BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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10 Mac Settings to Change Right After Setup

Twenty minutes of tuning that makes a new Mac safer, clearer, and kinder to use

Plain-English Mac help from:
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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

A fresh Mac has a few defaults worth changing, and twenty minutes in System Settings (Apple menu System Settings) makes it safer and kinder to use. The most important by far is turning on Time Machine backups so your files are always safe. Then require a password or Touch ID, make text larger and bolder for comfortable reading, quiet the notifications, turn on Find My Mac, and trim the apps that launch at startup.

Set automatic security updates on (but keep big yearly upgrades on “notify me”), and review iCloud — remembering it syncs files but is not the same as a backup. Everything here is reversible.

1 The Short Version

A brand-new Mac — or one you've just set up fresh — works fine out of the box, but a handful of settings aren't quite right for how most people actually want to use it. Spending twenty minutes tuning these ten things makes your Mac safer, easier to see, less naggy, and far kinder to use for years to come. None of it is technical, and nothing here can break anything.

This guide walks you through the ten settings worth changing right after setup, one at a time, in plain English. Do them in any order, skip any that don't fit you, and come back anytime.

- A fresh Mac has a few defaults that aren't ideal — these ten tweaks fix that.
- The most important by far is turning on backups, so your files are always safe.
- Several make the Mac easier to see and less distracting.
- All of them are reversible — you can change your mind anytime.

> **TIP**
>
> If you only do one thing from this guide, make it setting #1: turning on Time Machine backups. It's the single best protection against ever losing your photos and files.

2 How to Open System Settings

Nearly everything here happens in one place: System Settings, the Mac's control panel. Here's how to get there, since you'll use it for all ten.

1. Click the Apple menu — the apple symbol in the very top-left corner of the screen.
2. Choose "System Settings."
3. A window opens with a list down the left side; you'll click into different sections from there.
4. You can also press Command and the Space bar, type “System Settings,” and press Return.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If you've used a Mac years ago, you may remember this as “System Preferences.” It's the same idea — Apple renamed it and tidied it into a list. Everything you need is still in there.

3 #1 Turn On Time Machine Backups

This is the most important setting on the Mac, full stop. Time Machine automatically keeps copies of your files on an external drive, so if your Mac is ever lost, stolen, damaged, or simply dies, your photos and documents are safe. You need one thing: an external drive plugged in.

1. Plug an external drive into the Mac (any drive at least as big as your Mac's storage works).
2. Open System Settings General Time Machine.
3. Click "Add Backup Disk" and choose your drive.

4. Let the first backup run — it can take a while; after that it's automatic and invisible.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Once it's set, Time Machine works entirely on its own — you never have to think about it. We have a whole companion guide on setting it up and, crucially, how to get a file back when you need one.

4 #2 Make Sure a Password or Touch ID Is Required

Your Mac holds your email, photos, and perhaps banking — so it should ask for a password (or your fingerprint) to unlock, and should lock itself when you step away. On a laptop especially, this is what protects you if it's ever lost.

1. Open System Settings "Lock Screen."
2. Set "Require password after screen saver begins or display is off" to a short time, like immediately or 1 minute.
3. If your Mac has Touch ID, open "Touch ID & Password" and add your fingerprint for quick, secure unlocking.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Touch ID lets you unlock with a fingertip instead of typing your password every time — it's both more convenient and more secure. You can add more than one finger, which is handy.

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5 #3 Make Text and Icons Easier to See

The default text size suits younger eyes and large screens. If you're squinting, you don't have to live with it — the Mac can make everything comfortably larger, and it makes a real difference to daily use.

1. Open System Settings "Displays."
2. Choose a “Larger Text” or lower-resolution scaling option to make everything bigger.
3. For sharper, bolder text, open "Accessibility" "Display" and try “Increase contrast” or “Bold text.”
4. In "Accessibility" "Zoom," you can also turn on a feature to magnify part of the screen anytime.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Don't think of these as “disability” settings — they're comfort settings, and nearly everyone benefits from them. Bigger, bolder text reduces eye strain for all of us.

6 #4 Tame the Notifications

Out of the box, a Mac pops up a lot of alerts — banners sliding in, badges, sounds — and many are from apps you don't care about. Quieting them makes the Mac far more peaceful.

1. Open System Settings "Notifications."
2. Go through the list of apps and turn off notifications for any you don't need interrupting you.
3. For ones you keep, you can choose quieter styles or turn off their sounds.
4. Set up “Do Not Disturb” hours (under Focus) so the Mac stays quiet in the evenings.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can always find any notification later in the Notification Center, so turning off the pop-ups doesn't mean missing anything important — it just stops the constant interruptions.

7 #5 Set Up Find My

Find My lets you locate your Mac on a map if it's lost or stolen, lock it remotely, and even erase it from afar to protect your information. It's free and takes a minute to confirm it's on.

1. Open System Settings and click your name at the very top.
2. Click "Find My" and make sure "Find My Mac" is turned on.
3. Allow location access if asked.
4. That's it — you can now locate this Mac from another Apple device or from the Find My website.

TIP

Find My works hand in hand with your Apple Account. If you're not sure you're signed in correctly, that's worth confirming now — it's the key to Find My, iCloud, and the App Store all working.

8 #6 Tidy the Dock

The Dock — the row of icons at the bottom — comes stuffed with apps you may never use, and it can be set to behave in ways that get in the way. A quick tidy makes it yours.

1. Open System Settings "Desktop & Dock."
2. Adjust the Dock size and turn on “magnification” if you'd like icons to grow as you point at them.
3. Decide whether the Dock should always show or hide until you need it.

4. To remove an app you never use from the Dock, drag its icon up off the Dock until it says “Remove” (this doesn't delete the app).

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Removing an app from the Dock just clears the shortcut — the app is still on your Mac and easy to find in the Applications folder or via search. So tidy freely; nothing is lost.

9 #7 Trim What Opens at Startup

Many apps quietly set themselves to launch the moment you turn on your Mac, which slows down how quickly it's ready for you and clutters your screen. Trimming this list gives you a faster, calmer start.

1. Open System Settings General "Login Items & Extensions."
2. Look at the list of apps set to “Open at Login.”
3. Turn off any you don't need the instant you sit down — you can still open them yourself anytime.
4. In the “Allow in the Background” section, switch off helpers for apps you've removed or never use.

> **TIP**
> Not sure what something does? Leave it on — there's no harm. We have a dedicated Login Items guide that explains exactly what's safe to switch off.

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10 #8 Right-Click and Trackpad Comfort

A new Mac doesn't always make "right-clicking" obvious, yet it's the key to a world of handy shortcut menus. A couple of settings make the Mac far more comfortable to control.

1. Open System Settings "Trackpad" (or “Mouse”).
2. Turn on "Secondary click" so you can right-click — on a trackpad, this lets a two-finger tap open shortcut menus.
3. Adjust the tracking speed so the pointer moves at a pace that suits you.
4. On a trackpad, turn on “Tap to click” if you'd rather tap gently than press down.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> “Right-clicking” (also called secondary click) opens a menu of useful options wherever you do it — it's one of the most useful habits on a Mac, and worth turning on and practicing.

11 #9 Updates on Autopilot — Safely

Keeping your Mac updated is how it stays secure and runs smoothly. You can let it handle the important security fixes automatically while still choosing when to take the big yearly upgrades.

1. Open System Settings General "Software Update."
2. Click the small “i” or “Automatic Updates” options.
3. Turn ON automatic security responses and app updates — these are safe and important.
4. You can leave the big macOS version upgrades set to notify you, so you pick a convenient time for those.

TIP

Letting the small security updates install automatically is genuinely important — it's a big part of staying safe online. It's the big, once-a-year upgrades you may want to schedule for a quiet moment instead.

12 #10 iCloud and What to Sync

iCloud keeps your photos, files, and more safely in the cloud and in sync across your devices. It's worth a minute to decide what you want it handling — and to understand that iCloud is not the same as a Time Machine backup.

1. Open System Settings and click your name at the top, then "iCloud."
2. Review what's turned on — Photos, iCloud Drive, Contacts, and so on.
3. Turn on the ones you want kept safe and in sync.
4. Note how much iCloud storage you have; the free amount is small, and you may want more if you have lots of photos.

WATCH OUT

iCloud syncs your files; Time Machine backs them up — they're different safety nets, and you want both. If you delete a photo, it disappears from iCloud too, whereas a Time Machine backup still has it. Don't rely on iCloud alone as your backup.

13 A Couple of Bonus Comfort Tweaks

If you've enjoyed tailoring your Mac, here are a few extra touches people appreciate.

- Night Shift / warmer evening colors (in Displays) are easier on the eyes at night.
- A bigger pointer (in Accessibility) is easier to find on screen — shake the mouse to locate it too.
- Hearing the time or having text read aloud (in Accessibility) helps many people.
- Set your correct name, region, and time zone (in General) so dates and times are always right.

> **TIP**
>
> There's no need to do everything at once. Change one thing, live with it a few days, and adjust. Your Mac should fit you — not the other way around.

14 When to Call Bill

These ten settings are all safe to change yourself, and doing so makes a new Mac genuinely nicer to live with. But setting up a brand-new Mac well — getting backups running, signing into the right Apple Account, moving your files and photos over from an old computer — is exactly the kind of thing I set up cleanly in one visit so it's right from day one.

- You've got a new Mac and want it set up properly from the start.
- You need your files and photos moved safely from an old computer.
- You're unsure whether your backups and Apple Account are set up correctly.
- You'd simply like it all tuned to suit you, with a note of how it's set.

I come to you here in Portage County, set your new Mac up the way that fits you, make sure your files are safe and moved over, and leave you a plain one-page note of how everything's arranged.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the new Mac. Work through the ten; skip any that don't fit you.

I want to...	Do this...
Protect my files (do first!)	System Settings General Time Machine Add Backup Disk
Lock it securely	Lock Screen: require password; add Touch ID
See it comfortably	Displays Larger Text; Accessibility bold / contrast
Stop the nagging	Notifications turn off apps you don't need
Be able to find it	Your name Find My turn on Find My Mac
Start up fast	General Login Items & Extensions trim the list
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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