BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Drop Cable but Keep Your Local Channels

Free over-the-air locals with an antenna, plus streaming for the rest — done right

Plain-English tech help from:

Bill's Home Tech

Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Your local channels are broadcast free through the air, so an antenna catches them at no monthly cost — often sharper than cable. Start by checking what reaches your address on the FCC's DTV reception maps. If signals are strong, an inexpensive indoor antenna will do; patchy signals suit an attic antenna, and far or weak ones an outdoor one.

Place an indoor antenna high and near a window facing the towers, connect it to the TV's "Antenna In" socket, then run the TV's channel scan and be sure to choose "Antenna," not "Cable." Move it and re-scan to pull in more. Add an over-the-air DVR if you want to pause and record.

For the cable-only channels an antenna can't give you, add only the streaming services you will truly watch — that is where the honest savings live.

1 The Short Version

You want to stop paying for cable, but you are not ready to lose your local channels — the evening news, the weather, the football, the network shows you have watched for years. Here is the good news that cable companies would rather you did not dwell on: those local channels are broadcast through the air, for free, and have been all along. With a simple antenna, you can pull them in at no monthly cost and in better quality than cable often delivered.

This guide shows you how, calmly and honestly. We will check what channels you can actually get where you live, pick the right kind of antenna for your home, get it set up and scanned in, and then look at streaming to replace the handful of cable channels an antenna cannot give you. We will also be straight with you about what you gain and what you give up, so there are no surprises.

- Local channels (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, PBS and more) are free over the air — you just need an antenna to catch them.
- First, check what you can receive at YOUR address — it depends on how far you are from the towers.
- An indoor antenna is cheapest and easiest; an attic or outdoor one reaches farther when you need it.
- A tuner or over-the-air DVR lets you pause and record, just like cable did.
- Streaming services can fill in the cable channels an antenna can't, so you keep what you love.
- When it comes to choosing and placing the antenna, this is a satisfying, common visit for Bill.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> You do not have to decide everything at once. Many people start with an inexpensive indoor antenna just to see how many channels they get for free — and are pleasantly surprised. You can always add streaming for the rest later.

2 What's Really Going On

It genuinely surprises people to learn that local television is, and always has been, free. The major networks beam their signal out from tall towers, and anyone within range with an antenna can receive it at no charge — this is the same over-the-air broadcasting that has existed since television began. When you paid the cable company, part of what you paid for was simply them catching those free signals and passing them along to you.

Today's over-the-air television is fully digital and high-definition, so the picture is often sharper than the same channel looked on cable, because it has not been squeezed to fit alongside hundreds of other channels. An antenna will not give you cable-only channels (the sports, film, and news networks that only exist on cable), but for your locals it is free, it is crisp, and it keeps working even when the internet is down — which is no small thing during a storm.

> *Your local channels have been free through the air the whole time. An antenna simply lets you catch what you were paying the cable company to hand you.*

3 What You Gain and What You Give Up

Honesty first, because dropping cable is a real trade and you deserve to know both sides before you spend a dollar. For most people the sums work out strongly in their favour, but it depends on what you watch, and it is better to know now than to be disappointed later.

	What you gain	What you give up
Local channels	Free, often sharper than cable	Nothing — you keep them
Monthly bill	No cable TV bill for the locals	The convenience of one bill
Cable-only channels	Can be replaced by streaming	They don't come over the antenna
The guide & DVR	Available via a tuner/DVR box	Cable's built-in guide and recorder

- You GAIN: free local channels, a lower bill, and often a better picture — plus TV that still works in a power or internet outage (with a battery).
- You GIVE UP: the cable-only channels unless you add streaming, and the all-in-one simplicity of a single cable box and bill.
- The honest question to ask yourself: how much of what you actually watch is local channels versus cable-only channels?

GOOD TO KNOW

There is no single right answer, because prices and packages change constantly and vary by town — which is exactly why this guide does not quote figures that would be out of date by the time you read them. The durable truth is this: the antenna part is a one-time cost with no monthly bill, and streaming for the rest is where your ongoing spending (if any) goes. Add up only the streaming you would truly use.

4 Check What You Can Get at Your Address

Before buying anything, find out which channels actually reach your home, because it depends entirely on how far you are from the broadcast towers and what is in the way. A free, official tool does this for you — you type in your address and it lists the channels you should receive and how strong each signal is likely to be.

1. On a computer or phone, go to the government's official reception tool at the FCC's DTV Reception Maps (search "FCC DTV reception maps" to find it).
2. Type in your full street address, including your city and state (leave out any apartment number).
3. Read the list it gives you: each channel's call sign, its network (ABC, CBS, and so on), and a colour or strength showing how easy it will be to receive.
4. Note which channels show as strong (easy, an indoor antenna may do) versus weak (you may need an attic or outdoor antenna).

GOOD TO KNOW

These tools assume an antenna mounted outdoors about thirty feet up, so your real-world results indoors may be a little weaker than the map suggests — treat it as an optimistic guide, not a promise. Hills, tall trees, and big buildings between you and the towers can block signals the map shows as available. It is still the best first step by far, and it stops you buying the wrong antenna.

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.

5 Indoor, Attic, or Outdoor — Which Antenna?

Antennas come in three broad types, and the right one for you depends almost entirely on how strong your signals are, which the reception check just told you. There is no need to overbuy — a bigger, pricier antenna does not help if a small one already pulls in everything you want.

- INDOOR: a flat panel or small set of "rabbit ears" that sits by the TV or sticks to a window. Cheapest and easiest, and plenty for homes close to the towers with strong signals.
- ATTIC: a larger antenna mounted in the attic, out of sight and weather. A good middle option when indoor reception is patchy but you would rather not put anything on the roof.
- OUTDOOR / ROOF: the biggest reach, for homes far from the towers or with hills and trees in the way. More involved to install, but it brings in the most channels most reliably.

WATCH OUT

Start with the least you need. If the reception check shows strong signals, buy an inexpensive indoor antenna first and try it — many people never need anything more. You can always step up to an attic or outdoor antenna if the indoor one falls short, and a good retailer will take a returned indoor antenna back.

6 Picking and Placing an Indoor Antenna

If you are starting indoors, placement matters far more than price — the very same antenna can pull in twice as many channels in a good spot as in a poor one. The goal is a clear a path as possible toward the broadcast towers, which usually means up high and near a window.

1. Unpack the antenna and connect its cable to the "ANT" or "Antenna In" socket on the back of your TV (a round socket you screw the cable onto).
2. Place it as high as you can and near a window, ideally on the side of the house facing the towers (the reception check hints at the direction).
3. Keep it away from large metal objects and, if possible, away from the TV and other electronics, which can interfere.
4. A flat-panel antenna often works well taped to a window; rabbit-ear types like to be spread out and upright.
5. You will scan for channels after placing it (next chapter) — then try moving it a little and re-scanning to find the best spot.

WATCH OUT

Resist the temptation to settle for the first spot that works. Moving an indoor antenna even a foot or two, or to a different window, can genuinely add several channels — so it is worth re-scanning in two or three positions before you decide. A few minutes of patience here is the difference between twelve channels and twenty-five.

7 Amplified or Not, and Which Way to Point It

Two questions come up with every antenna: does it need an amplifier, and does it need pointing in a particular direction? The answers are simpler than the packaging makes them sound, and getting them right avoids wasted money and fiddling.

