BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

An Extended Guide · No. 1259

Connecting to Your House

Extension cords vs. a transfer switch

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! Before you begin — a quick safety note.
This guide covers work involving your home's electrical panel and 240-volt wiring, 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 electrician. 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

Hello, and welcome

When a storm knocks the power out and you wheel the generator into the yard, there's one question that stops a lot of folks cold: how do you actually get that power into the house? This guide answers it, in plain English.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent more than 30 years helping folks get comfortable with their technology — patiently, in plain language, and at their own pace. Think of this guide as me sitting at your kitchen table, walking through it with you one step at a time.

There are really just two ways to do it — running extension cords to a few appliances, or having an electrician install a permanent hookup called a transfer switch or interlock so you can power whole circuits from a single plug. We'll walk through both, when each one makes sense, the one dangerous shortcut you must never take, and what to expect on the day the lights go out.

You do not have to read this all at once, and you certainly don't have to memorize it. Skip to whatever you need, keep it handy, and know that a real person is only a phone call away.

★ How to use this guide
Each page stands on its own. Read one, take what's useful, and come back for the next when you're ready. If a step ever feels fuzzy, that's on my writing — not on you — and you can always call me at (330) 200-8042.

The two ways to get power into the house

A generator makes electricity out in the yard. Getting it to your refrigerator, your furnace, or your lamps comes down to just two approaches — and knowing which is which makes the whole subject simple.

The first way is **extension cords**. You run a heavy outdoor cord from the generator to each thing you want to power — the fridge, a lamp, the coffee maker — and plug it in directly. It's simple, it's inexpensive, and for a lot of homes it's all you'll ever need.

The second way is a **permanent hookup** — a transfer switch or an interlock kit, installed by an electrician, with an outdoor socket called an inlet. You start the generator, run one thick cord to the inlet, and flip a few switches. That sends power to whole **circuits** in your home at once, including things you can't reach with a cord.

The big dividing line is this: extension cords can only reach things that **plug in**. A permanent hookup can also power the things that are **hard-wired** into your home — the furnace, a well pump, the water heater — that have no plug to reach.

Neither one is 'better' for everyone. Which is right for you depends on what you need to keep running, and that's exactly what the next pages sort out. We'll start with the simple path — extension cords — and build up from there.

> **✔ Two words to remember**
> **Cords** for a few things that plug in. A **switch** for whole circuits and the hard-wired things. Almost everything in this guide hangs on that one difference.

The simple path: extension cords

For a great many homes, the humblest approach is also the right one. A couple of good extension cords and a generator in the yard will carry you through most outages in comfort.

The idea couldn't be plainer. Your generator has regular household outlets right on the front, just like the wall. You run a heavy-duty outdoor extension cord from one of those outlets to whatever you want to power, and plug the appliance straight into the cord. No wiring, no electrician, no permit — just plug and go.

For most families the short list is the same: the **refrigerator** so the food stays cold, a **lamp** or two, the **phone and laptop chargers**, the **internet router**, maybe a **television** and a **space heater or fan**. Every one of those plugs into a wall outlet normally, so every one of them can run from a cord.

This path has real virtues. It's **inexpensive** — just the cost of the cords. It's **safe** when done right, because you're never touching your home's wiring. And it's **flexible** — you decide in the moment what to plug in, and you can move a cord from the fridge to the coffee maker and back as you please.

If your needs are a fridge, some lights, and your phones — and you're on city water so there's no pump to worry about — extension cords may honestly be the whole answer for you. There's no need to spend more or wire anything in.

> **★ Don't overbuy**
> Plenty of my customers are perfectly set with a modest generator and two good cords. I'll never talk you into a wired-in system you don't need. If cords cover your list, that's a win for your wallet.

Using extension cords the right way

Cords are simple, but a few sensible habits keep them safe and keep your appliances happy. None of this is hard — it's just worth doing properly.

First, use **outdoor-rated, heavy-duty cords**. The generator lives outside, so the cord starts outdoors and comes in. A thin indoor lamp cord isn't up to the job and can overheat. Look for a thick outdoor extension cord rated for the load — the package lists what it can carry.

Second, **thicker is better over distance**. The longer the run, the more a thin cord struggles and the more power it wastes as heat. A shorter, thicker cord delivers cleaner power to your fridge than a long skinny one. When in doubt, go one size heavier.

Third, **be kind to the cord's path**. Don't run it through a window crushed shut on it, under a rug where it can overheat unseen, or across a walkway where folks will trip. If it must come through a door or window, a purpose-made flat gasket helps. Keep the connections up off wet ground.

