



Captcha-Less Form Guard

Plugin for Joomla!

This manual documents **version 3.7.x** of the Joomla! extension.

<http://www.aimy-extensions.com/joomla/captcha-less-form-guard.html>

1 Introduction

Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard is a Joomla! system plugin that allows you to protect your forms from spambots - without requiring an image based Captcha.

2 Remarks

This manual documents both the free and the pro version of the Joomla! extension. Any documentation that applies to one of the versions only is marked either (*FREE*) or (*PRO*) respectively.

3 Installing the Captcha Plugin

The installation of the extension follows the common Joomla! procedures.

In case you are not familiar with these procedures, proceed as follows:

1. Download the extension's ZIP archive
2. Log into your Joomla! backend as "Super User"
3. From the menu, choose "*Extensions*" → "*Extensions Manager*"
4. Click on the "*Browse*" button and select the ZIP archive
5. Click on the "*Upload & Install*" button

The extension's archive will be uploaded and installed afterwards.

For further information, please have a look at the Joomla! documentation: Installing an Extension.

NOTE: All plugins are disabled by Joomla! when installed for the first time. To enable Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard, proceed and configure the plugin.

4 Configuring the Captcha Plugin

After a fresh installation, click on the "*Configure plugin now*" button on the installation report page.

At any time, you can configure the Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard plugin using Joomla!'s Plugin Manager by choosing "*Extensions*" → "*Plugin Manager*" from the menu. Locate the plugin and click on its name in the "*Plugin Name*" column of the plugin listing.

4.1 Enabling the Plugin

In order to use Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard functionality, you have to enable it first.

To do so, change the plugin's status from "*Disabled*" to "*Enabled*" and apply your changes by clicking on either the "*Save*" or "*Save & Close*" button in the toolbar.

4.2 Form Protection

Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard provides a couple of methods to guard Joomla! forms against spam without requiring a traditional image-based Captcha.

NOTE: You may choose any combination of the available protection mechanisms - but at least one protection mechanism has to be enabled.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Minimum Fill Out Time | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |
| Minimum Time (in seconds) | <input type="text" value="8"/> |
| Hint | <input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/> Disable Button <input checked="" type="radio"/> Countdown |
| Bot Trap | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |
| DNSBL Tests: Nix Spam | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |
| DNSBL Tests: SORBS (Safe) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |
| Logging | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |
| Logging Method | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Joomla! <input type="radio"/> PHP |
| Show Protected-By | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Off |

4.2.1 Minimum Fill Out Time

Unlike humans, spambots usually require nearly no time to fill out your forms. They obtain your form, fill in their data and submit it immediately. Any human would at least have needed a few seconds to understand what data to enter where in your form and actually fill it in before clicking the submit button.

This distinction is why setting a minimum fill out time helps to programmatically distinguish spambots from humans.

If this protection method is enabled, Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard keeps track of the time the form has been sent to the user and only accepts it if a certain amount of time has passed on submission.

To enable this feature, set "*Minimum Fill Out Time*" to "On" and optionally select a "*Minimum Time (in seconds)*" that suits your form best or stick to the default of seven (7) seconds.

4.2.2 Bot Trap

Spambots are usually not very smart guys. They obtain your form's code, gather its fields and submit their data as long as the form has either been accepted or a certain amount of attempts failed. They don't have an understanding of what input the fields of your form actually expect and they don't look at the rendered form like a human user would - they just evaluate your form's code.

Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard therefore provides an effective bot trap that helps to detect whether a form has been submitted by man or machine: a special field is placed in your form that is not shown to your human users. Technically it is hidden using CSS so a browser won't render it while it is still there in the form's code.

If this protection method is enabled, Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard checks whether the special field has been filled out and rejects the form submission if any data has been sent for this field.

To enable this feature, set "*Bot Trap*" to "*On*".

4.2.3 DNS Blackhole Lists (DNSBL) (PRO)

Some nice and smart people do take a huge effort to identify machines on the internet that send spam and make their knowledge available to the public. Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard allows you to use these blacklists to automatically check the IP address of anyone trying to submit your form.

If the sender's address is known to send spam by any of the activated DNSBL providers, the form submission will be rejected.

You may select one or more of the following DNS Blackhole Lists:

- **NiX Spam**

`http://www.dnsbl.manitu.net/`

- **SORBS (Safe)**

`http://www.sorbs.net/`

4.3 Logging

To enable logging of rejected form submissions, set "*Logging*" to "*On*".

The next option, "*Logging Method*", allows you to specify how these messages are logged. Select one of the following methods:

- **Joomla!**

If selected, logging is done using Joomla!'s logging facilities.

The log file will be named "*aimycaptchalessformguard.php*" and stored in the log folder set up in Joomla!'s "Global Configuration" ("System" tab).

The log file looks like this:

```
#Fields: date time clientip message
2017-04-26 09:30:17 1.2.3.4 REJECT: denied by NiX Spam DNSBL
```

- **PHP (PRO)**

If selected, logging is done using PHP's standard error logging facility using the function `error_log()`.

As a result, all logged messages are stored along with your other PHP error messages. Depending on how you configured your PHP error logging facilities, a log entry may look like this:

```
AimyCaptchaLessFormGuard: REJECT: 1.2.3.4: denied by NiX Spam DNSBL
```

4.4 User Interface Hints in the Joomla! Frontend (PRO)

If you enabled the "*Minimum Fill Out Time*" protection mechanism, you may want to give your users a hint about it. This further reduces the likeliness of a false-positive bot detection.

Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard allows you to do so in different ways:

- **Disable Button**

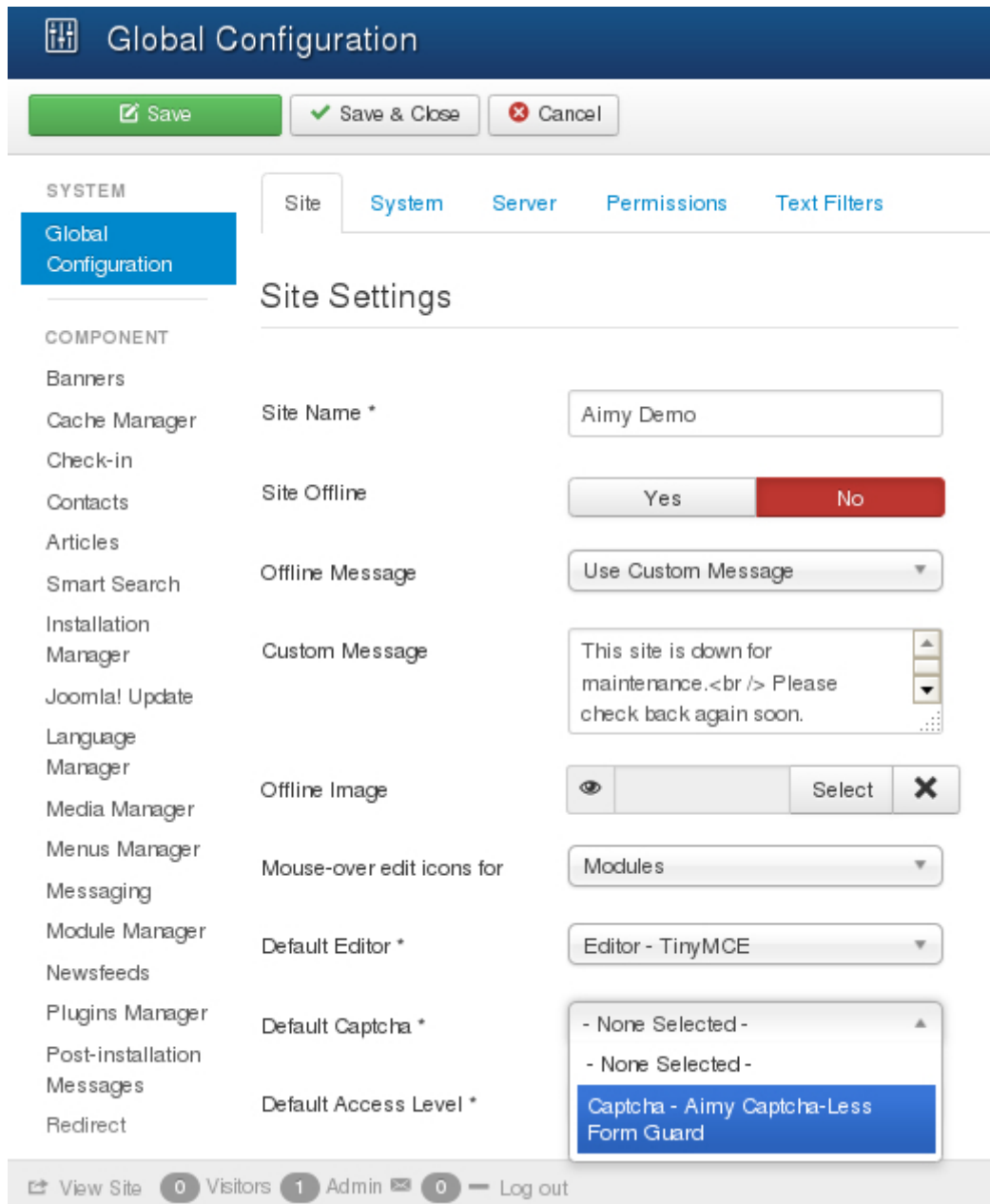
If selected, the submit button of the form will be disabled until the configured minimum time is over.

- **Countdown**

If selected, the submit button will be temporary disabled and its text will be replaced by a countdown that is refreshed each second, as long as the minimum time is met. The initial text will be restored afterwards.

4.5 Joomla! Configuration

To put this extension to use, tell Joomla! to do so: Beneath *System* → *Global Configuration* set "Default Captcha" to Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard.



The screenshot shows the Joomla! Global Configuration interface. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the Joomla! logo and the text "Global Configuration". Below the header are three buttons: "Save" (green), "Save & Close" (green with a checkmark), and "Cancel" (red with an X). The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is a sidebar with a "SYSTEM" section containing "Global Configuration" (highlighted in blue) and a "COMPONENT" section listing various Joomla! components. The right column is titled "Site Settings" and contains several configuration options: "Site Name *" (text input with "Aimy Demo"), "Site Offline" (radio buttons for "Yes" and "No", with "No" selected), "Offline Message" (dropdown menu with "Use Custom Message"), "Custom Message" (text area with "This site is down for maintenance.
 Please check back again soon."), "Offline Image" (image selection button with "Select" and "X" icons), "Mouse-over edit icons for" (dropdown menu with "Modules"), "Default Editor *" (dropdown menu with "Editor - TinyMCE"), "Default Captcha *" (dropdown menu with "Captcha - Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard" selected), and "Default Access Level *". At the bottom of the page, there's a status bar showing "View Site", "0 Visitors", "1 Admin", "0" (with an envelope icon), and "Log out".

5 Advanced Configuration

5.1 User Notification Message

To inform your users that the form they are filling out is protected, Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard displays a short message saying: "This form is protected by Aimy Captcha-Less Form Guard".

This way your users won't misinterpret the lack of a traditional, image-based captcha as your site being unprotected and insecure. In contrast, they may very well appreciate not being forced to enter some hard to read code to prove being a human while still being aware of your security measures. This helps you building trust.

However, if you do like to replace the default message shown, you do not have to edit any source code. Just use Joomla!'s default mechanism of *Language Overrides*, and override the constant `AIMY_CLFG_PROTECTED_MSG_FMT` with your new message.

Language Overrides are explained in detail in the official documentation:

https://docs.joomla.org/J3.x:Language_Overrides_in_Joomla

To switch the message off completely, set "*Show Protected-By*" to "*Off*" (PRO).

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