BILL'S HOME TECH

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10 Alexa Tricks Beyond Setting Timers

Ten genuinely useful things to ask your Echo — beyond timers and the weather

Plain-English tech help from:

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Your Echo does far more than timers. Just say the wake word and ask in plain words. Set spoken medicine reminders that call out across the house, call family hands-free, or use Drop In like an intercom for trusted relatives.

Hear the news, your calendar, and the weather; play radio, music, and audiobooks; and control smart lights or a thermostat by voice. It can find your phone, answer quick questions, and run multi-step Routines from a single phrase like "good night." Amazon's newer Alexa+ (free for Prime members) understands conversation even better.

Manage contacts, routines, and privacy in the free Alexa app.

1 The Short Version

Your Echo speaker is far more capable than a kitchen timer. Just by speaking, you can set medicine reminders, call or "drop in" on family, hear the news and your calendar, control lights, and get help in a pinch — all without touching a screen or a button.

Everything here works by simply talking to the Echo using its wake word. You do not need to learn exact phrases; Alexa understands plain, everyday language. And in 2026 Amazon's smarter, AI-powered version — called Alexa+ and included for Amazon Prime members — makes it even better at understanding what you mean. Try the tricks that sound useful and ignore the rest.

- Everything is hands-free — just speak naturally to your Echo.
- Great for reminders, calling family, the news, and controlling the home.
- No exact wording needed; Alexa understands plain language.
- The newer Alexa+ (free for Prime members) is smarter at conversation.

WATCH OUT

You do not have to phrase anything perfectly. If Alexa does not understand the first time, just rephrase it the way you would say it to a person — it is surprisingly forgiving.

2 Getting Comfortable Talking to It

If talking to a speaker feels odd at first, that is completely normal. The trick is to speak as if asking a helpful neighbor, in plain words, after saying the wake word. You do not need to be loud or robotic; a normal speaking voice from across the room is plenty.

Alexa is listening only for its wake word; until it hears that, it is not acting on anything you say. When it does hear it, a light ring glows to show it is listening, and it stops when you finish. If it ever misunderstands, nothing is harmed — just say the wake word and try again in different words.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can see and manage everything Alexa has heard and done in the free Alexa app on your phone, including deleting voice recordings. If privacy is on your mind, that app is where you stay in control — and I am happy to set it up the way you prefer.

3 1. Medicine and Daily Reminders

One of the most valuable uses is a spoken reminder that calls out across the house at the right time — ideal for medications, appointments, or anything easy to forget.

1. Say the wake word, then "remind me to take my pills at 8 in the morning."
2. For a repeating reminder, add "every day."
3. When the time comes, the Echo announces the reminder aloud.
4. Ask "what are my reminders?" any time to hear them.

> **TIP**
> Because the reminder is spoken out loud by the speaker, you hear it even if your phone is in another room. For medicine, that across-the-house announcement is far harder to miss than a quiet buzz in your pocket.

4 2. Call and Message Family Hands-Free

Alexa can place a call to family members just by asking, so you can reach your daughter while your hands are full — no phone, no dialing.

1. Set up contacts once in the Alexa app on your phone.
2. Say the wake word, then "call Susan."
3. Talk hands-free through the Echo's speaker and microphone.
4. Say "hang up" or "end call" when you are done.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Both people need Alexa or the Alexa app for Alexa-to-Alexa calls, but it is free and crystal clear. It is a lovely, low-effort way for family to stay in touch, especially when dialing a phone is fiddly.

5 3. Drop In Like an Intercom

Drop In lets a trusted family member connect to your Echo instantly, like an intercom, to check in — and you can do the same to their Echo. It is popular for keeping a gentle eye on a loved one who lives alone.

1. Turn on Drop In for specific, trusted contacts in the Alexa app.
2. Say the wake word, then "drop in on Mom's kitchen" (using the Echo's name).
3. The two Echos connect right away for a quick chat.
4. Say "hang up" to end it.

WATCH OUT

Drop In is powerful, so only enable it for people you fully trust, because it connects without the other side needing to answer. Set it up thoughtfully — I can help you turn it on for just the right family members and no one else.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

6 4. Hear the News and Your Day

Alexa can read you a short news summary, your calendar, and the weather — a pleasant way to start the morning without a screen.

- "What's my Flash Briefing?" or "what's the news?" for a quick news roundup.
- "What's on my calendar today?" after linking your calendar in the app.
- "What's the weather this weekend?" for the forecast.
- "Add bread to my shopping list" to build a list you can see in the app at the store.

TIP

Ask "good morning" and Alexa often gives a little greeting plus the day's basics. You can customize your Flash Briefing in the app to include the news sources you actually like.

7 5. Play Music, Radio, and Audiobooks

Beyond a song here and there, Alexa can play your local radio station, old favorites by era, and audiobooks — all by voice.

- "Play WKSU" or your favorite station by name for live radio.

- "Play music from the sixties" or "play Frank Sinatra."
- "Read my audiobook" if you have one in your Amazon or Audible account.
- "Turn it up" or "turn it down" to adjust the volume hands-free.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> You can group several Echos together in the app and play the same music throughout the house, or ask one room at a time. It turns a couple of speakers into a whole-home radio.

8 6. Control Lights and the Thermostat

If you have smart bulbs, plugs, or a smart thermostat, Alexa controls them by voice — wonderful for turning off a lamp without getting up, or warming the house from your chair.

1. Connect your smart lights or thermostat in the Alexa app once.
2. Say "turn off the living room light" or "set the thermostat to 70."
3. Group devices ("turn off downstairs") for whole-room control.
4. Create a Routine so "good night" turns everything off at once.

> **TIP**
> Even a single smart plug on a hard-to-reach lamp is a small life-changer — "Alexa, turn off the lamp" from bed is one of the most-loved uses. I can set up a plug or two for you simply.

9 7. Set Up a Call for Help

Alexa can be a safety net. With a feature set up in advance, you can ask it to call a designated emergency contact, and some Echos work with a paid emergency-response service.

- Set an emergency contact in the Alexa app so you can say "call for help" to reach them.

- Ask "call my emergency contact" to reach the person you chose.
- Amazon offers a paid Emergency Assist service that can connect you to trained agents.

> **WATCH OUT**
> An Echo is a helpful backup, but it is not a monitored medical alert device, and it will not work in a power or internet outage. If a reliable emergency call is important, pair it with a proper medical-alert system — I can talk you through sensible options.

10 8. Quick Facts, Math, and Conversions

Alexa is a tireless answerer of the little questions that pop up all day, so you never have to stop and look something up.

- "How many tablespoons in a cup?" while cooking.
- "What's 15 percent of 48 dollars?" when figuring a tip.
- "How do you spell necessary?"
- "What time is it in London?" before calling a relative abroad.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> With the newer Alexa+, you can ask longer, more conversational questions and follow up naturally — "and what about in Celsius?" — without repeating yourself, because it remembers the thread of the conversation.

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11 9. Find Your Phone

Misplaced your phone in the house? Alexa can make it ring, even if it is on silent, so you can follow the sound.

1. Make sure your phone is linked in the Alexa app (or use the Alexa calling feature).
2. Say the wake word, then "find my phone."
3. Follow the ringing to wherever it is hiding.

> **TIP**
> This pairs beautifully with your phone's own find feature. Between Alexa ringing it and your account's Find My tool, a lost phone in the house rarely stays lost for long.

12 10. Make Routines That Do Several Things

A Routine bundles several actions under one phrase, so a single sentence does a whole morning or bedtime for you.

1. In the Alexa app, open Routines and tap to create a new one.
2. Choose a phrase, like "good morning."
3. Add actions: read the weather, then the news, then turn on a light.
4. Save it, then just say "good morning" to run the whole sequence.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Routines are where Alexa stops being a gadget and starts feeling like a helper. A "good night" routine that dims the lights, sets an alarm, and says a goodnight is a gentle, satisfying end to the day.

13 A Real Example: Living Alone, a Little Easier

Consider someone living on their own who wants to stay independent but would like a few gentle supports. An Echo in the kitchen can quietly do a surprising amount to make the days smoother and to keep family close, without feeling like surveillance or a fuss.

Each morning it reads the weather and a short news briefing while the coffee brews. At eight it announces the morning medicine, and again at supper. A quick "call my daughter" reaches family hands-free, and they can Drop In for a two-minute hello when they like. A smart plug means "turn off the lamp" from the armchair, and "find my phone" ends the daily hunt. None of it requires a screen, good eyesight, or steady fingers — just a few plain words.

Set up thoughtfully, with Drop In limited to trusted family and the privacy settings arranged to taste, an Echo becomes a calm, helpful presence rather than one more confusing device. That setup is exactly the kind of visit I enjoy — getting it tuned to the person, not the other way around.

14 Keeping It Working and Private

A little setup and a few privacy choices keep Alexa helpful and comfortable to live with.

- Use the free Alexa app on your phone to set contacts, reminders, routines, and privacy.
- You can review and delete voice recordings, and even tell Alexa "delete what I just said."
- Keep the Echo plugged in and on your Wi-Fi; a reboot fixes most glitches.
- If the Echo mishears often, move it away from noisy appliances and speak toward it.

TIP

If the idea of an always-on microphone is uncomfortable, remember the mic-off button on top of the Echo, and that you control the recordings in the app. I can set the privacy options exactly where you want them.

15 When to Call Bill

None of this is a test, and there is no prize for struggling. Most of these tricks take a minute once you know where to look, and this guide gets you there. But if a setting hides somewhere new on your version, or you would simply rather have someone set it up with you and show you once, that is exactly the kind of visit I make.

I come to you here in Portage County, sit down beside you, and set these up on your own phone or tablet so they work the way you want. I will show you each one slowly, write down the few steps that matter, and make sure you can do it yourself afterward. No rush, no jargon, and no question is too small.

- You want reminders, family calling, or Drop In set up safely for the right people.
- You would like a couple of smart plugs or lights connected so you can use your voice.
- You want the privacy settings arranged so you are comfortable with the microphone.
- You would simply rather have it set up correctly the first time, with someone showing you how.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Just say the wake word, then ask in plain words.

I want to...	Say...
Set a medicine reminder	"Remind me to take my pills at 8am every day"
Call family hands-free	"Call Susan" (set contacts in the Alexa app first)
Check in like an intercom	"Drop in on Mom's kitchen" (enable for trusted people only)
Hear the news & day	"What's the news?" / "What's on my calendar?"
Control a light	"Turn off the living room light"
Find a lost phone	"Find my phone"
Do several things at once	Make a Routine in the app (e.g. "good night")
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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