BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

An Extended Guide · No. 1289

Generator Maintenance by Fuel Type: Keeping It Ready

Simple habits, fewer no-starts

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

! Before you begin — a quick safety note.
This guide covers work involving fuel and engine exhaust, which can cause serious injury, fire, or property damage if something goes wrong. It's here for general information only, not professional advice. If you're not completely comfortable — or if your local codes require a licensed pro — please stop and hire a qualified generator installer. Turn off the power at the breaker before any electrical step. Never work on gas lines yourself; if you smell gas, leave right away and call your gas company or 911. There's no shame in calling a pro — that's often the smart, safe choice. You follow this guide at your own risk. — Bill

A Note From Bill

Here's a pattern I see over and over: someone buys a solid generator, and it sits untouched for a year until the exact week they need it — and that's when it won't start.

This guide is the fix for that pattern. None of it is difficult. It's a short list of habits, done consistently, that's the difference between a generator that starts on the first pull and one that lets you down.

What you'll get out of this guide

- The handful of habits that matter most, in plain language
- How oil, filters, and the monthly run-time keep an engine happy
- Why gasoline needs more attention than propane or natural gas
- Battery care for electric-start models
- How the stakes shift a little for town homes and rural, well-water homes

★ An easy yearly favor to yourself
Once a year, I'm glad to come run through all of this for you — oil, filter, battery, the works. It's one of my favorite kinds of visit, because it's pure prevention. (330) 200-8042.

The Whole Routine in One Page

If you read only one page today, make it this one.

- ❑ Change the oil early on a new generator (check your manual), then roughly every 100 hours or 6 months after that.
- ❑ Run it about 30 minutes under a little load once a month — this alone prevents most no-start calls.
- ❑ Check the air filter and spark plug now and then, per your manual.
- ❑ If you run gasoline, use a stabilizer and don't let it sit for months — it gums up the works.
- ❑ Propane and natural gas burn cleaner and need far less fuel-system attention, but still deserve the same monthly run.

> **✔ Little and often beats a lot, rarely**
> Five minutes a month is a far better habit than a big once-a-year scramble. This guide is built around that idea.

Why a Little Habit Beats a Big Once-a-Year Push

Generator maintenance isn't complicated, but it does reward consistency over intensity.

An engine that sits completely still for months develops problems that one that runs occasionally simply doesn't — fuel breaks down, seals dry out, batteries drain. The fix isn't a heroic annual overhaul. It's a few small, regular habits.

- A generator that runs monthly rarely surprises you.
- A generator that only runs during outages is the one that lets people down.
- None of these habits take more than a few minutes at a time.

> **✔ Put it on the calendar**
> The single best thing you can do is pick a day each month for the exercise run and treat it like any other recurring reminder.

Oil: The Cheapest Insurance There Is

If you do nothing else on this list, keep the oil clean — it protects everything else inside the engine.

- Most manufacturers call for an early **break-in oil change** after just the first several hours on a new generator — check your manual for the exact interval.
- After that, a regular change roughly every **100 hours or 6 months**, whichever comes first, is a typical schedule — again, your manual is the final word.
- Check the oil level before every use, not just at change time.
- Dark, gritty oil is a sign it's overdue — clean oil should look close to its original color.

> **✔ Keep it simple**
> Write the date of your last oil change somewhere you'll actually see it — the cheat sheet at the back of this guide, or a sticker on the generator itself.

Air Filter & Spark Plug: Quick, Easy Checks

These two small parts have an outsized effect on whether a generator starts easily and runs smoothly.

- A dirty **air filter** starves the engine of clean air and makes starting harder — check and clean or replace it per your manual's schedule.
- A worn or fouled **spark plug** is one of the most common reasons for a rough-running or hard-starting engine.
- Both are inexpensive, simple parts to check yourself, and your manual will show you exactly where to find them.
- If you're not comfortable checking these yourself, it's a quick job to hand off.

> **✔ A five-minute look, twice a year**
> Fold these two checks into a spring and fall look-over, and they'll rarely surprise you.

The Single Best Habit: Running It Monthly

If this guide has one habit to underline twice, it's this one.

Run the generator outdoors, in its safe spot, for about 30 minutes with a little bit of load plugged in — a lamp, a fan, something modest. This keeps fuel moving instead of sitting still, keeps internal seals and gaskets lubricated, and on electric-start models, keeps the battery charged.