- An AMPLIFIER (a small powered booster) helps when the towers are far away and signals are weak — but it can actually make things worse if your signals are already strong, by overloading the tuner. Only add one if a plain antenna falls short.
- DIRECTIONAL antennas pull hardest from one direction and need aiming at the towers; MULTI-DIRECTIONAL (omnidirectional) ones catch signals from all around and need no aiming, which is simpler if your channels come from different directions.
- If your local towers are clustered in one direction, a directional antenna aimed that way reaches farther; if they are scattered, an omnidirectional one is the easier choice.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The reception check from earlier often shows the compass direction to the towers, which tells you whether your channels come from one direction or several. If they are all roughly the same way, aiming a directional antenna there gets you the most. If they are all over the place, do not fight it — an omnidirectional antenna saves you the aiming entirely.

8 Scan for Channels on Your TV

Once the antenna is connected and placed, you tell the TV to go looking for channels — this is called a channel scan, and the TV does all the work. You will do this once at the start, and again any time you move the antenna or want to pick up newly-added channels.

1. With the antenna connected, open your TV's Settings or Menu and look for "Channels," "Channel Scan," "Auto Tuning," or "Antenna Setup."
2. Choose "Antenna" (sometimes called "Air" or "Over the Air") rather than "Cable" as the signal type — this matters.
3. Start the scan and wait a few minutes while the TV finds every channel it can receive. It will count up as it goes.
4. When it finishes, flick through the channels it found to see what you have.
5. Not happy with the count? Move the antenna a little, then run the scan again — re-scanning is how you lock in a better position.

TIP

Always choose "Antenna" (not "Cable") when the scan asks, as picking the wrong one is the single most common reason a scan finds nothing. If your scan comes up empty or nearly so, check that first, then check the antenna cable is firmly screwed onto the "Antenna In" socket.

9 Add a Tuner or DVR to Pause and Record

One thing people miss when they leave cable is the ability to pause live TV and record shows for later. The good news is you can have that back with an over-the-air DVR — a small box that connects to your antenna and records free local channels onto its own storage, giving you the pause-and-record convenience without a monthly cable bill.

- A basic setup needs nothing extra: a modern TV has a built-in tuner, so the antenna plugs straight in and you watch live.
- An over-the-air DVR adds recording and pausing: it sits between the antenna and TV, and many also send the channels around your house over your home internet so any TV can watch.
- Some DVRs charge a small fee for their on-screen guide; others are a one-time purchase with a free guide — worth checking before you buy.

GOOD TO KNOW

You do not need a DVR to enjoy free local TV — plenty of people are perfectly happy watching live with just an antenna and the TV's own tuner. Add a DVR only if pausing and recording is something you genuinely used on cable and would miss. It is an "extra," not a requirement, so there is no need to spend on one to get started.

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.

10 Streaming the Rest of What You Watch

An antenna gives you the local channels; streaming fills in everything else — the cable-only channels, the films, and the shows you cannot get over the air. The trick is to add only what you will actually watch, because the whole point of leaving cable is to stop paying for a hundred channels to watch five.

- For cable-only channels you miss, a "live TV" streaming service carries many of them over the internet, for a monthly fee — the closest thing to cable without the cable.
- For films and shows on demand, the familiar on-demand services (the big-name streaming apps) each carry their own libraries; pick one or two, not all of them.
- Many services let you start and stop month to month with no contract, so you can try one, then cancel if you do not use it.
- You will need reasonably steady home internet for streaming to look good — the antenna part does not need internet at all.

TIP

Write down the handful of cable channels and shows you would actually miss, then look only for those. It is easy to re-create your old cable bill by stacking up streaming services — the saving comes from being honest about the short list you truly watch, and leaving the rest.

11 Putting Antenna and Streaming Together

The everyday reality of this setup is simpler than it sounds: you switch between the antenna for live local channels and your streaming apps for everything else, both on the same TV. A few minutes of thought about how you switch between them makes it effortless for everyone in the house.

1. The antenna channels live on your TV's own "Antenna" or "Live TV" input — the same place the channel scan put them.
2. Streaming lives in the apps on your TV (or on a small streaming stick plugged into it) — a button or input away.
3. Learn the one button that switches between the two (often "Input," "Source," or a "Live TV" button on the remote).
4. If switching feels clumsy, a streaming device with a good remote can tuck both the live channels and the apps under one simple menu.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The one skill to master is switching between the live antenna channels and the streaming apps, because they are two separate worlds on the same screen. Once that one button is familiar, the setup feels completely natural — and a simple written note by the remote ("Live TV button for local channels") makes it easy for anyone to use.

12 When Channels Are Weak or Missing

If some channels come in perfectly while others are patchy, break up, or do not appear at all, that is almost always about signal strength and antenna position rather than anything being broken. A short, calm checklist clears up most of it.

1. Re-scan after moving the antenna higher, or to a different window, or to the side of the house facing the towers.
2. Check every cable connection is screwed on firmly — a loose antenna cable causes break-up and drop-outs.

3. If far-away channels are the ones missing, consider an amplified antenna, or stepping up to an attic or outdoor antenna.
4. If a strong local channel suddenly vanishes, re-run the channel scan — stations occasionally change their signal and a fresh scan finds them again.

WATCH OUT

Weather and the seasons genuinely affect over-the-air reception — heavy storms can briefly break up a channel, and bare winter trees sometimes let in a signal that summer leaves block. A channel that comes and goes with the weather is normal physics, not a fault. If a channel you rely on is permanently weak, that is the sign to improve the antenna rather than keep re-scanning.

13 Set It Up So the Whole Household Can Use It

The final step is making the new setup as easy as the old cable was, so nobody feels lost when the familiar cable box is gone. A little labelling and a short written note turn it into something anyone can work.

- Write a simple card: which button shows the live local channels, and which shows the streaming apps.
- List the few streaming apps you kept and what is on each, so nobody hunts for a show in the wrong place.
- Keep the antenna in its best-scanned spot and note not to move it (a knocked antenna is a common "the channels disappeared" cause).
- Save a note of how to re-run the channel scan, in case channels ever need refreshing.

TIP

The biggest hurdle in dropping cable is rarely the technology — it is the new setup feeling unfamiliar for a week or two. A clear card by the remote carries everyone over that hump, and after a fortnight the antenna-plus-streaming routine feels as natural as cable ever did, with a smaller bill to show for it.

14 When to Call Bill

Dropping cable while keeping your locals is very achievable, and this guide is written so you can do each piece at your own pace. But choosing the right antenna, finding its best spot, and weaving the live channels together with just the right streaming can be a lot to juggle at once — and a little expert help turns a weekend project into an afternoon, with every channel you are owed actually coming in.

I come to you here in Portage County, check exactly what your address can receive, fit and aim the right antenna for your home, scan everything in, set up only the streaming you will truly use, and leave the whole thing labelled so the household takes to it in a day — no monthly cable bill, and nothing you watch lost. With 30+ years of professional experience, I have set up more of these than I can count, and no question is too small to ask.

- You are not sure which antenna your address needs, or where to put it.
- Some channels come in and others stubbornly will not, and you cannot work out why.
- You want help choosing the smallest set of streaming services that still covers what you watch.
- You would like the whole thing wired up, scanned, and labelled so the household can use it with confidence.
- You would simply rather have it done right, once, by someone you trust.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy as you set up. Antenna for free locals, streaming for the rest.

I want to...	Do this...
See what I can get free	Check the FCC DTV reception maps for your full address
Pick the right antenna	Strong signals = indoor; patchy = attic; far/weak = outdoor
Place an indoor antenna	High, near a window, facing the towers — then re-scan to improve
Find my channels	TV Menu Channel Scan choose "Antenna" (not Cable)
Pause and record	Add an over-the-air DVR between the antenna and TV (optional)
Replace cable channels	Add only the streaming services for shows you truly watch
Fix a weak channel	Move the antenna and re-scan; check the cable is screwed on tight
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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