



An Extended Guide · No. 1109

AI in the Garden

Identify Plants, Diagnose Problems
and Plan What to Grow

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

A Note From Bill

Your phone is turning into a pretty good garden companion. Point it at a plant to learn its name, ask why the leaves are yellow, or plan what to grow next spring -- all in plain words.

There are two kinds of help here. First, plant-identification apps that name a plant or spot a problem from a photo. Second, a general AI helper like ChatGPT or Google Gemini that answers gardening questions and plans out your season. This guide covers both, gently.

What's in this guide

- Naming a plant or a bug by pointing your phone at it.
- Free apps versus paid ones, and which to trust.
- Diagnosing yellow leaves and common problems.
- Planning what to grow in northeast Ohio, month by month.
- The safety rule: never eat or forage a plant based on an app alone.

★ Gardening is forgiving

You do not need to know the fancy names to enjoy your yard, and there is no shame in asking an app the same question twice. If you get stuck with the tech side, call me at (330) 200-8042.

The 60-Second Version

The whole idea on one page. Read the rest at your leisure.

- ❑ To name a plant, point a plant-ID app at it -- PlantNet and iNaturalist are free.
- ❑ Google Lens is quick and free, but only right about 60 to 70 percent of the time.
- ❑ Paid apps like PictureThis and PlantIn are more accurate and add care reminders.
- ❑ For planning, ask a general helper like ChatGPT or Gemini.
- ❑ Ask what grows in shade in northeast Ohio, or why leaves are yellow.
- ❑ Never eat or forage a plant or mushroom based on an app or AI alone.
- ❑ For a real second opinion, your county OSU Extension office is free.

✓ Two tools, two jobs

Use an ID app to name things, and a general AI helper to plan and explain. They work nicely side by side.

Two Kinds of Garden Help

It helps to know that AI shows up in the garden in two different ways. Once you see the difference, choosing the right tool is easy.

The first kind is a **plant-ID app**. You point your phone camera at a plant, and it tells you what it is or what might be wrong. These are built just for plants.

The second kind is a **general AI helper** like ChatGPT or Google Gemini. You type or speak a gardening question and it answers, plans, and explains -- like a knowledgeable friend who has read a shelf of gardening books.

✓ You will use both

Most folks snap a photo with an ID app to name something, then ask a general helper how to care for it. There is no single right tool -- they team up.

The Free Plant-ID Apps

You can get a long way without spending a cent. Two free, community-based apps are well worth having.

PlantNet and **iNaturalist** are free and community-based, which means real people help confirm identifications. They are reliable for common plants and a lovely way to learn what is growing around you.

- PlantNet: point, snap, and get a name, drawing on a big shared plant database.
- iNaturalist: identify plants and wildlife, with a friendly community that checks IDs.
- Both are free and good for the everyday plants in a yard.

✓ A clear photo helps

Get close, in good light, and include a leaf or a flower. A sharp photo gives a far better answer than a dark, blurry one.

Google Lens for a Quick Look

If you just want a fast guess, Google Lens is already on most phones and costs nothing.

Google Lens is quick and free, and it identifies common plants well enough for casual use. Be aware it is roughly 60 to 70 percent accurate on common species, and weaker on rare ones -- so treat its answer as a good guess, not the final word.

- Free and built into the Google app, Google Photos, and Chrome.
- Fast -- point and get an answer in seconds.
- Right about two times in three on common plants, so double-check.

! A guess is not a fact

Because Lens is right only about 60 to 70 percent of the time, never make an important decision -- especially anything you might eat -- on its word alone. Confirm with a second source.

The Paid Apps: Worth It?

If you garden a lot, a paid app can be worth the money for its accuracy and its reminders -- but read the fine print first.

PictureThis and **PlantIn** are the popular paid options. They offer very high accuracy plus care reminders, watering schedules, and disease diagnosis. They usually cost a yearly subscription.

! Watch the auto-renew and free-trial trap

These apps often start with a free trial that quietly turns into a yearly charge if you do not cancel in time. Before you sign up, note the price, set a reminder to decide, and check how to cancel. See my guide on Making AI Pictures for how subscriptions can sneak up on you.

- Very accurate, with care reminders and watering schedules.
- Can diagnose common plant diseases from a photo.
- Usually a yearly subscription -- watch the auto-renew.