Fourth, **don't gang cords together into a nest**. One good cord to each appliance is far better than a daisy-chain of three thin ones and a power strip doing the work of house wiring. If you find yourself building a spider web of cords, that's usually the sign it's time to think about a permanent hookup instead.

> **! Match the cord to the job**
> An undersized or damaged cord is the most common cord mistake — it can overheat, and it starves your appliance of power. Use thick, outdoor-rated cords in good condition, keep the runs as short as you can, and never use one with a cut jacket or a missing ground prong.

What cords can't reach

Extension cords have one hard limit, and it's the reason the second path exists: a cord can only power something that plugs into an outlet. The things wired straight into your home are out of its reach.

Look around and you'll find that some of your most important equipment has **no plug at all**. It's wired directly into your electrical panel on its own circuit. You can't run a cord to it because there's nowhere to plug the cord in.

The usual hard-wired list is exactly the equipment you'd most want in a bad outage:

- **The furnace** — even a gas furnace needs electricity for its blower and controls, and it's wired in, not plugged in. No cord reaches it.
- **A well pump** — on a private well, the pump is hard-wired and usually 240-volt. A cord can't touch it (there's a whole guide in this series on wells).
- **The water heater, central air, and electric range** — big, hard-wired loads with no plug to reach.
- **Some overhead lights and built-in things** — wired into the wall with no outlet of their own.

If the things you care most about in an outage are on that hard-wired list — and for a lot of folks the **furnace** alone is reason enough — then extension cords simply can't do the job, no matter how many you own. That's not a knock on cords; it's just their nature.

This is the fork in the road. If your must-haves all plug in, cords are enough. If they include the furnace, a well pump, or other wired-in equipment, you need the second path — a permanent hookup — which is where we head next.

> **✔ A quick test**
> Walk your house and ask of each must-have: does it plug into an outlet, or is it wired into the wall? Everything that plugs in, a cord can power. Everything wired in needs a transfer switch. That one walk tells you which path you need.

The second path: a permanent hookup

When you want whole circuits — the furnace, the well pump, a room's worth of outlets — powered from the generator at once, you move up to a permanent, wired-in hookup. Here's the big idea before the details.

Instead of running cords to individual appliances, an electrician installs a small piece of equipment that connects your generator to your home's own **circuits** — the same wiring that feeds your outlets and hard-wired equipment every day. Then, in an outage, those circuits can draw from the generator instead of the utility.

The key ingredient is a device that **keeps the generator and the utility strictly apart**, so they can never be connected at the same time. That protection is the whole point, and it's what makes the difference between a safe, legal hookup and a deadly one. It comes in two common flavors — a transfer switch and an interlock kit — which we'll compare on the next page.

Out on the wall of your house goes a weatherproof socket called an **inlet**. When the power's out, you set the generator outside, run a single thick cord from it to that inlet, start it up, and flip a few switches. Power flows to the circuits you chose — no spider web of cords, and the hard-wired things come to life too.

This path costs more and it takes an electrician, a permit, and an inspection. In return you get a tidy, safe, one-plug setup that can run things cords never could. For a home that needs the furnace or a well pump in an outage, it's usually well worth it.

> **★ One plug, whole circuits**
> The first time folks flip that switch and watch the furnace and half the house come on from one cord in the yard, they tend to grin. It's a genuinely satisfying bit of preparedness — and I'm glad to help you plan it.

Transfer switch or interlock kit?

The permanent hookup comes in two shapes, and folks often hear both names without knowing the difference. Both are safe and both are common — they just go about the same job a little differently.

A **manual transfer switch** is a small panel the electrician mounts next to your main breaker box. It has switches for a chosen set of circuits — say the furnace, the fridge, some lights. In an outage you flip those switches from 'utility' to 'generator,' and back again when the power returns. Because each circuit physically can't be on both sources at once, it's inherently safe. It's the tidiest, most foolproof option, and it makes very clear exactly which circuits you can run.

A **panel interlock kit** is a simpler, often less expensive cousin. It's a sliding metal plate fitted to your existing breaker box. The plate makes it physically impossible to have the main breaker and the generator breaker switched on together — so, just like the transfer switch, the generator and utility can never meet. With an interlock you use your regular breakers to choose what runs, which gives you access to more of your circuits, but asks a little more care from you in picking what to turn on.

Both pair with the same outdoor **inlet** and a single cord to the generator. Which one an electrician recommends depends on your panel, your budget, and how many circuits you want to reach. There's no wrong choice between them — they're two good tools for the same safe result.

> **✔ The plain-English difference**
> A **transfer switch** is a separate little panel with its own labeled switches — simplest to use. An **interlock** is a plate on your existing panel that lets you use your normal breakers — often cheaper and reaches more circuits. Your electrician will help you pick.

The inlet box and the cord

Two more pieces complete the picture: the weatherproof socket on your wall, called an inlet, and the thick cord that runs to it from the generator. A minute on each and you'll know the whole setup.

The **inlet box** is a small weatherproof outdoor socket the electrician mounts on the outside of your house, wired back to the transfer switch or interlock. It's where you plug the generator cord in. Think of it as a special outdoor outlet that runs **backward** — safely feeding power in, instead of out.

Where does it go? Somewhere convenient to where the generator will sit and reachable by your cord — but still keeping the running generator well away from the house, at least 20 feet out, with its exhaust pointed away from doors and windows. A good electrician places the inlet with both the cord run and that carbon-monoxide safety distance in mind.

The **cord** is a single heavy one, thicker than an ordinary extension cord because it carries whole circuits. It has matching locking plugs on each end that twist a quarter-turn to lock in place so they can't shake loose. A very common type is called an **L14-30** — a round, four-prong twist-lock that carries both 120-volt and 240-volt power. Your generator needs a matching outlet for it, which is worth checking before you buy.

That twist-lock, 120/240-volt outlet is also the sign of a generator big enough for this kind of hookup. The little suitcase units usually have only the flat household plugs; a unit meant to feed your house has that round locking outlet on the front.

> **✔ Check the outlet before you buy**
> If you're planning a transfer-switch hookup, make sure the generator you choose has a 120/240-volt twist-lock outlet (often an L14-30) to match the inlet cord. It's an easy thing to confirm ahead of time, and I'm happy to check a model with you.

The one deadly shortcut: never back-feed

There's a dangerous trick that circulates among generator owners, and I have to be blunt about it because it kills people: never feed power into your house through a regular outlet with a homemade double-male cord.

The shortcut goes like this. Someone makes or buys a cord with a **male plug on both ends** and plugs one end into the running generator and the other into a dryer outlet, a range outlet, or a wall socket — pushing power backward into the house. It's known as a **suicide cord**, and the name is not an exaggeration.

Here's why it's so deadly. With no transfer switch or interlock keeping things apart, the generator can send power **backward onto the utility lines** outside. A line worker out restoring your power, believing those wires are dead, can be electrocuted by your generator. People have died this way. You could kill a stranger doing their job to help your neighborhood.

It's a danger inside your home, too. The moment the generator is running, the exposed prongs on that cord are **live** — a shock or electrocution risk to anyone who touches them. And back-feeding skips right past your home's safety breakers, which is a genuine **fire hazard** in the walls. On top of all that, it's **against electrical code and illegal**.

I know the shortcut looks cheap and quick, especially in the cold and dark of a storm. Please don't. A proper transfer switch or interlock with an inlet does the very same job safely and legally, and it's a one-time cost that buys a lifetime of not worrying. There is no version of the suicide cord that is safe, and no storm urgent enough to justify it.

> **! This one is non-negotiable**
> Never connect a generator to your house by plugging a double-male cord into a dryer, range, or wall outlet. It can electrocute line workers, shock your family, start a fire, and it's illegal. The only safe way to power your home's circuits is a transfer switch or interlock installed by a licensed electrician.

This is electrician work — and that's good

Both a transfer switch and an interlock kit connect to your home's main electrical panel, and that means both are jobs for a licensed electrician, with a permit and an inspection. I want to explain why that's a feature, not a hassle.

Your breaker panel is the heart of your home's electrical system, carrying serious voltage. Tying a generator hookup into it has to be done exactly right — correct wiring, correct sizing, the interlock or switch fitted properly so the generator and utility truly can never meet. A licensed electrician does this kind of work every day and knows your local code.

The **permit and inspection** aren't red tape for their own sake. A permit means the work is on the record and done to code; an inspection means a second qualified set of eyes confirms it's safe before you rely on it. For something that ties into your panel and protects line workers' lives, that extra check is exactly what you want.

It also matters for your home itself. Proper, permitted, inspected work is what keeps your insurance sound and gives a future buyer confidence. A hookup done on the sly, without a permit, can come back to bite you when you least expect it.

Now, I'm a home-tech person, not a licensed electrician — so I don't do this wiring myself. What I do is coordinate a good electrician for the hookup and handle everything around it: helping you choose and size the generator, deciding which circuits matter, setting it up, and teaching you to run it safely. You get one friendly point of contact for the whole project.

> **★ One friendly point of contact**
> You don't have to line up an electrician, a generator, and the setup all on your own. Tell me what you're hoping to keep running, and I'll help you plan it and bring in a licensed electrician for the panel work. Call me at (330) 200-8042.

Choosing which circuits to cover

A permanent hookup lets you pick which parts of your home the generator can run. You don't power everything — you choose the essentials, and choosing well keeps the whole setup simple and affordable.

The point of a generator in an outage isn't to run the house as if nothing happened. It's to keep the important things going. So you and the electrician pick a handful of **circuits** to wire into the transfer switch, or plan which breakers you'll turn on with an interlock.

For most homes the essential list looks like this:

- **The furnace** — heat is the big one in an Ohio winter, and its blower is hard-wired, so this is often the number-one reason for the whole hookup.
- **The refrigerator and freezer** — to save the food, a modest but steady need.
- **A well pump**, if you're on a well — usually 240-volt, and covered in depth in its own guide.
- **Some lights and outlets** — enough to live by, charge phones, and run the internet and a TV.
- **The sump pump**, if a wet basement is a worry — a hard-wired essential in a storm.

What usually stays off the list are the big, hungry comfort loads — central air, the electric range, the electric water heater — unless you've bought a large generator on purpose. Trying to run everything means a much bigger, thirstier, pricier unit, and most folks find they don't need it.

There's a nice bit of teamwork here, too: you rarely run all the chosen circuits at full tilt at once. The furnace cycles, the fridge cycles, and you can take turns with the heavier things — so a sensibly sized generator covers a well-chosen list comfortably.

> **✔ Make your short list first**
> Before you talk sizes and switches, walk the house and jot the few things you'd truly want in an outage. That short list — not 'everything' — is what we size the generator and plan the circuits around. Most folks are surprised how little they actually need.

Why 240-volt things make this matter most

If there's one situation where a permanent hookup goes from 'nice' to 'the only real option,' it's when you need to run a 240-volt load — most commonly a well pump. Here's why.

Your home has two kinds of power. The regular wall outlets are **120 volts** — lamps, the TV, the fridge, chargers. Big, hungry equipment like a well pump, an electric range, or central air often uses **240 volts** instead, wired to its own special circuit with no ordinary plug.

You simply can't reach a 240-volt load with an extension cord — there's no outlet to plug into, and a household cord doesn't carry 240 volts anyway. The only safe way to run one from a generator is through a transfer switch or interlock, using that 120/240-volt twist-lock hookup we talked about.

This is exactly the bind country folks on a well run into. The small, quiet generator that keeps the fridge and phones going puts out only 120 volts and can't touch the 240-volt pump. Running the pump means a larger 120/240-volt generator **and** a proper hookup — the two go together. (Backing up a well has its own full guide in this series.)

So if your must-have list includes anything 240-volt, the choice is made for you: it's the transfer-switch path, sized for that load, wired by an electrician. For a home whose big worry is the well pump or a 240-volt load, that's the whole ballgame.

> **! 120 volts can't do a 240-volt job**
> No extension cord and no small 120-volt generator can run a 240-volt well pump — it's the wrong kind of power, not just too little. A 240-volt load always means a 120/240-volt generator and a proper transfer-switch or interlock hookup. Pairing two little units together doesn't get you there either.

How it works on the day

Once the hookup is installed and you've practiced once, running your home on generator power is a short, calm routine. Here's how the day of an outage actually goes.

First, **set the generator outside** — at least 20 feet from the house, on stable ground, with the exhaust pointed away from doors, windows, and vents. Never in the garage or a shed, even with the door open. This never changes, hookup or no hookup.

Next, **run the cord** from the generator to your inlet box on the wall and twist it locked at both ends. Then **start the generator** and give it a moment to warm up and settle into a steady rhythm.

Now **flip the switches** for the circuits you want. With a transfer switch, you move each chosen circuit from 'utility' to 'generator.' With an interlock, you slide the plate, switch off the main, switch on the generator breaker, and then turn on the breakers for what you want to run. Either way, your furnace, fridge, and chosen lights come to life.

A couple of gentle habits: if a big motor like a furnace or well pump is about to start, switch **eco mode off** for a moment so the engine has its full muscle for the surge, then back on once things are running. Bring loads on a few at a time rather than all at once. And when the utility power returns, reverse the steps — switch the circuits back, shut the generator down, and let it cool before you put it away.

That's the whole dance. The first time you'll want the card your electrician or I help you write; by the second outage it's second nature.

> **✔ Tape the steps inside a cabinet**
> On a dark, stressful night you don't want to be remembering steps. Once we've walked through your exact setup, write the order down on an index card and tape it inside a kitchen cabinet. Then you just follow the card.

If you live in town: city and suburb

Most of my in-town customers — in Kent, Ravenna, Streetsboro, and Aurora — are on city water and city power, and that shapes which path makes sense when it's time to connect a generator.

Good news first: on city water, you don't have a well pump to run, which takes the single most demanding 240-volt load right off your list. That means a lot of town homes can get by with the simpler, cheaper path — extension cords to the fridge, some lights, the phones, and the internet — and never need to wire anything in.

The main reason a town home does step up to a permanent hookup is the **furnace**. It's hard-wired, no cord reaches it, and in a January ice storm heat isn't optional. A modest interlock kit that can run the furnace, the fridge, and a few lights is a popular, sensible setup here — enough to stay warm and fed without a whole-house system.

A sump pump is the other common one in town, if you've got a basement that worries you in a heavy rain. Like the furnace, it's hard-wired, so covering it means the transfer-switch path rather than a cord.

! Permits and the HOA
In town, the electrician will pull a permit and get the work inspected — that's normal and it's for your protection. If you're in a neighborhood with a homeowners' association, it's also worth a quick check of the rules before install day, since some have a say about where a generator runs and how it's stored. A minute of checking saves a headache later.

✔ Start with the furnace question
For most town homes the whole decision comes down to one thing: do you need the furnace? If yes, a small interlock for the furnace and a few essentials is usually the answer. If a fridge and phones are really all you need, good extension cords may do the whole job.

If you're in the country on a well

Out in the townships — Atwater, Rootstown, Deerfield, Palmyra — many of my customers are on a private well and a bit further from help, and that changes the picture: for a country home, a permanent hookup is often close to essential.

The reason is the **well pump**. On a private well, no power means no water — and the pump is hard-wired and usually 240-volt, so an extension cord can't touch it. If you want running water in an outage, you need a transfer switch or interlock and a generator big enough to make 240 volts. That one fact pushes most country homes onto the permanent-hookup path.

> **! The honest truth about well pumps**
> Most home well pumps run on 240 volts, and the small, quiet inverter generators most folks picture put out only 120 volts — so they cannot run the pump at all. For a well you need a larger inverter unit with a 120/240-volt outlet, sized to your pump, and a proper way to connect it. Pairing two little units together does not fix this — two 120-volt units still only make 120 volts. I'll help you get the right size, and bring in a licensed electrician for the hookup.

Because you're wiring in a hookup anyway, and because country outages here can run for days, rural folks usually cover a **longer list of circuits** than town homes: the well pump, the furnace, the refrigerator and freezer, the sump pump if you have one, and enough lights and outlets to live comfortably. It's worth sizing the generator and the hookup for that fuller list from the start.

And keep the country habit of **stored water** alongside it all. Even a perfect hookup takes a few minutes to start and switch over, and the pump only makes water once it's running. A few jugs of drinking water and a bathtub filled before a storm bridge the gap — belt and suspenders, the country way.

> **★ A country hookup done right**
> Sizing a 120/240-volt generator for the pump and furnace, planning the circuit list, and coordinating the electrician for the hookup — that's a country well backup done properly, and it's one of my favorite projects. One call and I'll walk the whole thing with you: (330) 200-8042.

The safety talk: carbon monoxide

Wiring your generator into the house makes it wonderfully convenient — but that can tempt folks to set the machine a little too close, or in the garage, for an easy cord run. So even with a proper hookup, this one safety rule comes first, every single time.

Every generator that burns gasoline or propane makes carbon monoxide, or "CO" — a gas you cannot see or smell. It is the one real danger with a generator, and it is completely avoidable. More people are hurt by running a generator in the wrong place than by anything else, so please read this page twice.

Outside only — no exceptions

Never run a generator indoors, and that includes the garage, the basement, a shed, a carport, or a covered porch — even with the door up or a window open. CO pools and seeps into the house. The only safe place is outdoors, in the open air.

At least 20 feet away, exhaust pointed away

Set the generator at least 20 feet from the house, and turn it so the exhaust blows **away** from any door, window, or vent. Don't tuck it against the wall to hide it or keep it dry — give it room to breathe and let the fumes drift off.

Alarms are your safety net

Put working carbon-monoxide alarms on every level of your home and near the bedrooms, and use ones with a battery backup so they work when the power is out. Test them now, before storm season, not during it.

Is a permanent hookup worth it?

A wired-in hookup costs more than a couple of cords and takes an electrician, a permit, and an inspection. So it's fair to ask: is it worth it for you? The honest answer depends on your list.

The case **for** cords is simple: they're cheap, they need no electrician, and for a fridge, some lights, and your phones they do the whole job. If that's your outage list and you're on city water, you may never need more. Spending on a wired-in system you won't use is money better kept.

The case **for** a permanent hookup comes down to two things: **hard-wired equipment** and **convenience**. If your must-haves include the furnace, a well pump, or a sump pump, cords simply can't reach them — the hookup isn't a luxury, it's the only way. And even where cords could work, some folks happily pay for the ease of one plug and a few switches instead of stringing cords through windows in the cold.

I won't quote you a price here, because it genuinely varies with your panel, how many circuits you want, and whether it's a transfer switch or an interlock. What I can tell you is that it's a **one-time cost** for a lifetime of safe, tidy backup — and that an interlock is generally the more affordable of the two. An electrician can give you a real number for your home.

My honest guidance: let your **need** decide, not fear of missing out. Make your short list of must-haves, check which ones are hard-wired, and the right path usually reveals itself. If it's all plug-in things, enjoy the simple cords. If the furnace or the pump is on there, plan the hookup and do it right.

> **★ An honest recommendation, not a sales pitch**
> I make my living helping folks, not selling the biggest system. If cords cover your list, I'll tell you so. If you truly need the furnace or the pump, I'll help you plan a proper hookup and bring in the electrician. Either way you get straight advice — (330) 200-8042.

Cords or a switch: deciding your path

Let's put it all together into a simple decision you can actually make. It really does come down to a few plain questions about what you need to keep running.

Start here: what's on your must-have list? Not everything — just the handful of things you'd truly want in an outage. Write them down. Then sort each one by a single test: does it **plug into an outlet**, or is it **hard-wired** into the house?

If it all plugs in — a fridge, lights, phones, the internet, a TV, a space heater — then extension cords are very likely your whole answer. Simple, inexpensive, no electrician. Buy a good generator and a couple of heavy outdoor cords and you're set.

If your list includes hard-wired things — the furnace, a well pump, a sump pump, or you simply want whole circuits from one plug — then it's the transfer-switch or interlock path, installed by a licensed electrician. That's the only way to reach those loads safely, and it's a tidy, satisfying setup once it's in.

If you're not sure — you don't know which things are hard-wired, whether you're on a well, or how big a generator you'd need — that's exactly the moment to have it looked at before you spend a dime. A short assessment turns all the guessing into a clear, right-sized plan.

Whichever bucket you land in, the dangerous shortcut stays off the table: never a double-male cord into an outlet, ever. Cords to appliances, or a proper hookup to circuits — those are the only two safe answers.

> **✔ When in doubt, have it assessed**
> There's no shame in not knowing whether you need cords or a switch — most folks don't until someone walks the house with them. If you're unsure, a quick look sorts it out and saves you from buying the wrong thing.

How I can help

Connecting a generator to your house is one of those projects with a few moving parts — the right generator, the right hookup, the right circuits, and an electrician for the panel work. Pulling all that together into one simple plan is exactly the sort of thing I do for folks around Portage County.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech right here in Portage County. I'm a tech-help person, not a power company and not a pushy salesman — I help folks pick the right gear, set it up, and feel confident using it. With generators, that means helping you choose a unit that fits your home and your budget, showing you how to run it safely, and getting your internet, TV, and devices happily back on once the power's flowing.

The hookup itself — the transfer switch or interlock that ties the generator into your electrical panel — is a licensed electrician's job, and I'm a home-tech person, not an electrician. So I coordinate a good one for that part, and I handle the rest: helping you choose and size the generator, deciding which circuits matter, running the extension-cord setup if that's all you need, teaching you to run it safely on the day, and getting your internet, TV, and devices happily back on. One friendly point of contact for the whole thing.

Three easy ways to get help

- **An in-home visit** — a flat $99 first visit. I come to you, here in Portage County, and every visit is 30-day come-back-free.
- **Remote help** — a flat $49 screen-share, up to two hours, for the things I can sort out without coming over (it's free for Support Plan members).
- **A Support Plan** — $39 a month for folks who'd like me on call all year.

Your connecting-to-the-house questions

The questions I hear most from folks working out how to get generator power into their home.

Q: Can I just plug the generator into a wall outlet to power the house?

No — please never do this. Feeding power in through an outlet with a double-male cord can electrocute line workers, shock your family, and start a fire, and it's illegal besides. The only safe ways are cords to individual appliances or a transfer switch installed by an electrician.

Q: Do I really need an electrician for a transfer switch?

Yes. Both a transfer switch and an interlock tie into your main electrical panel, which is licensed-electrician work, with a permit and an inspection. It's not a do-it-yourself job — but I'll coordinate the electrician and handle the rest for you.

Q: What's the difference between a transfer switch and an interlock?

A transfer switch is a separate little panel with its own labeled switches — simplest to use. An interlock is a plate on your existing panel that lets you use your normal breakers — often cheaper and reaches more circuits. Both are safe; your electrician helps you pick.

Q: Can extension cords run my furnace or well pump?

No. Those are hard-wired into your panel with no plug to reach, and a well pump is usually 240-volt besides. Powering them means a transfer switch or interlock, not a cord to an outlet.

Q: How many circuits can I run?

As many as you size for — but most folks pick a short essential list: the furnace, fridge, some lights and outlets, and a well or sump pump if they have one. The generator's size sets how much you can run at once, and things take turns as they cycle.

Your connecting-to-the-house checklist

Tear this out and tape it inside a cabinet door. Work down it once and you'll know your plan long before the storm.

- ❑ Made a short list of the few things you'd truly want running in an outage.
- ❑ Sorted each one: does it plug into an outlet, or is it hard-wired into the house?
- ❑ If it all plugs in: bought heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords in good condition, sized to the load.
- ❑ If it includes hard-wired or 240-volt things: planned a transfer switch or interlock kit with an inlet.
- ❑ Had a licensed electrician install the hookup, with a permit and an inspection.
- ❑ Confirmed your generator has a matching 120/240-volt twist-lock outlet (often an L14-30) if you're doing a hookup.
- ❑ Never, ever a double-male 'suicide' cord into a dryer, range, or wall outlet — the safe way only.
- ❑ Picked a safe outdoor spot for the generator, at least 20 feet from the house, exhaust pointed away.
- ❑ Working carbon-monoxide alarms inside, on every level, with fresh batteries.
- ❑ Written your on-the-day steps on a card and practiced them once on a calm day.

Ten check marks between you and an outage you can meet with a calm, safe routine. Nicely done.

The short version

If you remember nothing else from this guide, remember these:

- There are two safe ways to get generator power into your home: extension cords to things that plug in, or a transfer switch or interlock for whole circuits.
- Cords are simple, cheap, and safe, but they can't reach hard-wired equipment like the furnace, a well pump, or a sump pump — that takes a permanent hookup.
- A transfer switch or interlock, with an outdoor inlet and a 120/240-volt twist-lock cord, is installed by a licensed electrician with a permit and an inspection.
- Never back-feed your house with a double-male 'suicide' cord into an outlet — it can electrocute line workers, shock your family, start a fire, and it's illegal.
- Make your short must-have list, sort plug-in from hard-wired, run the generator outside 20 feet away — and know I'm a phone call away.

Connecting to Your House at a Glance

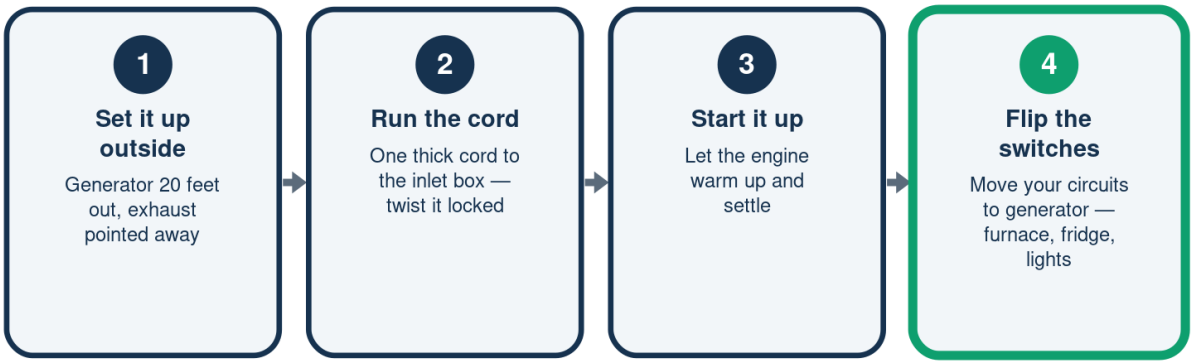
The plain-English version

	The short answer	Why it matters
Two ways	Cords or a switch	Simple vs. whole-house
Extension cords	For things that plug in	Cheap, easy, but limited
A transfer switch	For whole circuits	Reaches hard-wired
Who installs it	A licensed electrician	Permit and inspection
Never do this	Back-feed an outlet	It can kill line workers

Cords for a few plug-in things; a transfer switch or interlock for whole circuits and hard-wired equipment — never a back-feed.

How a Transfer Switch Works on the Day

Four steps, once it's installed



Start the generator outside, plug in the inlet cord, and flip the switches for the circuits you chose.

Extension Cords vs. a Transfer Switch

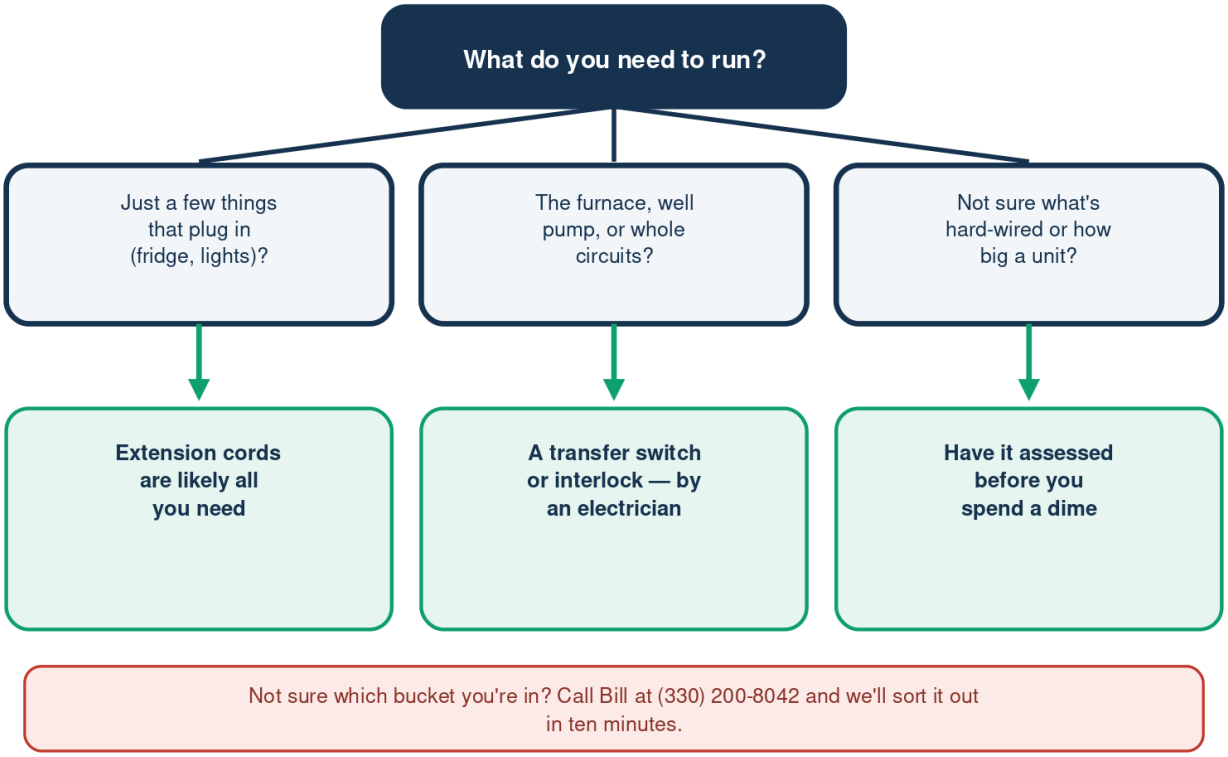
Two ways to power your home

	Extension cords	A transfer switch
What it powers	Things that plug in	Whole circuits
Hard-wired things	Can't reach them	Runs them
A 240-volt pump	No	Yes, sized right
Cost and effort	Cheap, no install	More, plus a pro
Who installs it	Just you	A licensed electrician

Cords are simple and cheap for a few plug-in things; a switch reaches whole circuits and hard-wired equipment.

Cords or a Transfer Switch?

Start with your must-have list



Not sure which bucket you're in? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 and we'll sort it out in ten minutes.

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

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— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat $49, free for Support Plan members.

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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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