



An Extended Guide · No. 1618

How Much Fuel to Keep and How to Rotate It

Enough to be ready,
fresh enough to work

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! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. A big stockpile of fuel is also a bigger fire load in your garage, so 'enough and fresh' is safer than 'as much as possible.'

Let's figure out how much fuel is right

How much fuel should you keep on hand? Enough to get through the outages you actually see, kept fresh so it works when you need it — and not so much that it becomes a hazard sitting in the corner. This guide helps you find that balance.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. The most common fuel mistake I see isn't storing too little — it's storing a lot and then forgetting about it until it's gone stale and won't start the engine.

So we'll talk about two things together: a sensible amount to keep, and a simple rotation habit that keeps that amount fresh without becoming a chore you dread.

★ I'll help you right-size it

Every home is a little different — how long your outages run, how far you are from a station, what you're powering. Tell me yours and I'll help you land on a number that fits. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll have enough fuel and it'll be fresh.

- ❑ Plan for the outage you actually expect, plus a modest reserve — not a worst-case hoard.
- ❑ Little and fresh beats a lot and forgotten, every time.
- ❑ Date every container, and use the oldest fuel first.
- ❑ Rotate stored gasoline by running it through the car or mower and refilling with fresh.
- ❑ Propane doesn't need rotating like gasoline does — but the tank still needs checking.
- ❑ Check your local fire code before storing more than a couple of standard containers.

✓ The habit is the whole secret

The amount matters far less than the habit. A modest supply you actually rotate will serve you better than a big one you never touch.

How much is actually enough?

More isn't automatically safer — and it's often the opposite.

Start from how long your power usually goes out and what you plan to run. A home that loses power for a few hours a couple of times a year has very different needs from a rural place that can be dark for days. Aim for enough to cover your realistic outage, plus a little cushion.

Why not just keep a lot? Because a large stash of gasoline is two problems at once: it's a bigger fire load in your storage space, and it's more fuel than you can rotate before it goes stale. You end up less safe and with fuel that may not even work.

! A stockpile can work against you

The garage full of old gas cans isn't a reserve — it's a hazard and a pile of fuel that probably won't start your engine. Keep an amount you can actually use and refresh.

A calm way to estimate what you need

You don't need exact math — just an honest look at how you'd actually use the generator.

How much fuel you'll burn depends on what you're running and for how long. A generator loafing along powering a fridge and some lights sips fuel; one working hard runs through it faster. Lighter loads stretch every gallon, which is one more reason not to run more than you need at once.

Rather than chase a precise figure, think in terms of days: how many days of outage do you want to be ready for, and could you safely refill during that time? Our guide on runtime and fuel planning digs into the 'how long will it run' side if you want to go deeper.

✓ Cycling loads stretches your fuel

You don't have to run everything at once. Running the fridge for a while, then the furnace, then charging phones, uses less fuel and makes your supply last longer — the load-cycling habit is your friend here.

Why rotation matters for gasoline

To keep fuel fresh, it helps to know why it goes stale in the first place.

Left sitting, gasoline slowly breaks down. Its lighter, more volatile parts evaporate first, and what's left can turn into a sticky residue that gums up an engine's carburetor — the small part with passages barely wider than a hair. That's the number-one reason a generator won't start when you finally need it.

This happens over a matter of months for untreated gasoline. A fuel stabilizer slows it down and buys you more time, but it doesn't stop the clock entirely — which is exactly why a rotation habit matters even with stabilizer in the can.

✓ Stabilizer and rotation work together

Think of stabilizer as widening your window and rotation as making sure you use the fuel inside it. Our fuel stabilizer guide covers the first half; this guide covers the second.

First in, first out: the simple rule

The best rotation system is one that doesn't rely on your memory.

The idea is borrowed from a well-run kitchen: use the oldest first. Pour your oldest stored gasoline into the car or the lawn mower, then refill that container with fresh fuel. The stash stays young, nothing sits long enough to spoil, and you never have to throw good fuel away.

- Date every container the day you fill it.
- When you need gas for the car or mower, take it from the oldest can.
- Refill that can with fresh fuel and a dose of stabilizer.
- Keep the cans in order so the oldest is always the easy one to grab.

