BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Cheaper Ink, Toner & Printing Over a Year

The simple choices that cut printing costs dramatically — without printing any less of what you need

Plain-English money-saving help from:

Bill's Home Tech

Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Printer ink is extremely expensive, so how you buy and use it matters more than the printer's price. Buy high-yield (XL) cartridges and compare them by cost per page — price divided by the page yield on the box — not by sticker price. Well-reviewed third-party ink saves money in many printers, but some, especially HP+ models, require genuine HP ink, so check before buying.

An ink subscription like HP Instant Ink can be a fair deal if you print a steady amount each month, but usually costs more than it saves if you print rarely. The biggest painless savings come from settings: default to Draft quality, grayscale (black only), and printing on both sides, and save things as a PDF rather than printing when you only need to read them.

If you print a great deal, a black laser printer or a refillable-tank inkjet costs more up front but far less to run; if you print rarely, keep what you have and use it carefully.

1 The Short Version

Printer ink is, ounce for ounce, one of the most expensive liquids most of us ever buy — and toner and paper add up too. Over a year, careless printing can cost far more than the printer itself. The good news is that a handful of simple choices cut that cost dramatically, without buying a new printer or printing any less of what you actually need.

This guide walks through the real ways to spend less on printing: buying ink smartly, deciding whether a subscription helps or hurts, choosing the right settings, and knowing when a different kind of printer would pay for itself. It is practical, plain, and free of gimmicks.

- Ink is wildly expensive, so how you buy and use it matters more than the printer's price.

- The right settings — draft mode, grayscale, print-both-sides — cut usage painlessly.
- Ink subscriptions help some people and cost others; this shows which you are.
- For heavy printing, a laser printer or a refillable-tank printer can pay for itself.

> **TIP**
> Before changing anything, notice how much you actually print. A few pages a week and a few hundred a month lead to completely different best choices — so match the advice to your real habits.

2 Why Printing Costs So Much

The price of a printer is often deliberately low, because the maker expects to earn far more from the ink or toner over the years. It is the razor-and-blades model: cheap handle, costly refills. That is why a set of replacement cartridges can cost nearly as much as the printer did.

Understanding this changes how you shop. The sticker price of the printer tells you almost nothing about what it will cost to own. The real number is the cost per page over its life, and that is where the savings in this guide come from.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> A bargain printer with pricey, low-capacity cartridges can cost you far more over a year than a dearer printer with cheap, high-capacity ones. The cheap printer is rarely the cheap choice.

3 Buy the Right Cartridges

How you buy ink and toner is the biggest single lever. A few habits cut the per-page cost sharply.

- Buy the high-capacity ("XL" or "high-yield") cartridges; they cost more up front but far less per page.

- Check the "page yield" printed on the box and divide the price by it to compare true cost.
- Buy from reputable sellers; stick to trusted retailers rather than unknown bargain sites.
- Keep spare cartridges sealed and stored cool, so they are ready and do not dry out.

> **TIP**
> Always compare cartridges by cost per page, not sticker price. A cartridge that costs more but prints three times as many pages is much cheaper in the end — the box usually lists the page yield to help you work it out.

4 Third-Party and Refilled Ink: The Honest Picture

Cheaper non-brand cartridges are tempting, and for many people they are fine — but there are real trade-offs worth understanding before you decide.

- Compatible (third-party) cartridges cost much less and work well in many printers.
- Quality varies by seller, so a well-reviewed brand of compatibles is worth seeking out.
- Some printers, especially certain HP models, are set to resist or reject non-brand ink.
- Refilling your own is the cheapest but messiest route, and not for everyone.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Some newer printers, particularly HP models enrolled in the HP+ program, require genuine HP ink and will refuse other cartridges. That is a policy, not a fault — so if cheaper ink matters to you, check a printer's ink rules before you buy it.

5 Should You Get an Ink Subscription?

Ink subscriptions, such as HP's Instant Ink, charge a monthly fee based on how many pages you print and mail you ink automatically. They genuinely save money for some people and cost more for others, so it is worth working out which you are.

