



An Extended Guide · No. 1623

Propane Tanks: Sizes, Refills, and Exchanges

Refills, swaps, and
keeping tanks in date

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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 propane tank or cylinder is only as safe as its valve and its date stamp, so knowing when it's due for a look before it's filled again matters just as much as picking the right size.

Let's sort out sizes, refills, and exchanges

Propane comes in more sizes than most people realize, and refilling one is simpler than it looks once you know your options. This guide walks through picking a size, choosing between a refill and an exchange, and keeping your tank in good standing so a dealer will always fill it.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. The propane questions I hear most are the simplest ones — what size do I actually need, and is it better to refill mine or just swap it — so let's answer both.

For the safety side of storing and handling a cylinder, our propane cylinder guide covers that in full. This guide is about the tank itself: sizing it, keeping it filled, and keeping it current.

★ There's no silly question here

Sizes and refill options can feel like a small industry of their own. Tell me what you're powering and how often, and I'll help you sort out what actually makes sense. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll pick the right size and keep it filled without a hitch.

- ❑ Propane cylinders and tanks come in a range of sizes, from a common grill-size cylinder up to larger home tanks — the stamp on the collar tells you exactly what you have.
- ❑ A refill fills the tank you already own; an exchange swaps it for a full one from a cage — each has its trade-offs.
- ❑ Every cylinder is stamped with a date and eventually needs professional recertification before it can be refilled again.
- ❑ Overfilling isn't your job to prevent — a modern cylinder's overfill-protection valve and a trained filler handle that together.
- ❑ A larger home tank usually comes with an ongoing relationship with a propane dealer, not a one-time purchase.
- ❑ When exact sizes, dates, or capacities matter, the stamp on the tank and your dealer have the real answer.

✓ The stamp tells the story

Whatever question you have about a tank — its size, its age, whether it's due for a look — the stamped markings on the collar and your propane dealer have the honest answer, every time.

Propane sizes, in plain terms

You don't need to memorize numbers — just know the general categories and where to find the real answer.

The propane cylinder most people know best is the common grill-size cylinder — the kind you see in cages outside hardware stores and gas stations. It's popular because it's easy to carry, easy to swap, and handles plenty of everyday uses, including many portable generators.

Beyond that, there are larger cylinders and tanks that hold more and are meant to sit in one place rather than travel back and forth — these are common for whole-house backup or heavier propane use. As tanks get larger, they tend to become a fixed, delivered installation rather than something you carry yourself.

✓ Let the stamp and the dealer confirm specifics

Every cylinder and tank is stamped right on the collar with its exact capacity and other details. Rather than guess, read the stamp or ask your propane dealer — they'll match a size to what you're actually powering.

Matching a size to what you're actually doing

The right size depends far more on your setup than on any single rule of thumb.

A single grill-size cylinder is plenty for many portable generators running a modest load for a few hours. If you're running a generator for days at a time, or a larger appliance load, you'll likely want either several cylinders on rotation or a larger tank — our guide on matching the right fuel to your generator and our guide on runtime and fuel planning both help with that math.

- Short outages, modest loads: a cylinder or two often does the job.
- Longer outages, bigger loads: several cylinders, or a larger tank, make more sense.
- Whole-house or standby power: usually a larger, dealer-supplied tank.
- When unsure, your generator's manual and your propane dealer both have useful input.

✓ Bigger isn't automatically better

A tank sized for a whole-house system is overkill for a portable generator that runs a few times a year — and a small cylinder won't keep up with heavy, sustained use. Match the size to the actual job.

Refill or exchange — what's the difference?

Both get you a full cylinder. How you get there is what differs.

A refill means bringing your own cylinder to a station or dealer that fills it on the spot. You pay for the propane you actually receive, and you keep the same cylinder you started with — so you get to know its condition and its history.

An exchange means handing over your empty cylinder and taking a full one from a cage, often at a hardware store or gas station. It's fast and simple, but you don't necessarily get your own cylinder back — you get whichever one happens to be in the cage, in whatever condition and however close to its next recertification it may be.