- A little load is important — running it completely unloaded for long stretches isn't as good a workout for the engine.
- Pick a day each month so it becomes routine rather than something you have to remember to remember.
- This single habit prevents more no-start calls than anything else on this list.

> **! Outdoors, every time — even for a test run**
> The monthly exercise run needs the exact same carbon-monoxide precautions as running it in a real outage: outdoors only, 20+ feet from the house.

Keeping the Battery Ready on Electric-Start Models

A dead battery is one of the most avoidable reasons an electric-start generator won't fire up.

- Keep battery terminals clean and free of corrosion — a quick wipe now and then is usually enough.
- If the generator sits unused for long stretches, a trickle maintainer keeps the battery topped off without overcharging it.
- The monthly exercise run itself helps keep the battery charged, which is one more reason to stick with that habit.
- Most electric-start models still have a pull-cord backup — good to know, but far more convenient not to need it.

> **✔ Check it before storm season**
> A quick battery check each fall, before winter storms roll in, is a small habit that pays off at exactly the right moment.

Why Gasoline Causes More Trouble Than the Other Fuels

If you run your generator on gasoline, this is the page that explains most of the maintenance headaches you'll ever have.

Gasoline is chemically less stable than propane or natural gas. Left sitting for months, it starts to break down, and the residue it leaves behind — a sticky gum or varnish — can clog the tiny passages inside a carburetor. That's one of the single most common reasons a generator won't start.

- Ethanol-blended gasoline can start degrading even faster, sometimes within just a month or two.
- A gummed-up carburetor often means a repair, not just a quick fix.
- The good news: this is almost entirely preventable with a couple of easy habits.

> **! The classic no-start story**
> Nine times out of ten, a generator that “just won't start” after sitting all summer has stale gasoline to blame, not a mechanical failure.

The Habits That Prevent Stale Gasoline

A few consistent habits keep gasoline from ever becoming the problem.

- Add a **fuel stabilizer** to gasoline you plan to store — it slows the breakdown considerably.
- Keep ethanol content at **10% or less**, and never use E85 in a generator — it's not designed for that fuel.
- Buy gasoline in amounts you'll actually use within a few months rather than stockpiling a large supply.
- Rotate any stored gasoline into your car periodically and replace it with fresh fuel.

> **✔ Stabilizer is cheap; a gummed carburetor isn't**
> A bottle of stabilizer costs a few dollars. A carburetor cleaning or rebuild costs a lot more — an easy trade.

Run It Dry, or Drain It — Pick One

If you're putting a gasoline-fueled generator away for a while, there are two sound approaches. Either works — just don't skip both.

- **Run it dry:** let the generator run until it uses up the gasoline in the carburetor and stalls out on its own, leaving little residue behind to gum up.
- **Drain it:** remove the remaining gasoline from the tank and carburetor before long-term storage.
- Either approach, paired with a stabilizer in any fuel you do leave in, meaningfully lowers the odds of a stale-fuel no-start.
- Propane and natural gas sidestep this entirely — there's no fuel sitting in the system to go stale.

> **✔ This is where propane and NG really shine**
> If stale-fuel maintenance sounds like a hassle, it's one more point in favor of propane or natural gas as your everyday fuel.

Why Propane and Natural Gas Ask Less of You

This is the flip side of the gasoline story — and it's a genuinely nice perk of running on gas fuels.

- Propane and natural gas both burn cleaner than gasoline, leaving far less residue behind in the fuel system.
- Neither fuel goes stale in storage, so there's no stabilizer, no rotation, no “use it or lose it” pressure.
- Fuel-system-related no-starts are far less common on propane or natural gas than on gasoline.
- This is one reason so many households lean on propane as their everyday, go-to fuel.

> **★ My honest read, maintenance-wise**
> If low-maintenance is what you're after, propane or natural gas is genuinely the easier road. Gasoline is still handy to have, just needs a bit more tending.

What Propane & Natural Gas Still Need From You

Clean-burning doesn't mean maintenance-free. A few things still deserve regular attention.

- Check **hoses and connections** for wear or damage periodically — the soapy-water leak test is quick and effective.
- Make sure the **regulator** is functioning properly; an aging or damaged regulator can affect performance.
- Oil changes, the air filter, the spark plug, and the monthly exercise run all still apply — the engine itself doesn't care which fuel it's burning.
- There's a dedicated guide in this series on safe propane and natural-gas handling, including the full leak-check routine.

> **✔ Less fuel worry, same engine care**
> Think of it this way: propane and natural gas take one whole category of worry off your plate, but the engine underneath still wants its oil and filter.