The plans are priced by pages per month, not by ink used, and unused pages often roll over up to a limit. The sweet spot is steady, predictable printing. The trap is a plan bigger than you need, or a low plan that charges extra every time you go over.

- Good fit: you print a fairly steady number of pages each month and value never running out.
- Poor fit: you print rarely, or in unpredictable bursts, where a plan's monthly fee outweighs the ink.
- Watch the overage charges and the rollover limits, which decide the real cost.
- Remember the fee continues every month whether you print or not.

GOOD TO KNOW

A subscription can be a fair deal for a household that prints regularly and hates running dry mid-letter. For someone who prints a handful of pages a month, paying a monthly fee for ink usually costs more than simply buying a cartridge now and then.

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6 The Settings That Save the Most

You can cut ink and paper use substantially just by changing a few print settings, with no loss for everyday documents. These are the quiet savers.

1. Print in "Draft" or "Economy" quality for everyday pages; it uses noticeably less ink.
2. Print in grayscale (black only) unless you truly need color — color pages cost far more.
3. Print on both sides (duplex) to halve your paper use.
4. Preview before printing, and use "print selection" or page ranges to avoid printing pages you do not need.

> **TIP**
> Make draft, grayscale, and both-sides your defaults for ordinary documents, and switch to full quality only for photos or something special. Most everyday printing looks perfectly fine in draft and costs a fraction as much.

7 Stop Wasting Ink Without Noticing

A surprising amount of ink disappears into things you never meant to print — extra pages, cleaning cycles, and color used where black would do. A little awareness stops the leaks.

- Avoid printing web pages whole; use the "print selection" or a reader view to skip ads and junk pages.
- Save things as a PDF instead of printing when you only need to read or keep them.
- Leave an inkjet printer turned on at the wall if you print now and then; powering it off and on triggers ink-hungry cleaning cycles.
- Do not run cleaning cycles more than needed; each one uses real ink.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Inkjet printers run a cleaning cycle that consumes ink, often when switched on after sitting idle. Printing a little and regularly, and leaving the printer powered, wastes less than long idle gaps followed by heavy cleaning.

8 Paper Costs Count Too

Ink gets the attention, but paper adds up, especially if you print a lot. A few sensible choices trim it without fuss.

- Buy ordinary paper by the ream or box; it is far cheaper per sheet than small packs.
- Use standard weight for everyday printing; save heavier, special paper for photos or keepsakes.
- Print both sides to halve sheets used.
- Keep paper flat, dry, and stored well so it does not jam and waste sheets.

WATCH OUT

A single large box of paper bought once a year is cheaper and more convenient than small packs bought often — and means you never pay a premium for running out at the wrong moment.

9 When a Different Printer Pays for Itself

If you print a lot, the cheapest move over a year can be a different kind of printer. Two types cost more up front but far less to run.

- Laser printers (black and white) use toner, which lasts for thousands of pages and costs little per page — ideal for lots of text.
- Refillable-tank inkjet printers (sold under names like EcoTank, MegaTank, or SmartTank) come with bottles of ink that last enormously longer than cartridges.
- Both cost more to buy but can save a heavy printer a great deal over a couple of years.
- For occasional printing, though, your current printer used wisely is usually the cheapest of all.

GOOD TO KNOW

The rule of thumb: print a lot of plain text, a black laser printer wins; print a mix including color regularly, a refillable-tank inkjet wins; print rarely, keep what you have and use it carefully.

10 Work Out Your Cost Per Page

To know whether a change is worth it, a rough cost-per-page figure is the honest measure. It is simple arithmetic and cuts through all the marketing.

1. Take a cartridge's price and divide by its page yield (on the box) to get cost per page.
2. Do this for your current ink and for any alternative you are weighing.
3. Estimate how many pages you print in a year.
4. Multiply to see the yearly cost of each option, and compare.

TIP

Even a rough figure is powerful. If your current ink works out at, say, a few cents a page and an alternative is a fraction of that, multiplying by a year of printing shows the real saving in black and white.

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11 Decide When to Buy

A little timing and stocking sense avoids both running out at the worst moment and overpaying in a panic.

- Keep one spare cartridge or toner on hand so you never pay a premium for an emergency top-up.
- Buy when you spot a genuine sale on the high-capacity version you use.
- Do not overstock inkjet cartridges, which can dry out over long storage; toner keeps far longer.
- Note which cartridge numbers your printer takes so you buy the right ones every time.

WATCH OUT

Buy only from trusted sellers. Unbelievably cheap ink from an unknown source can be empty, old, or counterfeit, and faulty ink can harm a printer — a false saving that costs more in the end.

12 Make Your Ink Last Longer

Beyond how you buy ink, how you treat it affects how far it goes. A few simple habits stretch each cartridge and prevent the waste that comes from ink drying out or clogging.

- Print at least a little every week or two; ink left idle for months can dry in the nozzles.
- Keep the printer somewhere cool and out of direct sun, which dries ink faster.
- Do not replace a cartridge the moment the "low" warning appears; these often cry low while plenty remains.
- Only run cleaning cycles when print quality actually suffers, since each one spends ink.

GOOD TO KNOW

Printers warn that ink is low long before it truly runs out, because the maker would rather you bought early. Keep printing until quality genuinely drops, and you will get noticeably more from each cartridge.

13 Print Less Without Printing Less of What Matters

The cheapest page is the one you did not need to print at all. A moment's thought before pressing print saves paper and ink without costing you anything you actually wanted on paper.

- Keep receipts, tickets, and confirmations on your phone instead of printing them.
- Read documents on screen and print only the pages you truly need on paper.
- Use "print selection" to print just the part of a web page that matters.
- Save a copy as a PDF for your records rather than a printed page.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Boarding passes, event tickets, and order confirmations almost never need printing — your phone shows them fine. Breaking the habit of printing everything is a painless, steady saving.

14 Know Your Cartridge Numbers

A small piece of homework saves money and mistakes every time you buy: knowing exactly which cartridges or toner your printer takes, so you never overpay for the wrong one or grab a pricey option by accident.

1. Find your printer's exact model name and number (on the front, or in its settings).
2. Note the cartridge numbers it uses, including the high-yield (XL) versions.
3. Write these on a card kept with the printer or a photo on your phone.
4. Use that card when you shop so you buy the right, best-value cartridge every time.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> A card listing your printer's model and its XL cartridge numbers, kept where you shop, means you never stand in a shop or a website unsure which to buy — and never pay extra for the wrong one.

15 When to Call Bill

Trimming printing costs is mostly good habits and smart buying, and this guide gives you the levers. But working out whether a subscription suits you, whether cheaper ink is safe for your exact printer, or whether a laser or tank printer would truly pay off can benefit from a plain-spoken second opinion — with no sales pitch, since I am not selling you a printer.

I am glad to look at how much you really print, set your printer's defaults to the money-saving settings, work out your true cost per page, and advise honestly on cartridges, subscriptions, and whether a different printer would pay for itself for you. The aim is simply to stop you overpaying for something as ordinary as printing.

- You want an honest read on whether an ink subscription fits your printing.
- You are unsure whether cheaper ink is safe for your specific printer.
- You print a lot and want to know if a laser or tank printer would pay off.
- You would like your printer set to the money-saving defaults.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the printer. Match the choices to how much you actually print.

I want to...	Do this...
Pay less per cartridge	Buy high-yield (XL) cartridges; compare by cost per page, not sticker price
Consider cheaper ink	Well-reviewed third-party ink is fine for many printers (not HP+ models)
Decide on a subscription	Good for steady printers; a poor deal if you print rarely
Use far less ink	Default to Draft quality, grayscale, and print both sides
Stop hidden waste	Save as PDF when you can; leave inkjets powered to avoid cleaning cycles
Save big if you print a lot	Consider a black laser or a refillable-tank (EcoTank-style) printer
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.

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GOOD TO KNOW

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