THE USEFUL TECH

FREE GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

The Non-Chatbot Mac AI Stack

Twenty-four Mac apps that finish the task instead of describing how to finish it. Sorted by the job they take off your desk, with what each one costs, what it needs, and where your data goes.

24	6	20
APPS	CATEGORIES	RUN OFFLINE

PRICES CHECKED
AUGUST 2026

Three kinds of ”on your Mac”

Almost every app in this guide claims to be private and local. Those words are doing different work in different places, so this list separates them into three honest categories. When you see a tag next to an app, this is what it means.

LOCAL

Nothing leaves your machine

The model runs on your own silicon. Pull the Wi-Fi out and the app keeps working exactly as before. Your files, audio, and screen contents are never transmitted anywhere.

HYBRID

Some of it leaves, briefly

Core functions run on your Mac, but the heavier reasoning goes to a server. Most of these apps process in memory and discard immediately with no logs and no training on your data. That is a reasonable trade, but it is not the same as offline.

CLOUD

It all leaves, every time

The app is a well-built front end for a service somewhere else. It stops working on a plane. Sometimes that is exactly the right choice, because the model quality is worth it. Just know that you are choosing it.

COST

One-time prices are noted as ”once”. Where an app has a usable free tier, it is listed first. Checked in August 2026 and worth confirming before you buy.

NEEDS

The floor, not the recommendation. Apple Silicon appears often because on-device models depend on the Neural Engine and unified memory.

THE JOB IT REMOVES

The column that matters. Every app here replaces a decision or an action you were making by hand. If that decision is not one you make, skip the app.

01 Files & organisation

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
Floxtop	Free (100/mo) $19.99 once	macOS 15+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Deciding where every download belongs, one file at a time
Hazel	$42 once	macOS 13+	LOCAL	Applying the same filing rule by hand, forever
Sparkle	Freemium	macOS 12+	LOCAL	Inventing a folder structure from nothing
NameQuick	One-time	macOS, Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Renaming scanned documents one by one after a scan

02 Capture & recording

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
CleanShot X	$29 once $19/yr updates	macOS 12+	LOCAL	Cropping, annotating, and hosting a screenshot by hand
ShotSnap	Free $6/mo	macOS 12+	HYBRID	Filing the screenshot somewhere sensible after you take it
OwnClip	$39 once	macOS, Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Uploading a screen recording somewhere to get a transcript back
Screen Studio	$9/mo annual	macOS 13+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Keyframing zooms and cursor motion in a video editor

03 Writing & input

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
Typeahead	$79 once	macOS, Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Typing the second half of a sentence you have typed before
Superwhisper	Free $8.49/mo or $249.99 once	macOS 13+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Typing at all, in any app, with model choice you control
MacWhisper	Free €59 once	macOS 13+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Sending an interview recording to a transcription service
Wispr Flow	$15/mo $144/yr	macOS 13+	CLOUD	Typing, plus the tidy-up pass afterwards. No offline mode at any tier

04 Search & retrieval

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
Clipto	Freemium	macOS, Windows	LOCAL	Scrubbing through hours of footage to find one clip
Chat2Editing	Free	macOS 26+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Rewatching an interview to find the one quote you need
Raycast	Free $16/mo Pro	macOS 13+	HYBRID	Hunting through Finder windows and menu bars for anything
Alfred	Free Powerpack once	macOS 13+	LOCAL	The same job, older, and far more scriptable if you like scripts

05 Agents & runtimes

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
Osaurus	Free, MIT	16GB min, 24GB better macOS 26 for sandbox	LOCAL	Paying per token every time an agent touches your files
Invoko	Free (beta)	macOS 14+ Apple Silicon	HYBRID	Copying context into a chat window to explain what you are looking at
Ollama	Free	macOS 12+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Depending on somebody's API for every single model call
LM Studio	Free	macOS 13+ Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Setting up a local runtime from the terminal before you can test anything

06 Building & automation

APP	COST	NEEDS	DATA	THE JOB IT REMOVES
Glaze	Free (120 credits) $20/mo Pro	macOS Tahoe Apple Silicon	LOCAL	Searching the App Store for something that does not exist yet
Shortcuts	Free, built in	macOS 12+	LOCAL	The same five clicks you make every single morning
Keyboard Maestro	$36 once	macOS 11+	LOCAL	Any sequence of actions you have repeated more than twice
Hammerspoon	Free, open source	macOS 12+	LOCAL	Dragging windows into position at the start of every work session

Four ways to test whether an app does what it says

Every app on the previous pages describes itself as private. Marketing pages are written to be technically true rather than clear, and the gap between "your files stay on your Mac" and "your files are processed and discarded" is a real one. These four checks take about ten minutes each and they work on any Mac app, not just the ones in this guide.

1 Pull the plug

Turn off Wi-Fi and use the app normally for five minutes. If a feature stops working, that feature was never local. This is the fastest and most reliable test there is, and no amount of marketing language survives it. Do the test on the feature you care about, not the app as a whole, because plenty of apps sort files offline and only reach for a server when you ask for something clever.

2 Watch the traffic

Little Snitch or LuLu will tell you every connection an app opens and where it goes. Install one, run the app through a normal session, and read the log. You are looking for two things: **whether it connects at all**, and **who it connects to**. An app that talks to its own update server is fine. An app that talks to a model provider while sorting your Desktop is doing something it did not mention.

3 Read the privacy page for the verb

The verb tells you everything. **Stored** means it sits on a server. **Processed** means it went to a server and came back. **Never leaves your device** is the only phrase that means what you think it means. Watch for scope too: "we do not train on your data" is a promise about training, not about transmission, and the two get used interchangeably on purpose.

4 Check what happens when the company disappears

Indie Mac apps get abandoned. Before you commit a workflow to one, find out whether your work survives it. Files written into normal folders in normal formats will outlive any app. A proprietary library, a cloud-only archive, or a subscription that bricks the app on expiry will not. Ask this before the free trial ends, not after two years of screenshots.

THE SHORT VERSION

Local is a spectrum, not a badge. The goal is not to refuse every app that touches a server, it is to know which ones do so you can decide what you are comfortable sending. Sorting your Downloads folder and transcribing a client call carry very different stakes, and the same standard should not apply to both.

Do not install twenty-four apps

A list this long is a menu, not a shopping cart. Installing everything here would cost you more time than it saves and you would abandon most of it inside a fortnight. Pick the one line in the "job it removes" column that made you wince, and start there. If nothing made you wince, here are three defensible starting points.

START HERE IF YOUR DESKTOP IS THE PROBLEM

Floxtop, $19.99 once

Point it at your Downloads folder and watch what it does with the files you forgot were in there. It runs entirely offline, it costs less than a month of most subscriptions, and you will know within one afternoon whether this whole category is for you. The lowest-risk entry point on the list.

START HERE IF YOU KEEP LOOKING FOR AN APP THAT DOES NOT EXIST

Glaze, free tier

The free bundle of credits is enough to build two or three small things. Build the tracker, the checklist, or the tiny utility you have searched for and never found. It will change how you think about software more than any other app here, because it removes the reason you settle for the wrong tool.

START HERE IF YOU ARE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR AI

Osaurus, free and open source

The steepest learning curve on the list and the highest ceiling. You need 16GB of RAM to start and 24GB to be comfortable. In exchange you get agents that read your calendar, work with real files, and cost nothing per token. Give it a weekend, not an evening.

KEEP GOING

New Mac apps, tested and written up every week

I write The Useful Tech, the number one Apple blog on Medium, for 78,000+ readers. Everything I find that is worth your attention ends up in the newsletter first.

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