Keeping a Town Generator Ready

A generator in town or the suburbs often goes the longest stretches between real use — which makes the monthly habit even more important, not less.

- **Shorter, less frequent outages** mean a town generator can sit for a year or more between real tests — the monthly run is what keeps that from being a bad surprise.
- **Storage space is tighter.** A generator stored in a garage or shed still needs its fuel handled with the same care — gasoline stabilized, propane cylinders outdoors.
- **Pick a considerate time for the monthly run** — a weekend late morning is usually more neighbor-friendly than early on a Sunday.
- **If you rarely use yours**, that's exactly the profile most likely to have stale gasoline as the culprit when it finally won't start.

> ✔ **The generator that's used least needs the habit most**
> Ironically, a town generator that rarely gets a real workout benefits the most from the monthly exercise run.

Keeping a Rural, Well-Pump Generator Ready

When a generator's job includes keeping your well pump running, “it usually starts” isn't good enough — this is where maintenance stops being optional.

- **No water without it.** If the generator is what keeps your well pump running in an outage, a maintenance lapse doesn't just mean an inconvenience — it means no water at all.
- **Longer outages mean more running hours.** A well-maintained generator that runs reliably for days is a very different thing from one that limps through a couple of hours before something goes wrong.
- **Test it under the load that matters.** During your monthly run, if you can safely include the well pump in that test load occasionally, you'll know the whole system — not just the generator — is ready.
- **Propane's clean-burning edge matters more here**, since a rural generator run on propane is less likely to develop a fuel-system problem right when you need it most.

I'd rather you find a maintenance gap on a calm Tuesday during a test run than discover it three days into an ice storm with no water in the house.

> **★ This is worth doing right**
> For well-pump households, I treat the yearly check-up as non-negotiable. Water is the thing you miss first — let's make sure the generator never lets you down when it matters.

A Simple Spring and Fall Check-Up

Twice a year is a good rhythm for a slightly deeper look, on top of the monthly run.

- ❑ Check the oil level and color; change it if it's due.
- ❑ Check and clean or replace the air filter.
- ❑ Look over the spark plug.
- ❑ Check the battery terminals and charge, on electric-start models.
- ❑ Look over fuel lines, hoses, and connections for wear or damage.
- ❑ Confirm your CO alarms are still working while you're at it.

> **✔ Spring and fall, easy to remember**
> Tying this to a season — say, when you change your clocks — makes it much easier to remember than an arbitrary date.

A Few Cold-Weather Maintenance Notes

Ohio winters add a couple of small wrinkles to the usual routine.

- Battery capacity drops in cold weather — a battery that was fine in October can struggle in January, so a fall check matters.
- Propane vaporizes more slowly in deep cold, which is a fuel-delivery issue rather than a maintenance one — there's a dedicated guide in this series on cold-weather propane.
- Keep the generator's air intake and exhaust clear of snow buildup so it can run the way it's meant to.
- Fresh, stabilized gasoline starts more reliably in the cold than an old, sitting tank.

> **✔ Do the fall check-up before the first cold snap**
> A battery or fuel problem is much easier to catch on a mild fall afternoon than to discover during the season's first ice storm.

Signs Worth Paying Attention To

A generator usually gives a little warning before it fails outright — worth knowing what to watch for.

- Harder-than-usual starting, or needing several pulls where one used to do it.
- Rough, uneven running instead of a steady hum.
- Unusual smoke color from the exhaust, rather than the normal light haze.
- A noticeably different smell — beyond ordinary exhaust — while it's running.

None of these need to be diagnosed on the spot. They're simply signs it's worth a closer look — your own, or a professional's — before you're relying on it during an actual outage.

> **✔ Catch it during a test run, not a storm**
> This is one more reason the monthly exercise run matters: it's your early-warning system for exactly these signs.

A Simple Log Is Worth More Than Memory

You don't need anything fancy — just somewhere to jot down a few dates.

- Date of the last oil change, and the hour count if your model tracks it.
- Date of the last monthly exercise run.
- Any fuel added, especially if you're rotating gasoline.
- Anything that seemed off, even minor, so a pattern is easier to spot later.

A small notebook kept near the generator, or a note on your phone, is more than enough. The point isn't precision — it's simply not having to rely on memory for “when did I last...”

> **✔ The cheat sheet doubles as a log**
> Many customers just write dates in the margin of this guide's cheat sheet page. Whatever's easiest for you to actually keep up with is the right system.