★ A habit I can help you set up

On a visit I can help you build a rotation routine that fits how you really live — not an idealized version that never happens. Call (330) 200-8042.

Set a reminder, not just a good intention

Every won't-start call I get for old fuel started as a good intention that slipped.

The single most reliable trick is a recurring reminder every few months — on your phone, your calendar, or the paper one on the fridge. When it pops up, you rotate the oldest can and give the generator a short run. Ten minutes, a few times a year, and your fuel is always ready.

Tie it to something you already remember if you can: the change of seasons, when you set the clocks, or when you swap the smoke-alarm batteries. Piggybacking on an existing habit is how a new one sticks.

✓ Exercise the generator too

Running the generator briefly under some load every so often keeps the engine happy and uses a little fuel, which helps keep your supply moving. It also tells you it'll actually start before the storm, not during it.

Propane plays by different rules

If you store propane, the good news is you can mostly set the rotation worry aside.

Unlike gasoline, propane doesn't go stale — it stores for years without breaking down. That makes it wonderful for a generator that mostly waits between outages. You're not rotating the gas itself; you're just keeping enough full cylinders on hand and making sure the tanks themselves stay in good shape.

The thing propane does need is attention to the tank: cylinders are stamped with a date and eventually need recertification, and they should be checked for damage. Our propane cylinder guide and our propane tank sizes guide cover all of that.

✓ This is why many folks lean on propane

For backup power you hope you'll rarely use, propane's long shelf life is a real comfort — there's no stale fuel to deal with on the one night you need it. A dual-fuel generator lets you keep both.

How much you're allowed to keep

There's a limit to how much fuel you can store at a home, and it's not mine to guess.

Local fire codes set how much gasoline and propane you may keep at a residence, and the figures vary from place to place. Rather than trust a number that might be wrong for your address, ask the people who set the rule — a quick call to your local fire department gets you a clear, correct answer.

This matters most if you're a rural home tempted to keep a large reserve. There's usually a sensible way to store what you need within the rules; the fire department would far rather answer your question now than visit later.

✓ A dedicated guide on the rules

Our guide on fuel storage and your local fire code walks through how to ask and what the limits are usually about — worth a read before you build up a supply.

What to do with fuel that's too old

Even with the best habits, some fuel eventually ages out. Here's the safe way to part with it.

If a can's fuel is older than you're comfortable with, or it smells sour, looks dark or cloudy, or you simply can't remember filling it, don't gamble the engine on it. Set it aside for proper disposal and start fresh.

Never pour old gasoline on the ground, down a drain, or into the trash — it's harmful and, in the case of a drain, genuinely dangerous. Most communities have a household hazardous waste site or collection day that takes it. Our guide on disposing of old fuel safely has the full how-to.

! When in doubt, rotate it out

Trusting questionable fuel to save a trip to the recycling site is a poor trade. A gummed-up carburetor costs far more time and money than fresh fuel ever would.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

How much you keep, and how hard you have to work at rotation, depends a great deal on where you live.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or a close-in suburb, a station is usually reachable even mid-outage, and storage space is often tighter. Both point toward keeping a modest amount — which is the safe, easy side to be on.

- A can or two of gasoline, rotated through the car, covers most short outages.
- A spare propane cylinder or two handles a lot without crowding the garage.
- Shorter outages mean less pressure to keep a big reserve on hand.
- Check any city or neighborhood-association limits on how much you can store and where.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, the nearest open station may be a genuine drive in a widespread outage, and if you're on a well, running out of fuel means running out of water. You'll reasonably keep more — and lean on propane's long shelf life.

- Plan a larger reserve than an in-town home, and rotate the gasoline part just as faithfully.
- Propane shines here, since a generator may sit a full season between outages without the fuel spoiling.
- A larger propane tank or a delivery relationship with a local dealer can make sense for a heavy-propane home.
- Store the larger supply detached from the house and ask the fire department about limits for your property.

★ Let's right-size your fuel plan

Tell me how long your outages typically run and how far you are from an open station, and I'll help you settle on a sensible amount — not too little, not a hazard. Call (330) 200-8042.

If you do keep more, store it well

A larger reserve is fine when it's stored with a little extra care.

The more fuel you keep, the more it matters where and how it lives. A detached shed or barn, away from the house and any heat source, is far better than a corner of an attached garage. Keep cans off the traffic path, out of the sun, and clearly labeled so the rotation stays organized.

Spread the fuel across cans you can each lift, rather than one huge container — it's easier to handle and safer if one ever develops a problem. Our guide on safe gasoline storage and containers covers the can side of this in full.

! More fuel, more distance from ignition

A larger supply raises the stakes if anything sparks nearby. Keep it well clear of the water heater, furnace, workshop, or any flame — and clear of clutter that could feed a fire.

How to tell if stored fuel has aged

A few simple checks before you trust older gasoline.

- **Smell:** fresh gasoline has a sharp, familiar smell; stale gas often smells sour or 'off.'
- **Color:** fresh gas is clear to light amber; darker, cloudy, or with visible bits is a bad sign.
- **Separation:** a distinct layer or film in the can suggests it has broken down.
- **The date:** if it's past your stabilizer's stated window, treat it as due for rotation even if it looks fine.

None of these is worth a guess when an engine is on the line. If a can fails any of them, rotate it out and refill with fresh.

✓ The date settles most arguments

You can second-guess a smell, but the date you wrote on the can doesn't lie. That's why labeling and dating — covered in our containers guide — is the small habit that makes all of this easy.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable habits cause most fuel-supply trouble.

- **Buying a big stockpile** for peace of mind, then never rotating it — so it's neither fresh nor safe.
- **Not dating the cans**, so nobody knows how old the fuel really is.
- **Skipping stabilizer** on fuel meant to sit for months.
- **Waiting for the storm warning** to think about fuel, then finding the stations busy or empty.
- **Trusting old fuel** to save a trip, and paying for it with a no-start.

! The stockpile trap is the big one

Keeping too much fuel feels responsible, but old fuel that won't start the generator is worse than a smaller supply you actually keep fresh — and it's a real fire load besides.

Put it all together: a simple plan

Here's a realistic system that doesn't ask too much of you.

- ❑ Keep enough fuel for your realistic outage plus a modest cushion.
- ❑ Store it in approved, labeled, dated cans — not one giant container.
- ❑ Add stabilizer to gasoline at fill-up.
- ❑ Set a recurring reminder every few months to rotate and run the generator.
- ❑ Use the oldest fuel first, in the car or mower, and refill fresh.
- ❑ Check propane tanks for damage and recertification; the gas itself keeps.

★ I'll help you set this up on a visit

A plan only works if it fits your routine. On a visit I can help you build one you'll actually keep — and make sure your storage spot is a safe one. Call (330) 200-8042.

Topping up before a storm — the right way

When bad weather is coming, a little foresight beats a last-minute scramble.

If you keep your supply rotated, you're already most of the way there when a storm is forecast — you just top up the cans and confirm the generator starts. That calm position is the whole reward for the rotation habit.

What you want to avoid is the panic buy: racing to a crowded station as the storm arrives, or worse, over-buying into an unsafe stockpile in a single afternoon. Our guide on storm and hurricane fuel prep covers how to get ready without hoarding.

✓ Ready beats reactive

The best time to sort out fuel is a quiet week with no storm in sight. Do the work when it's easy, and a storm warning becomes a quick check instead of an emergency.

Questions worth asking

Whether you're asking a dealer, a fire official, or me, these get you real answers.

Q: How much fuel am I actually allowed to store at home?

That's set by your local fire code and varies by area. Call your local fire department for the limit at your address, especially before keeping more than a couple of cans.

Q: How often should I rotate my gasoline?

Use the oldest first and refill fresh whenever you draw fuel; a reminder every few months keeps it moving. Even stabilized fuel is best used well within the stabilizer's stated window.

Q: Do I need to rotate propane like I do gasoline?

No — propane stores for years without going bad. You just keep enough full cylinders and make sure the tanks are sound and not due for recertification.

Q: Where can I get rid of gas that's gone too old?

Most counties have a household hazardous waste site or collection day. Your local waste authority can point you to the nearest one — never the trash, a drain, or the ground.

✓ There's no silly question

Fuel amounts and rules feel fussier than they need to be. Ask until you're confident — getting it right keeps your family safe.

A simple fuel-supply checklist

Walk through this before the next outage, not during it.

- ☐ I'm keeping an amount that fits my outages, not a stockpile.
- ☐ Every can is approved, labeled, and dated.
- ☐ I've added stabilizer to any gasoline meant to sit.
- ☐ I have a recurring reminder to rotate and to run the generator.
- ☐ I know where to take old fuel for proper disposal.
- ☐ I've checked my fire department's limit if I'm storing more than a couple of cans.

✓ Do this on a calm day

Five quiet minutes now saves a scramble later. The night before a storm is the worst time to discover your fuel is old or short.

Keeping the whole supply safe

However much you keep, the safety basics hold — and matter more as the amount grows.

Stored gasoline gives off flammable vapor that's heavier than air and can drift toward a spark or pilot light. The more fuel you keep, the more this matters, so distance from any flame and good ventilation are your foundation.

Keep the storage area uncluttered, know where a suitable fire extinguisher is, and never handle or pour fuel near a flame, a running generator, or a lit cigarette. These habits cost nothing and prevent the worst.

! Amount raises the stakes

A single small can and a garage full of fuel carry very different consequences if something goes wrong. Let the size of your supply guide how carefully you place and protect it.

Common Questions

The 'how much and how fresh' questions I hear most, answered plainly.

Q: How much fuel should I really keep?

Enough for the outage you realistically expect, plus a modest cushion. Little and fresh beats a lot and forgotten — and a big stockpile is a fire load and mostly stale fuel besides.

Q: How long can gasoline sit before I shouldn't trust it?

Untreated, plan on a matter of months before quality drops noticeably. Stabilizer extends that, but it's best used well within the product's stated window. When in doubt, rotate it out.

Q: What's the easiest way to keep fuel fresh?

A recurring reminder plus first-in-first-out: use the oldest can in the car or mower and refill fresh with stabilizer. Tie the reminder to the seasons so it sticks.

Q: Is it worth keeping some propane as well as gas?

For backup that mostly waits, yes — propane stores for years, so there's no stale fuel to worry about. A dual-fuel generator lets you keep both and use whichever is handy.

★ Let's make sure yours is set up right

If you'd like a second set of eyes on how much you keep and how you rotate it, I'm glad to take a look on a visit. Peace of mind is worth a phone call. (330) 200-8042.

How this fits with the rest

Right-sizing and rotating your fuel is one piece of being ready — here's how the pieces connect.

This guide covered how much to keep and how to keep it fresh. For the containers that fuel lives in, see our safe gasoline storage guide; for the additive that widens your window, our stabilizer guide; and for why ethanol-free gas stores better, its own guide.

When you're planning for a specific storm, our storm-prep guide helps you get ready without hoarding, and our runtime and fuel planning guide helps you estimate how long your supply will actually last. Reach for whichever matches your question today.

★ One call covers all of it

You don't have to sort out which guide answers which question. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, describe your setup, and I'll tell you plainly what to keep and how to keep it fresh.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made deciding how much fuel to keep and how to rotate it feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

A Modest Supply vs. a Risky Stockpile

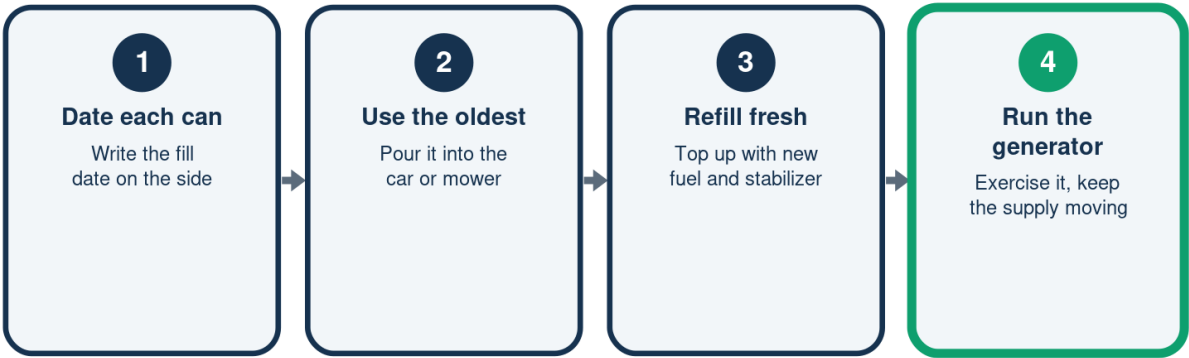
Enough and fresh beats as much as possible

	Modest and fresh	Big and forgotten
Readiness	Starts when needed	Often won't start
Fire load	Small	Large
Rotation	Easy to keep up	Never happens
Waste	Little	Lots of stale gas

The amount matters less than the habit of keeping it fresh.

First In, First Out

The rotation habit, in four easy steps



A reminder every few months makes this almost automatic.

How Gasoline and Propane Keep

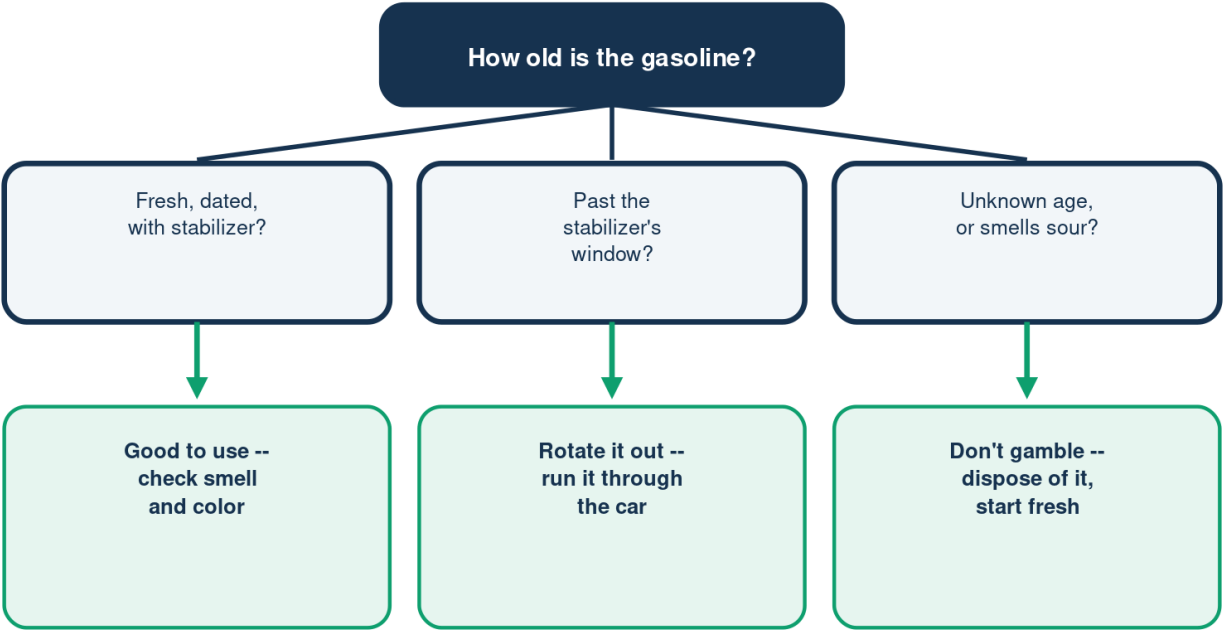
Two fuels, two very different habits

	Gasoline	Propane
Shelf life	Months	Years
Needs stabilizer	Yes	No
Rotate the fuel	Yes, oldest first	Not needed
Watch instead	Freshness	Tank condition

Propane is the low-worry choice for backup that mostly waits.

Use This Fuel, or Replace It?

A quick gut-check before you trust it



Old fuel gumming the carburetor is the #1 reason generators won't start.

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



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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*



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