — hosting, backups, upgrades, security patches. The crossover is usually one engineer-week per quarter; if that work is unfunded, SaaS free is the cheaper option.

SaaS free trades budget for feature gates; self-host free trades feature gates for operational ownership.

Agile and Engineering Workflow Depth

Free plans can carry full agile workflows, but the depth gap shows up at the edges — cycle reporting, sprint analytics, and engineering integrations.

Backlogs, cycles, and sprint planning

Linear Free models cycles with caps; Shortcut Free supports iterations; ClickUp Free supports sprints as a feature flag. On the self-host side, Plane carries cycles and modules out of the box, and OpenProject offers full Scrum boards on its Community edition.

GitHub, GitLab, and CI integrations

- GitHub Projects is the deepest GitHub integration by definition; same for GitLab Issues with GitLab CI.
- Linear and Shortcut both ship branch automation and PR linking on free tiers.
- OpenProject and Plane have GitHub apps; integration depth varies by community plugin quality.

Issue hierarchy and roadmap needs

Most free plans support a single issue level (issue / story / task) but gate epics and roadmaps to paid tiers. If your engineering ritual leans on epic rollups, expect that to be the first paid upgrade. Linear Insights, Shortcut Milestones, and ClickUp Hierarchy all sit behind a paywall.

Free covers the daily work; roadmaps, epics, and analytics are the typical paid upgrade triggers.

Feature Comparison Criteria

Comparing free plans needs a different rubric than comparing paid tiers — the question is not "what features exist" but "what features survive the cap".

Boards, backlogs, sprints, and issues

- Are board, list, and timeline views all free, or is timeline gated?
- Can you separate backlog from active board, or only run a single work surface?
- Is sprint close-out automatic, or does someone have to roll items over manually?

Automation, dashboards, and reports

- How many automation runs per month does the free plan include?
- Are dashboards gated to paid tiers? (Often yes.)
- Does the free plan retain history past a few weeks? (Often no.)

Integrations, docs, and mobile apps

- Which native integrations work on free? (Slack and GitHub usually do; Salesforce and SSO usually do not.)
- Does the free plan include in-app docs or only task descriptions?
- Is the mobile app feature-complete on free, or a read-mostly companion?

Score each free plan on the features that survive the cap — not the marketing copy on the pricing page.

Pricing, Free Plans, and Upgrade Limits

Free is rarely the destination; it is the runway. Most teams that start free have a paid upgrade in the first 12 months. Knowing where that gate sits is the buying decision.

Seat pricing and plan gates

- Linear, Shortcut, ClickUp: per-seat paid tiers start around \$7-10 per user / month (verify on vendor page).
- Asana and Monday: per-seat paid tiers start around \$10-12 per user / month (verify on vendor page).
- GitHub Projects rides GitHub plan pricing; GitLab Free is generous but SSO and roadmaps live on Premium and Ultimate.

Free-plan limits to verify

- Seat or workspace cap (varies by vendor).
- Storage cap (gigabytes per workspace).
- Automation run cap per month.
- History retention window.
- SSO availability — almost always gated to higher tiers.

Total cost as teams grow

Multiply expected year-two headcount by the entry paid tier, then add the cost of SSO if you expect to need it (usually two tiers up). The result is usually 1.5-2× the sticker price most teams budget for. Pricing, free-tier caps, and feature availability verified against vendor pages

on May 20, 2026; recheck before procurement.

Model the year-two upgrade — SSO, automation, and history are the most common forced upgrades.

Migration and Switching Considerations

Switching from Jira to a free plan is the most under-planned migration on this list — teams treat it as cheap because the destination is free.

Importing issues, fields, and comments

- Most free plans accept CSV import; few support direct Jira import on free.
- Custom field mapping is manual on free tiers; expect to prune aggressively.
- Comments and attachments often need a paid plan to import in bulk.