Identifying a Plant, Step by Step

The how is the same in every app. Once you have done it once, it becomes second nature.

Open the app, point the camera at the plant, and take the picture. In a moment you get a name and usually a few look-alikes to compare. Pick the one that matches what is in front of you.

- Fill the frame with the plant, not the whole garden.
- Photograph a leaf, a flower, and the whole plant if you can.
- Compare the app's top guesses against what you see.
- If unsure, try a second app and see if they agree.

✓ Two apps, one plant

When it really matters, run the same plant through two apps. If they agree, you can be more confident. If they disagree, dig deeper before you act.

Diagnosing a Sick Plant

When a plant looks poorly, AI can help you figure out what is going on. Sometimes an ID app spots it; sometimes a general helper explains it better.

You can photograph the trouble in an ID app, or describe it to a general helper: the leaves on my tomato plant are turning yellow at the bottom, what could it be? You will get the likely causes and what to try.

Q: Why are the leaves yellow?

Ask a general helper and describe it. Common causes are overwatering, a nutrient shortage, or the season -- it will walk you through the likely ones.

Q: There are spots on the leaves.

Photograph them in a paid ID app for a disease guess, or describe them to a helper and ask what to check.

✓ Describe it well

The more you say -- where the yellowing starts, how the soil feels, how much sun -- the better the answer. Detail is everything.

Planning What to Grow

This is where a general AI helper really shines. It can plan a garden that fits your yard and our Ohio weather.

Ask what grows well in shade in northeast Ohio? and mention your conditions. Northeast Ohio is generally growing zone 6, a term for how cold winters get, which tells you what will survive here. The helper uses that to suggest sensible plants.

- Tell it your light -- full sun, part shade, or deep shade.
- Mention you are in northeast Ohio, zone 6.
- Say whether you want flowers, vegetables, or low-fuss greenery.

✓ Know your zone

Zone 6 is the plant-hardiness zone for much of Portage County. Telling the helper your zone gets you plants that can actually survive our winters.

A Month-by-Month Calendar

Timing is half of gardening. The helper can lay out what to do each month for our climate.

Ask make a month-by-month planting calendar for a vegetable garden in northeast Ohio. You will get a plan -- start seeds indoors here, plant out after the last frost there -- that you can follow through the season.

! Confirm the frost dates

Frost timing varies year to year and yard to yard. AI can be off on exact dates, so confirm our local last-frost and first-frost dates with your county OSU Extension office before you plant tender things out.

Care, Watering and Pruning

Once things are growing, the helper is a patient guide for the ongoing chores -- the how and the when of care.

Ask how do I prune a hydrangea, and when? and you will get plain steps and the right timing. The when matters -- prune some shrubs at the wrong time and you cut off next year's flowers.

- Ask how much and how often to water a specific plant.
- Ask when and how to prune a shrub or tree.
- Ask how to feed or mulch, and with what.

✓ For sensors and gadgets

If you want moisture sensors, timers, and smart watering, see my guide on Smart Gardening -- Watering, Sensors and Plant Apps.

Never Eat a Plant on an App's Word

This is the most important page in the guide, so please read it twice. When it comes to eating wild plants or mushrooms, an app or AI is not enough.

Plant-ID apps and AI helpers make mistakes -- a poisonous plant can look almost exactly like a safe one, and a wrong ID here is not a small thing. It can send someone to the hospital.

! Do not forage on an app or AI alone

NEVER eat or forage a plant or mushroom based on an app or AI alone.

Mis-identifications happen and can be dangerous, even deadly with some mushrooms.

If you cannot be certain from an expert or a trusted field guide, do not eat it. When in doubt, throw it out.

- Look-alikes are common, and some are toxic.
- Mushrooms are especially risky -- leave foraging to experts.
- An app's guess is never proof a plant is safe to eat.

✓ Ask a real expert

Your county OSU Extension office can help identify plants and is a free, trusted source. That is who to call before anything goes in your mouth.

Careful with Sprays and Chemicals

If a diagnosis points to a spray or treatment, slow down -- especially around pets and children. AI does not know your yard.

An app might suggest a chemical to fix a problem it thinks it sees. But a wrong diagnosis plus a strong chemical is a bad mix, and some treatments are risky near pets, kids, or vegetables you plan to eat.