Staying Safe While You Maintain It

Maintenance itself comes with a couple of safety habits worth folding into the routine.

- Always do maintenance and the monthly exercise run **outdoors**, in the same safe spot you'd use during an outage — the CO rules don't pause for a test run.
- Let a hot engine **cool completely** before refueling, checking oil, or doing any other hands-on work.
- Work away from any open flame or spark source when handling gasoline or checking propane connections.
- Keep the area around the generator clear and well-lit while you're working on it.

> **! A quick check-up is still a running engine**
> It's easy to feel casual during routine maintenance since nothing's an emergency. The exhaust is exactly as dangerous as it is during a real outage — treat it that way.

When to Give Me a Call

Plenty of this you can absolutely do yourself. Some of it is easier to hand off, and I'm always glad to help.

- An annual check-up: oil change, filter and plug check, battery test, the works.
- Diagnosing a hard-starting or rough-running generator before it becomes a bigger repair.
- Setting up a simple maintenance log and schedule that fits your household.
- A pre-storm-season once-over, timed before winter or severe weather arrives.
- Any repair that's past simple filter-and-plug territory.

I come to you, here in Portage County and nearby, and I'll walk through exactly what I'm checking and why — no mystery, no upsell.

> **★ Bill's Home Tech**
> Call or text (330) 200-8042. Tech Made Simple, Service Made Personal. Every visit is $99 flat and 30-day come-back-free — if you're not happy, I'll make it right.

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Dog-ear this page, or jot your own dates right in the margin.

I want to...	Remember this
Change the oil	Early break-in change, then about every 100 hours or 6 months
Keep it ready	Run it ~30 minutes under a little load, once a month
Avoid a gasoline no-start	Stabilizer, rotate it, run dry or drain for storage
Enjoy propane/NG's edge	Cleaner burning, no stale fuel — but same engine care applies
Care for the battery	Clean terminals; a trickle maintainer if it sits unused
Catch problems early	Watch for hard starting, rough running, or unusual smoke
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

Words People Use

A few maintenance-related terms in plain language.

Q: Break-in oil change
The early oil change most manufacturers call for after just the first several hours on a new engine.

Q: Exercise run
Running a generator briefly under a little load on a regular schedule to keep it ready, not just during outages.

Q: Gum / varnish
The sticky residue aging gasoline can leave inside a carburetor, a common cause of hard starting.

Q: Fuel stabilizer
An additive that slows how quickly stored gasoline breaks down.

Q: Trickle maintainer
A small charger that keeps a battery topped off during long periods of storage without overcharging it.

Q: Fuel-system upkeep
The maintenance a carburetor and fuel lines need, especially on gasoline — far less on propane or natural gas.

Keeping It Ready, Step by Step

Four habits, repeated on a simple schedule

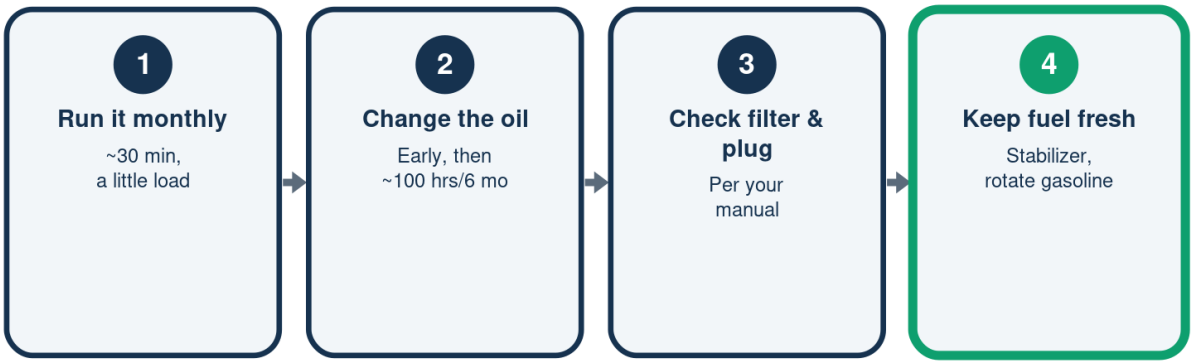


Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Maintenance by Fuel

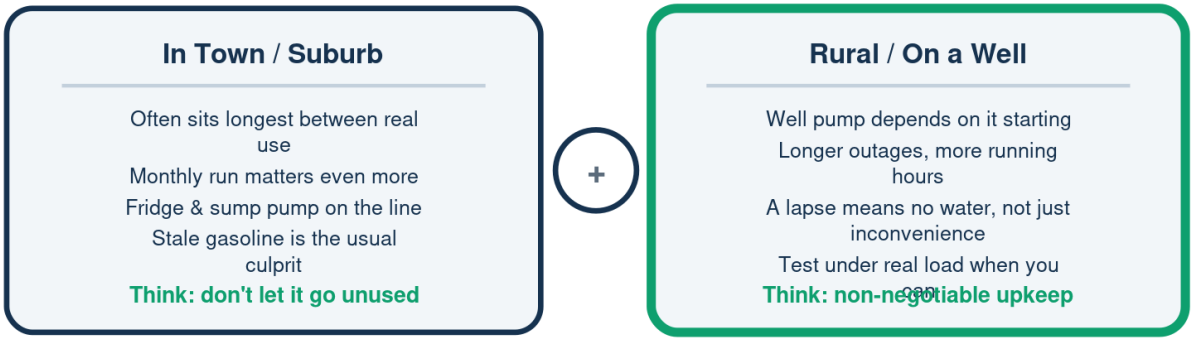
The engine care is the same; the fuel care is not

	Gasoline	Propane	Natural Gas
Goes stale?	Yes, in months	No	No
Fuel-system risk	Gum & varnish	Low	Lowest
Storage habit	Stabilizer, rotate	Just store outdoors	Nothing to store
Engine care needed	Same as any fuel	Same as any fuel	Same as any fuel

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Maintenance Stakes: Town vs. Country

Same habits, different consequences if skipped

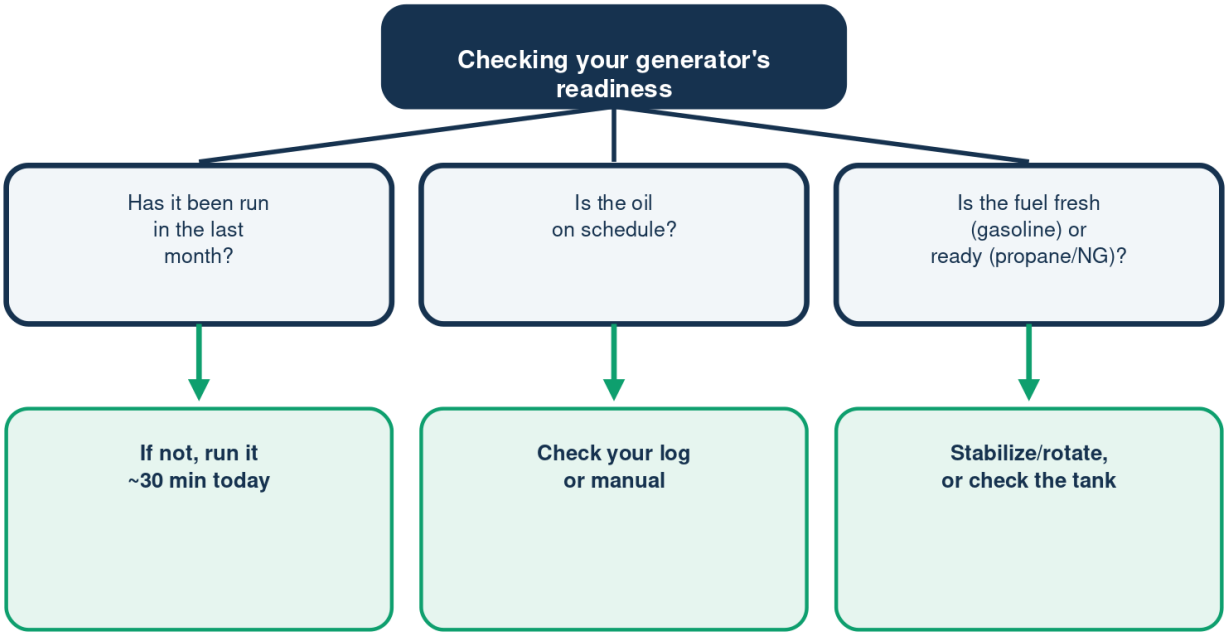


The habits are the same - the stakes are not

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Is It Ready for the Next Outage?

Three quick checks worth doing today



Do the test run outdoors, 20+ feet from the house, same as any other start-up.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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.

BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com
Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM