



An Extended Guide · No. 1635

Long-Term Fuel Storage and Draining for the Off-Season

Putting the machine away
so it starts next time

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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. Draining or stabilizing fuel is still fuel work, so do it with the engine off and cool, outdoors or well ventilated, and nowhere near a flame or pilot light.

Let's put the machine away the right way

Every fall, or after a season of use, generators and other small engines need a proper rest — and how you handle the fuel left inside them decides whether next season starts with a pull of the cord or a fight.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. Folks are often careful about the gas cans in the shed, but the fuel sitting inside the generator itself — in the tank and the carburetor — gets forgotten. That's usually where the trouble starts.

This guide is about that fuel: the machine's own supply, not what's in your storage cans. We'll cover the two honest ways to handle it, where to store the machine, and a few habits that make next season's start-up painless.

★ There's no silly question here

If you're not sure which method suits your generator, or where to store it, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to help with. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, your generator will be ready to start next season.

- ❑ Your generator's own fuel needs attention too, not just the cans in the shed.
- ❑ Two paths work: stabilize the fuel and run it through the carburetor, or run the carburetor dry. Follow your manual for which your model prefers.
- ❑ Turn the fuel valve off either way before it goes into storage.
- ❑ Store the machine somewhere cool, dry, ventilated, and covered — away from living space and anything that could spark or flame.
- ❑ Keep it off bare, damp concrete if you can, and tend the battery on an electric-start unit.
- ❑ Propane is simpler: just disconnect the cylinder and store it outdoors, upright.

✓ This is about the machine, not the cans

Our guide on how much fuel to keep and how to rotate it covers your stored cans. This one is about the fuel sitting inside the generator itself.

Why the machine's own fuel gets forgotten

It's an easy blind spot, and an understandable one.

Most fuel advice focuses on the gas cans in the shed — dating them, rotating them, keeping them fresh. All of that matters. But there's another supply of fuel that doesn't live in a can: whatever is already sitting in the generator's tank and carburetor when you put it away for the season.

That fuel ages the same way canned fuel does, but it's easy to overlook because it's out of sight inside the machine. Left untreated, it's exactly what causes the gummed-up carburetor and no-start engine so many people run into each fall.

! Out of sight, not out of mind

The fuel inside the machine matters just as much as what's in your cans. Skipping this step is one of the most common reasons a stored generator won't start.

Two honest paths, and no single right answer

When it comes to the fuel already in the machine, there are two sensible ways to handle it before a long rest.

The first is to stabilize the fuel that's in the tank and then run the engine for a few minutes so that treated fuel works its way through to the carburetor as well, not just the tank. The second is to run the carburetor dry: shut the fuel valve and let the engine run until it stalls out on its own, leaving the carburetor essentially empty of fuel.

Neither path is universally 'better' — manufacturers differ on which they recommend for a given engine, and that's genuinely the right place to get your answer.

✓ We'll walk through both

The next two pages cover each path in plain terms, so you know what you're actually doing either way.

Path one: stabilize and run it through

This path keeps fuel in the machine, but treats it so it holds up through the rest.

- Add fuel stabilizer to the fuel in the tank, at the amount the product's instructions call for.
- Run the engine for a few minutes afterward so the treated fuel moves through the fuel line and into the carburetor, not just the tank.
- Let the engine cool fully, then turn the fuel valve off before you put the machine away.
- This path suits engines whose manufacturer prefers fuel left in the system rather than run dry.

✓ Our stabilizer guide has the details

For what a stabilizer actually is and how to use it well, see our fuel stabilizer guide — this page just covers how it fits into putting the machine away.

Path two: run the carburetor dry

This path empties the carburetor instead of treating what's left inside it.

- With the engine running, shut off the fuel valve (the petcock) so no more fuel can reach the carburetor.
- Let the engine keep running on whatever fuel is already in the carburetor until it uses it up and stalls out on its own.
- Once it stalls, the carburetor is essentially empty, with little fuel left behind to age or gum things up.
- This path suits engines whose manufacturer prefers an empty carburetor over stabilized fuel for storage.

✓ Let it stall on its own

Don't force the engine off partway through — letting it run itself out of fuel is what actually empties the carburetor.

Which path is right for your machine?

This is one place where I'll point you to a specific source rather than give you a general rule.

Your owner's manual will say which storage method the manufacturer recommends for your particular engine, and it's worth the few minutes to find that section before the season's last run. Manufacturers design their fuel systems differently, and following their guidance is the safest bet.

If you've misplaced the manual, the manufacturer's website or customer support line can usually point you to the right method for your model.

✓ Either path beats doing nothing

If you truly can't find guidance for your model, either stabilizing and running it through or running the carburetor dry beats leaving untreated fuel to sit all season.

Turn the fuel valve off, either way

Whichever path you choose, this one habit applies to both.

Once the engine has cooled and you've handled the fuel one of the two ways above, make sure the fuel valve is off before the machine goes into storage. This keeps any remaining fuel from continuing to feed the carburetor while the engine sits untouched for weeks or months.

It's a small step, but it's one of the easiest things to forget in the rush of putting equipment away before winter or after a busy season.

✓ A habit worth pairing

Our guide on caring for fuel lines and the carburetor covers this same fuel valve habit for everyday use, not just storage — the two work together.

Choosing a storage spot

Where the machine spends its rest matters almost as much as how you handled the fuel.

- Cool and dry beats hot and humid — extreme heat and moisture are both hard on fuel, seals, and metal parts.
- Ventilated matters even for a machine that's off, since any lingering fuel vapor needs somewhere to go.
- Covered protects it from dust and moisture, but choose a breathable cover rather than sealing it in plastic.
- Away from living space and away from anything that could spark or flame, the same as you'd store a fuel can.

! The same fire-safety rules still apply

A stored generator still has fuel-system parts and any fuel left in the tank. Keep its storage spot clear of flame and ignition sources, just as you would a gas can.

Off the damp concrete, and keeping the battery happy

Two small details that are easy to overlook when you're just trying to clear space in the garage.

Bare concrete can hold moisture, especially in a basement or an unheated garage, and setting a generator directly on damp concrete for months can invite rust on the frame and hardware. A wood pallet, a mat, or even a couple of boards underneath is a simple, inexpensive fix.

If your generator has an electric start, its battery doesn't like being ignored all season either. A battery left fully discharged over a long storage period can be damaged or fail to hold a charge. Check your manual for how the manufacturer recommends maintaining it during storage.

✓ Small steps, real payoff

Neither of these takes much effort, and both are the kind of small thing that makes the difference between a smooth start-up and a frustrating one next season.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

How long your generator sits idle, and how it's stored, looks a little different depending on where you live.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or a close-in suburb, a generator is more likely to see occasional use year-round rather than sitting untouched for a full season, and storage space is often tighter.

- Shorter stretches of storage still deserve the fuel valve and stabilize-or-dry decision — even a few weeks of forgotten fuel can start the gumming-up process.
- An attached garage is common storage; keep the same distance from the water heater, furnace, or any pilot light that you would for a fuel can.
- Tighter space often means a corner or a shelf — a breathable cover keeps dust off without needing a lot of room.
- If you use the generator occasionally through the year, treat each period between uses like a small-scale version of the same storage routine.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, especially at a seasonal cabin or a property used mainly for weather emergencies, a generator can sit for many months, sometimes a full season, between starts.

- Long, unattended stretches make the stabilize-or-dry decision more important, not less — there's more time for untreated fuel to cause trouble.
- A barn or detached outbuilding is often the storage spot; the same cool, dry, ventilated, away-from-ignition rules apply there too.
- If the property sits empty for long periods, a battery tender or a similar manufacturer-recommended approach helps an electric-start unit be ready when you finally need it.
- Longer storage stretches make labeling the machine with the date and method you used (stabilized or run dry) a genuinely useful habit — write it on a tag or a notepad kept nearby.

★ Not sure which path fits your setup?

Tell me how long your generator typically sits between uses, and I'll help you decide between stabilizing and running it dry, and where to store it. Call (330) 200-8042.

If your generator runs on propane, this is simpler

Propane sidesteps most of what this guide covers.

Propane doesn't age or gum up a carburetor the way gasoline does, so there's no stabilize-or-run-dry decision to make for the fuel itself. Storing a propane-fueled generator mostly comes down to the cylinder.

Disconnect the cylinder from the generator and store it outdoors, upright, the same way you would any propane cylinder that's not in use. Our guide on storing propane cylinders safely covers exactly how.

✓ One less thing to worry about

If long-term fuel storage feels like a lot to manage, this is one of the reasons many folks lean on propane for a generator that mostly waits between outages.

How this is different from rotating your fuel cans

It's worth being clear about the line between this guide and our guide on how much fuel to keep and how to rotate it.

That guide is about your stored supply — the cans of gasoline or the propane cylinders sitting in the shed, waiting to refuel the generator. Rotating them, dating them, keeping them fresh — that's the ongoing habit for fuel you haven't used yet.

This guide is about the fuel already inside the machine when you put it away. It's a one-time step you take at the end of a season or a period of use, separate from (but just as important as) rotating your stored cans.

✓ Both matter, together

A freshly rotated supply of fuel doesn't help if the fuel already in the generator gums up the carburetor while it sits. Handle both, and you're covered.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable habits account for most end-of-season fuel trouble.

- **Draining the gas cans** but forgetting the fuel still sitting in the generator's own tank and carburetor.
- **Storing it with fuel in the tank** but no stabilizer and no plan, letting it sit untreated all season.
- **Leaving the fuel valve open** the whole time it's in storage.
- **Setting it directly on damp concrete** for months without anything underneath it.
- **Ignoring the battery** on an electric-start unit until it won't hold a charge next season.

! The forgotten fuel is the big one

Of everything on this list, fuel left untreated inside the machine causes the most no-start calls I get each spring.

A simple end-of-season routine

Here's how the pieces fit together into one calm session, rather than several separate chores.

- ❑ Decide which path your manual recommends: stabilize and run it through, or run the carburetor dry.
- ❑ Handle the fuel that way, then let the engine cool fully.
- ❑ Turn the fuel valve off.
- ❑ Give it a quick wipe-down and check for anything that needs attention before next season (see our fuel-line and carburetor care guide).
- ❑ Move it to its storage spot: cool, dry, ventilated, covered, and off bare damp concrete.
- ❑ Note the date and method you used somewhere you'll actually see it again.

★ I can walk through this with you

On a visit, I'm glad to help you handle this end-of-season routine and make sure your storage spot is a sound one. Call (330) 200-8042.

Waking it up again next season

A little care now makes the start-up next time refreshingly uneventful.

If you stabilized and ran the fuel through, check the fuel's condition and top off as needed, then start the engine as usual. If you ran the carburetor dry, you'll need to turn the fuel valve back on and add fresh fuel before it will start — that's expected, not a problem.

Either way, this is a good moment to glance at the fuel line, the filter, and the cap vent, and to confirm the battery on an electric-start unit still holds a charge. A few minutes of checking beats discovering an issue during an actual outage.

✓ Test it before you need it

Waking the generator up on a calm day, not during a storm warning, is exactly when you want to find out whether everything went smoothly.

Questions worth asking

Whether you're asking the manufacturer, a small-engine shop, or me, these get you real answers.

Q: Does my manual actually specify stabilize versus run-dry?

Many do. Check the storage or off-season section of your owner's manual first; if you can't find guidance, the manufacturer's website or support line can usually help.

Q: How long can I leave the carburetor dry without a problem?

Running it dry is meant to leave it empty for the storage period, so there's no fuel sitting inside to age. It's fine to leave it that way until you're ready to add fresh fuel and start it again.

Q: Do I need to do anything special for a propane generator?

Mostly just disconnect the cylinder and store it outdoors, upright. There's no stabilize-or-dry decision, since propane doesn't age the way gasoline does.

Q: What if I forgot and it's been sitting with old fuel all season?

Check the fuel's condition before trusting it — smell and color are a start. If it looks or smells off, or the engine struggles to start, see our guide on fuel-line and carburetor care and consider a small-engine shop if it doesn't resolve.

✓ There's no silly question

End-of-season steps feel like a lot to remember all at once. Ask until you're confident — that's exactly how next season's start-up goes smoothly.

A simple long-term storage checklist

Walk through this at the end of the season, not the morning after a big storm.

- ☐ I checked my manual for whether it prefers stabilized fuel or a dry carburetor.
- ☐ I handled the fuel that way and let the engine cool fully.
- ☐ The fuel valve is off before it goes into storage.
- ☐ It's stored cool, dry, ventilated, and covered with a breathable cover.
- ☐ It's off bare, damp concrete, and away from living space and any ignition source.
- ☐ I've addressed the battery if it's an electric-start unit.
- ☐ I noted the date and method somewhere I'll see it again.

★ I'll happily walk through it with you

A second set of eyes on your storage routine is a quick, worthwhile visit. Call (330) 200-8042.

A fire-safety reminder for storage day

Handling fuel to put the machine away deserves the same care as handling it any other day.

Whether you're adding stabilizer or letting the carburetor run dry, do it with the engine off or running outdoors in the open, never in a closed garage, and never near a flame, pilot light, or spark. Let the engine cool fully before you touch any fuel-system part.

Once it's in storage, the same rules protect the machine and your home for the whole season: keep it away from any ignition source, and don't store anything flammable piled up against it.

! Off, cool, outdoors, no flame

These four habits cover nearly every step in this guide. When in doubt, slow down and do the fuel work outside, away from anything that could ignite it.

Common Questions

The end-of-season questions I hear most often, answered plainly.

Q: Do I really need to do anything with the fuel already in the generator?

Yes — it ages the same way fuel in a can does, and it's the fuel most likely to be forgotten. Stabilizing and running it through, or running the carburetor dry, are the two honest options.

Q: Which is better: stabilizing or running it dry?

Neither is universally better. Your engine's manufacturer usually has a preference stated in the manual — that's the right place to get your answer for your specific model.

Q: Where should I store my generator for the off-season?

Somewhere cool, dry, ventilated, and covered, away from living space and any flame or ignition source, and off bare damp concrete if you can manage it.

Q: Is this the same as rotating my stored fuel cans?

No — rotating cans is about your ongoing fuel supply. This guide is about the fuel already inside the machine when you put it away for a season. Both matter, and they're separate habits.

★ Still have a question on your mind?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll give you a plain, honest answer — and if it's easier to just show me, I'll come take a look.

How this fits with the rest

Putting the machine away properly is one piece of being ready for next season — here's how the pieces connect.

This guide focused on the fuel already inside the generator and where to store the machine itself. For the additive that makes stabilizing effective, see our fuel stabilizer guide; for the everyday habits that keep the fuel line and carburetor happy, see our guide on caring for fuel lines and the carburetor.

For your ongoing supply of stored fuel — the cans and cylinders waiting in the shed — our guide on how much fuel to keep and how to rotate it is the one to read, and if you run on propane, our propane cylinder storage guide covers the tank side of things.

★ 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's worth doing before you put it away.

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 putting a generator's fuel away for the off-season 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

Two Ways to Put the Fuel Away

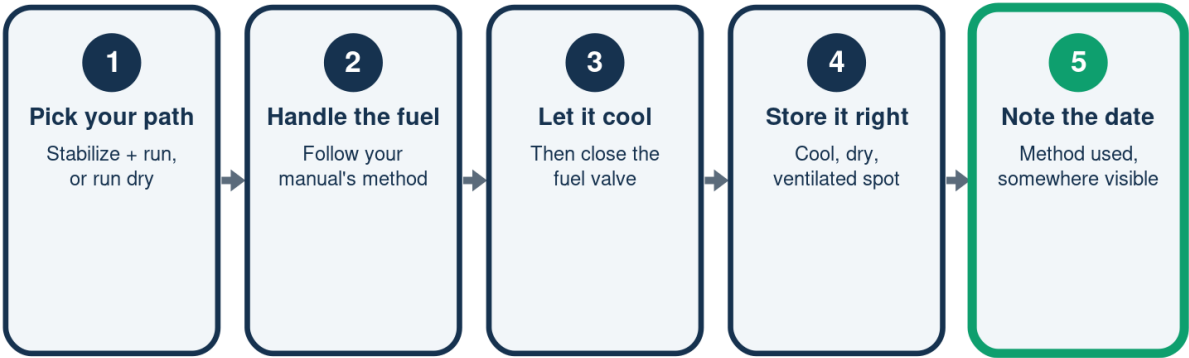
Both work -- follow what your manual prefers

	Stabilize path	Run-dry path
Tank fuel	Treated, left in	Run down, used
Carburetor	Gets treated fuel	Ends up empty
Fuel valve	Off once cooled	Off, then stalls
Leftover fuel	Small, treated	Essentially none

Follow your engine's manual for which path it prefers.

Putting the Generator Away, Step by Step

A calm, one-time routine at the end of each season



A calm, one-time routine at the end of each season.

The Machine's Fuel vs Your Stored Cans

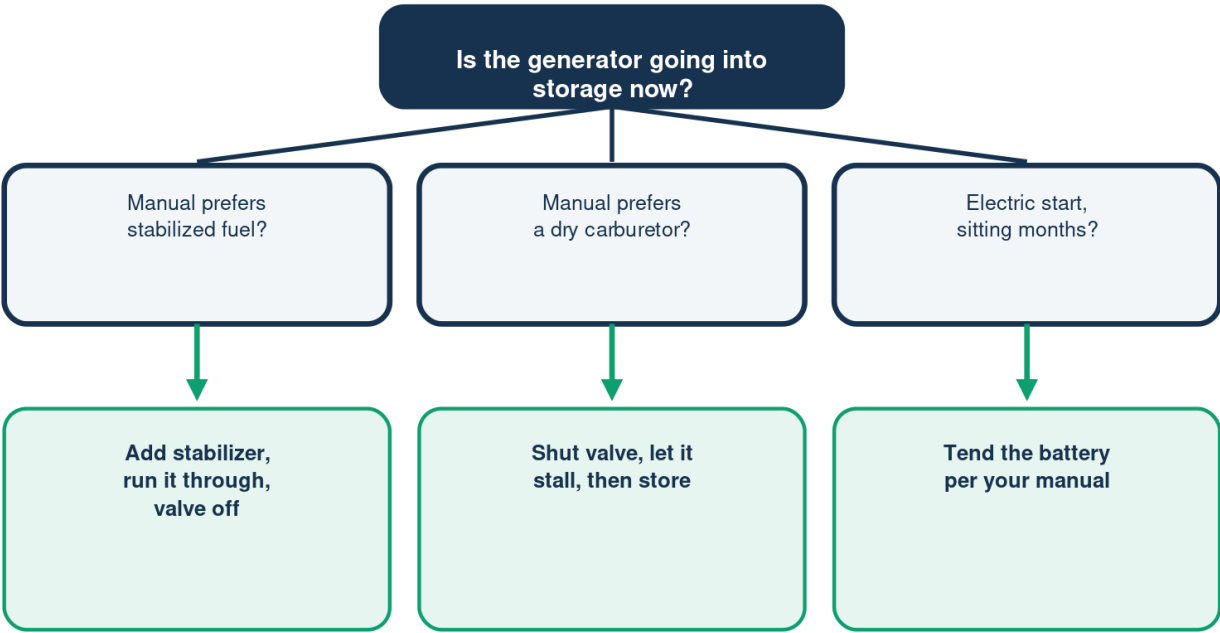
Two habits that both matter, at different times

	Machine's fuel	Stored cans
Lives where	Tank and carburetor	Cans in the shed
Handled when	End of season	All year, ongoing
The habit	Stabilize or run dry	Rotate oldest first
Why it matters	Stops the gum-up	Keeps fuel fresh

Both habits matter -- they just happen on different schedules.

Ready to Store It for the Season?

A quick check before it goes away



Whichever path you take, store it cool, dry, and away from any flame.

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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