! Get a second opinion before you spray

Do not act on an app's diagnosis with chemicals near pets or kids without a second, trusted source. Your county OSU Extension office is a great free one. Always read and follow the product label, which is the law.

- Confirm the problem before you reach for a chemical.
- Keep pets and children away from treated areas.
- Follow the label exactly -- more is not better.

Your Free Expert: OSU Extension

The best second opinion in the garden is not an app at all -- it is a free local service most folks have never heard of.

Every county in Ohio has an OSU Extension office. Ohio State University runs them, and their staff and trained Master Gardener volunteers answer plant questions, identify samples, and give research-based advice -- free, right here in the county.

- Free, local, and research-based advice.
- Can identify plants, pests, and diseases from a sample.
- The right place to check before eating or spraying anything.

✓ The perfect pairing

Use AI for the quick everyday questions, and OSU Extension for anything that touches safety. Together they cover you well.

Putting the Tools Together

Here is how a real garden question flows from start to finish, using the tools in order.

Say you spot a mystery plant. You snap it in PlantNet to get a name, run it through a second app to be sure, then ask a general helper how do I care for this in northeast Ohio? If anything about safety comes up, you call OSU Extension. That is the whole rhythm.

- Identify with an ID app -- twice if it matters.
- Learn care with a general helper, mentioning zone 6.
- Confirm anything about eating or spraying with a trusted expert.

✓ Slow and steady

You do not have to learn it all at once. Try one tool this week, add another next week. The garden will wait for you.

Handy Prompts to Copy

Borrow these ready-made questions for a general AI helper. Change the words in the brackets to fit your garden.

- What grows well in [shade] in northeast Ohio, zone 6?
- Make a month-by-month planting calendar for [vegetables] in northeast Ohio.
- The leaves on my [tomato] plant are turning yellow -- what could it be?
- How and when do I prune a [hydrangea]?
- How often should I water a [new shrub] in summer here?
- Suggest low-fuss plants for a [sunny front bed] that deer leave alone.

✓ Save the winners

When a question gets you a helpful answer, jot it down. You will build a little gardening notebook of your own.

How Accurate Is All This?

It pays to know how much to trust each tool, so you lean on them the right amount.

Tool	Roughly how reliable
PlantNet / iNaturalist (free)	Reliable for common plants, community-checked
Google Lens (free)	About 60 to 70 percent on common species
PictureThis / PlantIn (paid)	Very high accuracy, plus care features
General AI helper	Good for ideas and care; verify safety facts

! None is perfect

Even the best app is sometimes wrong, and a general AI helper can give a confident made-up answer. For anything you eat, forage, or spray, always confirm with a trusted source. See my guide on When AI Gets It Wrong.

Privacy and Staying Safe Online

Garden apps are low-risk, but a couple of habits keep it that way -- mostly around money and free trials.

- Prefer the well-known free apps unless you truly want the paid extras.
- With any paid app, note the price and the cancel steps before you start.
- Be careful of free trials that turn into a yearly charge.
- You do not need to share personal details to identify a plant.

✓ Read before you agree

A moment spent reading what an app charges and how to cancel saves a nasty surprise on your card later. It is the same care you would take with any subscription.

When the Answer Looks Off

If an app or helper gives you something that does not fit, here is how to sort it out. You are the gardener -- the tools just assist.

Q: Two apps disagree on the plant.

Take clearer photos of a leaf and a flower, try again, and if it still matters, ask OSU Extension.

Q: The advice does not fit Ohio.

Remind the helper you are in northeast Ohio, zone 6, and ask it to tailor the answer.

Q: It suggested a plant that died here.

Tell it what happened and ask for hardier, zone-6 choices.

Q: I am not sure a plant is safe.

Then treat it as unsafe. Do not eat it, and check with an expert first.

✓ Fresh photo, fresh start

A better photo fixes most ID troubles. Get close, use good light, and include the distinctive parts.

Where to Go Next

You now have what you need to make your phone a helpful garden hand. A few of my other guides pair well with this one.

- Smart Gardening -- Watering, Sensors and Plant Apps.
- Point Your Camera at Anything -- the how-to behind visual search.
- ChatGPT for Absolute Beginners -- if you are new to AI helpers.
- When AI Gets It Wrong -- how to spot and handle a made-up answer.