Training teams on new workflows

- Pilot on one team for two to four weeks before company rollout.
- Document the renamed vocabulary (issue / story / task / card) before training.
- Hold a live walk-through per team; recordings do not substitute for the first session.

Avoiding another overconfigured system

Free plans gate complexity by design. Use the constraint. Resist re-creating Jira's custom statuses, workflow gates, and field walls on the new tool. The whole reason to leave was the configuration tax — do not import it.

A free destination is not a cheap migration; budget pilot time the same way you would for a paid plan.

Verdict: Which Jira Alternative Fits Best?

The verdict in a free-tier comparison is who you should pick when budget is the binding constraint, not which tool is the most polished.

Best choice for agile developers

Linear Free is the cleanest for small product-led engineering teams. Shortcut Free is the runner-up when the team prefers Scrum vocabulary. GitHub Projects beats both when the team already lives inside GitHub and the project does not need cross-repo rollups.

Best choice for business teams

ClickUp Free wins on feature breadth — unlimited members and a long list of views. Asana Free wins on UX polish and goal visibility. Trello Free wins when the team's mental model is a single board per project.

Best choice for simple collaboration

Trello Free or Notion (personal) are the right calls for tiny teams or one-person operators who need a shared work surface, not a project tool. Basecamp does not offer a free tier — its flat

per-company pricing is the alternative to free.

Best for / not for

- **Best for:** teams with predictable scope and a tolerance for re-evaluating in 12 months.
- **Not for:** regulated workflows needing SSO, audit history, and admin controls on day one.
- **Not for:** teams that will hit seat caps within two quarters — pick a paid tier from the start.

Pricing, free-tier caps, and feature availability verified against vendor pages on May 20, 2026; recheck before procurement.

Pick free when your scope is predictable; pick paid when you can already name the gate you will hit.

FAQ

Is there a fully free Jira alternative?

There are two definitions of free. SaaS free tiers like ClickUp Free, Trello Free, Linear Free, and GitHub Projects offer no-charge usage with feature or seat caps. Self-hosted open source — Plane, OpenProject Community, Taiga, Redmine — has no software cost but does carry operational cost in hosting and maintenance.

Which Jira alternative has the best free plan?

ClickUp Free is the broadest in feature surface, supporting unlimited members. Linear Free is the best engineering-team fit despite its seat cap. Trello Free is the easiest to start with. GitHub Projects is the lowest-friction choice when GitHub is already in use. The "best" answer depends on which gate hurts least.

What are the trade-offs of open-source Jira alternatives?

Open-source options remove the per-seat cost but add operational ownership — someone has to host, back up, upgrade, and patch the instance. For teams with at least one engineer who can spare a few hours per quarter, that trade is usually worthwhile. For teams that cannot fund the ops work, SaaS free is the cheaper choice in practice.

Can a free Jira alternative scale to 50 or 100 users?

Self-hosted options like OpenProject and Plane scale to hundreds of users at no per-seat cost. SaaS free tiers usually cap below 50 users either by seat limit or by feature gates that force an upgrade. Above 25 active users, a paid plan or self-host usually becomes the realistic choice.

How risky is migrating from Jira to a free alternative?

The migration itself is low-risk if you pilot on one team first and prune custom fields aggressively. The real risk is treating "free" as "free forever" without modelling the year-two upgrade trigger. Most teams hit SSO, automation, or history retention gates within 12 months.

Are open-source Jira alternatives secure enough for production?

Plane, OpenProject, Taiga, and Redmine all run in production at companies in regulated industries. Security depends as much on your hosting practice as on the software — keep the

instance patched, lock down access, and enforce SSO. For teams without ops capacity, audited SaaS is usually a safer default.

Do free tiers include SSO?

Almost never. SSO is the most common feature gate across SaaS Jira alternatives — even on tools whose free tier is otherwise generous. Plan for SSO to be a paid upgrade and budget for it once your headcount and security posture justify the cost.

Full article: <https://jiraalternatives.net/free-jira-alternatives>

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