✓ Neither is 'the right one' for everyone

Refilling and exchanging are both legitimate, common ways to keep propane on hand. Which suits you better usually comes down to convenience versus knowing your own cylinder's history.

Weighing the trade-offs

A quick side-by-side helps this click.

Here's how the two stack up on the things people usually care about most.

	Refill	Exchange
Speed	A bit slower	Very fast
Your cylinder	Stays with you	Swapped away
You pay for	What you use	A flat swap price
Condition known	Yes, it's yours	Not always

★ Tell me your habits and I'll weigh in

If you're not sure which fits how you actually use propane, describe your setup and I'll give you my honest take — I don't sell either option, so there's no thumb on the scale. Call (330) 200-8042.

Recertification: why an older tank needs a checkup

That stamped date on the collar isn't decorative — it's the whole point.

Every propane cylinder is stamped with the date it was manufactured or last recertified. After enough time passes, a cylinder needs to go through professional recertification before it can be refilled again — a trained inspector confirms the tank is still sound.

You don't need to track this date yourself. A reputable refill station or dealer checks the stamp as a matter of course before they'll fill your cylinder, and they'll let you know if yours is due. If it is, they can usually handle the recertification or point you to someone who can.

✓ This is exactly why exchange programs can help

If your own cylinder comes due for recertification, an exchange program is a simple way to walk away with a current, ready-to-use cylinder in the meantime.

Overfilling: not something you need to manage

This is one worry you can set down entirely.

Modern cylinders include an overfill-protection device — a valve built to stop the fill at the correct point automatically. Combined with a trained filler who knows how to work with it, this is exactly why filling belongs at a proper dealer or refill station rather than as a DIY project.

Your part is simple: bring your cylinder to a reputable dealer or station, let them handle the technical side, and trust the safeguard that's already built into the equipment.

! Filling is a professional's job, not a home project

Don't attempt to fill a cylinder yourself from another tank or source. Filling is precise work best left to a trained professional with the right equipment.

Where to refill or exchange a cylinder

You have more options nearby than you might think.

- Many hardware stores, garden centers, and gas stations host an exchange cage out front.
- A dedicated propane dealer will typically refill your own cylinder on the spot.
- Some dealers offer delivery or pickup service for a larger tank or a heavier user.
- If you're not sure who's closest and reputable, ask around locally — it's a common enough service that recommendations are easy to come by.

✓ A reputable dealer is worth finding once

Once you find a propane dealer you trust, stick with them. They'll get to know your setup, and you'll have someone reliable to call for anything from a routine refill to a bigger question.

A larger tank is a relationship, not a purchase

Once you move beyond cylinders you carry yourself, the picture changes a little.

A larger home tank is typically installed in place and refilled by delivery rather than carried to a station. That naturally means an ongoing relationship with a propane dealer — they'll handle delivery scheduling, monitor your usage in many cases, and be your point of contact for anything involving the tank.

Setting up that kind of supply, including the professional work involved in connecting it to your home, is its own topic — our guide on connecting to a home propane supply covers what that process involves.

✓ This is a licensed-pro job to set up

Installing and connecting a larger propane tank is work for a licensed professional. I'm glad to help you think through the decision and line up the right pro — I don't do that installation work myself.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

How you size and refill your propane looks different depending on where you live.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or a close-in suburb, exchange cages and refill counters are usually close by, even during a widespread outage.

- One or two grill-size cylinders on rotation often covers a portable generator comfortably.
- An exchange is convenient when you're already out running errands.
- Check any city or homeowners' association rules about how many cylinders you can keep or where they're visible from the street.
- Less to store means less to think about when it comes to recertification too — fewer cylinders to track.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, a station or dealer may be a real drive, and a widespread outage can mean everyone else needs a refill at the same time.

- Keeping a couple of spare cylinders on rotation gives you a buffer against a busy dealer or a long drive.
- A larger home tank with a delivery relationship can make real sense if you use propane heavily or for long outages.
- Ask a local dealer about their delivery area and how they handle refills during widespread power outages.
- Our home propane supply guide covers what a larger, delivered system looks like if that fits your property.

★ Let's figure out what fits your place

Tell me how you use propane and how far you are from a dealer, and I'll help you land on a sensible size and a refill routine that works for you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Reading what's stamped on your tank

The tank itself is the most honest source of information you have.

Right on the collar of every cylinder, you'll find stamped markings — its capacity, its manufacture date, and the marks left by any recertification. You don't need to be an expert to find these; a dealer can point them out to you in a moment.

If you're ever unsure whether a cylinder is due for recertification, or what size you're actually holding, this stamp — not a guess, and not what the cylinder looks like — is the real answer. When it's not legible, a dealer can tell you what to do next.

✓ When the stamp is hard to read

Weathering can make an old stamp hard to make out. If yours is, a propane dealer can still help — they see this often and know how to proceed.

Getting your cylinder to and from the refill

A quick reminder, since this is a trip most people make sooner or later.

Whether you're headed to a refill counter or an exchange cage, a cylinder should travel upright, secured so it can't roll or tip, and inside a vehicle with some airflow rather than a sealed trunk. Our transporting fuel safely guide covers this in full detail.

- Keep it upright and secured in the vehicle.
- Don't leave it in a hot, closed car longer than the trip itself takes.
- Take the shortest sensible route and head straight there and back.

✓ One short guide, worth a read

If you haven't seen it yet, our transporting fuel safely guide covers cylinders and gas cans both — worth a quick read before your next refill run.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable habits cause most sizing and refill headaches.

- **Buying a tank bigger than the setup needs**, then paying for capacity that never gets used.
- **Assuming an exchanged cylinder is brand new** — it's a swap, not necessarily an upgrade.
- **Letting a cylinder lapse past recertification** and being surprised when a station won't fill it.
- **Trying to judge fullness by shaking or guessing** instead of trusting the filling station's equipment.
- **Not asking the dealer questions** out of feeling like you should already know the answers.

! The recertification surprise is the big one

Nothing derails a fill-up faster than discovering at the counter that your cylinder is out of date. A quick glance at the stamp before you go can save you the trip.

How many tanks can I keep — and who decides?

As with other fuel, the honest answer points you to your local fire authority.

How many propane cylinders or tanks you're allowed to keep at a home, and how large a fixed tank can be, is set by your local fire code and can vary from place to place. Rather than guess, a quick call to your local fire department gets you the real answer for your address.

This matters most if you're weighing a larger fixed tank or planning to keep several cylinders on hand. Our guide on fuel storage and your local fire code walks through how to have that conversation.

✓ Ask before you commit to a size

It's much easier to check the rule before you buy or install a tank than to work around a surprise afterward.

When a station or dealer says no to a fill

It happens, and it's not a hassle — it's the system working.

A dealer may decline to fill a cylinder that's past its recertification date, damaged, or showing rust or corrosion they're not comfortable with. That's not them being difficult; it's exactly the safeguard this whole guide has been describing.

If that happens, ask what your options are — many dealers can recertify a cylinder on the spot or point you toward an exchange instead, so you're not left without propane for long.

! Never work around a declined fill

If a dealer won't fill your cylinder, don't try another spot that might not check as carefully, and never attempt to fill it yourself. Address whatever the concern was first.

Questions worth asking

Whether you're at the counter or asking me, these get you real answers.

Q: What size cylinder or tank do I actually need?

It depends on what you're powering and for how long. A grill-size cylinder suits many portable generators for shorter outages; heavier or longer use often calls for a larger tank. Your generator's manual and a local dealer can both help you land on a size.

Q: Should I refill my own cylinder or just exchange it?

Both are legitimate. Refilling keeps the same cylinder and lets you pay for what you use; exchanging is fast but trades away your specific cylinder. Pick whichever fits how you actually get around.

Q: How do I know if my cylinder needs recertification?

Check the date stamped on the collar, or simply bring it to a dealer — they check this as a matter of course before filling and will let you know if it's due.

Q: Can I overfill a cylinder by accident?

No — modern cylinders include an overfill-protection device, and a trained filler works with it to stop at the right point. That's part of why filling is a job for a dealer, not a DIY project.

✓ There's no silly question

Sizes, refills, and recertification can feel like a lot to track. Ask until you're confident — your dealer and I are both glad to help.

A simple sizing and refill checklist

Walk through this before your next trip to fill up.

- ☐ I know roughly what size cylinder or tank fits what I'm actually powering.
- ☐ I've checked the date stamped on my cylinder's collar.
- ☐ I know whether I'd rather refill my own cylinder or exchange it, and why.
- ☐ I know a reputable local dealer or exchange location.
- ☐ If I'm considering a larger tank, I understand it means a dealer relationship and a licensed-pro installation.
- ☐ I've checked my fire department's rules if I'm keeping several cylinders or a larger tank.

★ I'll help you think it through

If you're weighing sizes or wondering whether a larger tank makes sense for your home, I'm glad to talk it through with you — no sales pitch, just honest advice. (330) 200-8042.

Safety doesn't change with size

Whether you're holding a small cylinder or arranging a larger tank, the fundamentals stay the same.

A bigger tank is not inherently more dangerous than a small one, but it does raise the stakes if something is neglected — a damaged valve, a lapsed recertification, or a bad connection matters just as much on a large tank as a small cylinder, if not more.

Whatever size you land on, keep it stored the way our propane cylinder guide describes, and lean on your dealer's expertise rather than guessing about your tank's condition or fill level.

! When in doubt, ask the dealer

A propane dealer inspects tanks and cylinders all day, every day. If something about yours seems off, their opinion is worth far more than a guess — yours or anyone else's.

Common Questions

The sizing and refill questions I hear most often, answered plainly.

Q: Is a bigger tank always a better value?

Not necessarily. A tank sized well beyond your actual use just ties up money and space. Match the size to what you're really powering, and ask a dealer if you're unsure.

Q: What happens to my old cylinder when I exchange it?

It goes back into the dealer's inspection and refill process — if it's sound and current, it becomes someone else's exchange cylinder. If it's due for recertification, that gets handled before it's filled again.

Q: Can I tell how full a cylinder is just by looking?

Not reliably. Weight is a better clue than appearance, and the filling equipment at a dealer or station is what actually manages the fill level — there's no need to guess.

Q: Do I need a dealer relationship for a single grill-size cylinder?

No — a single cylinder is easy to refill or exchange as needed almost anywhere that offers the service. A dealer relationship becomes more useful as your propane use grows.

★ Still have a question on your mind?

That's what I'm here for. 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 your setup, I'll come take a look.

How this fits with the rest

Sizing and refilling your propane is one piece of the picture — here's how the pieces connect.

This guide focused on sizes, refills, exchanges, and recertification. For the safety side of storing and handling a cylinder day to day, see our propane cylinder guide. For a larger, delivered tank and what that installation involves, our home propane supply guide is the next read.

Cold weather changes how well propane flows from a tank — our guide on propane in the cold covers that in full — and if you're ever moving a cylinder in the car or suspect a leak, our transporting fuel safely guide and our gas-leak guide cover those specifically.

★ 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 size and routine makes sense.

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 sorting out propane tank sizes, refills, and exchanges 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

Portable Cylinder vs. Larger Home Tank

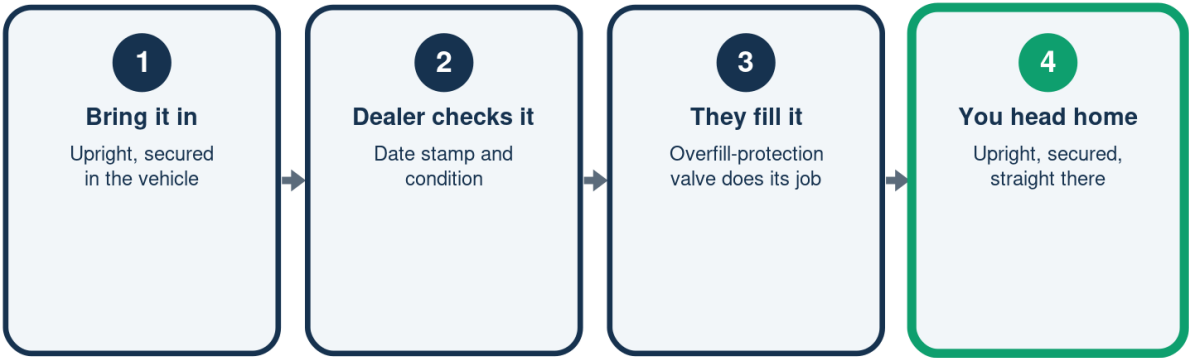
Two very different propane setups

	Portable cylinder	Larger home tank
You carry it	Yes	No, stays put
Filled by	Refill or exchange	Dealer delivery
Best for	Portable generator	Whole-house backup
Relationship	As-needed	Ongoing with dealer

Let a dealer match the exact size to what you're powering.

Refilling a Cylinder, Start to Finish

What actually happens at the counter



A trained filler and a built-in safeguard work together.

Refill vs. Exchange

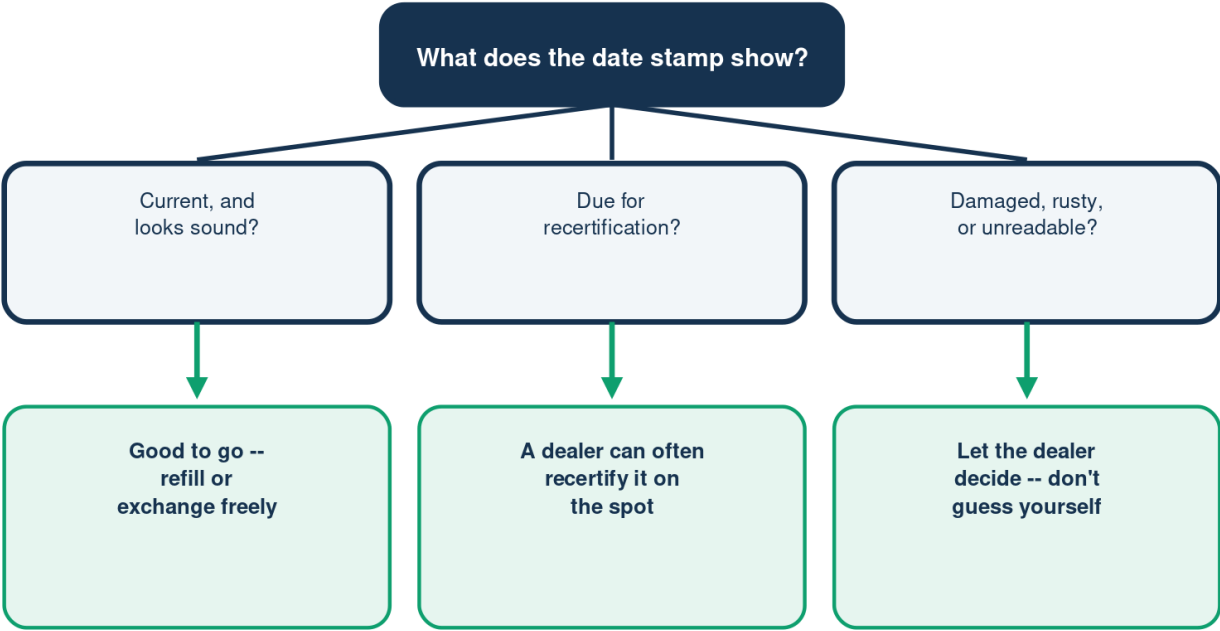
Both get you a full cylinder

	Refill	Exchange
Speed	A bit slower	Very fast
Your cylinder	Stays with you	Swapped away
You pay for	What you use	A flat swap
Condition known	Yes, it's yours	Not always

Neither is the right choice for everyone -- pick what fits you.

Is Your Cylinder Ready to Fill?

A quick check before you head out



A dealer checks the stamp as a matter of course before every fill.

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.

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