Start with one plant this week -- name it, learn to care for it, and enjoy knowing a little more about your own yard. There is no test at the end, just a happier garden.

★ Happy to help you set it up

If getting these apps onto your phone feels fiddly, I am glad to sit down and do it with you. That is a flat \$99 first visit with a 30-day follow-up included. Call me at (330) 200-8042.

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Clip this page and keep it with your garden gloves.

I want to...	Do this
Name a plant for free	Point PlantNet or iNaturalist at it
Get a quick guess	Use Google Lens -- right about 2 times in 3
Get top accuracy plus reminders	Try PictureThis or PlantIn (paid)
Figure out yellow leaves	Describe it to ChatGPT or Gemini
Know what to grow here	Ask about northeast Ohio, zone 6
Plan the season	Ask for a month-by-month calendar
Eat or forage a plant	Do NOT rely on an app -- ask an expert
Get a free expert opinion	Call your county OSU Extension office
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

Plain-English Word List

A few terms you will run into, explained the plain way.

Q: Plant-ID app

An app that names a plant or spots a problem from a photo, like PlantNet or PictureThis.

Q: General AI helper

A chat assistant like ChatGPT or Gemini that answers questions and plans in plain words.

Q: Google Lens

Google's free tool for identifying or searching things from a photo or your camera.

Q: Growing zone

A number for how cold winters get in your area. Much of Portage County is zone 6.

Q: Subscription

A recurring charge, often yearly, for a paid app. Watch the auto-renew.

Q: Auto-renew

When a subscription charges you again automatically unless you cancel first.

Q: OSU Extension

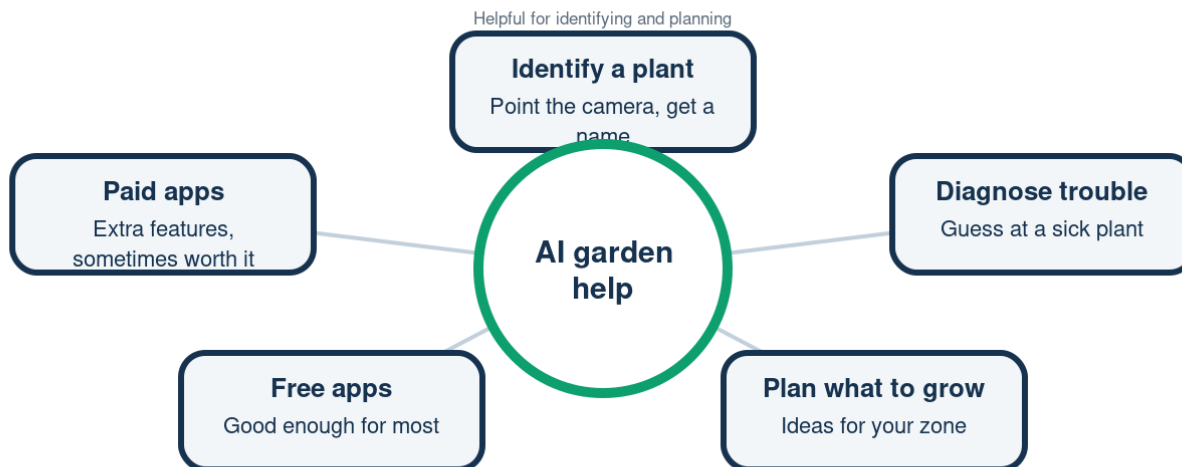
Ohio State University's free local office that answers plant and garden questions.

Q: Made-up answer

When AI states something false but sounds sure. Always verify safety facts.

A Picture to Follow Along

What Garden AI Can Actually Do



A helpful guess - never the final word.

Illustration - a schematic to explain, not a screenshot; details vary by device and plan.

A Second Look

Three Safety Rules

Where a confident app can still be wrong.

Never eat on its word

An ID can be wrong
Foraging mistakes
can be dangerous

Go easy on sprays

Follow the label,
not the app, for
any chemical

Treat it as a guess

Cross-check before
you dig up or
toss a plant

Use the guess to start - confirm before you act.

Illustration - a schematic to explain, not a screenshot; details vary by device and plan.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help — I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right — or refund it. No awkwardness,
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



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 comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech