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# Landlord Edition — Smart Locks, Cameras & Thermostats for a Rental You Own

*Smart Locks, Cameras & Thermostats Codes instead of keys, eyes on the shared space, control from your phone*

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

**Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech**

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

# 1 The Whole Plan on One Page

*If you read only one page, read this. Here is the whole idea as a short checklist.*

You own a rental or two, and you are tired of driving over with a key every time a cleaner, a contractor, or a new tenant needs in. Smart tech solves that. A keypad lock lets you hand out a code instead of a key and change it in seconds.

An outdoor camera watches the entry and the shared areas. A smart thermostat keeps an empty unit from freezing or running up heat for no one. You run all three from an app, from anywhere.

1. Start with one door. Fit a keypad deadbolt so you give out codes, not keys.
2. Give each person their own code — the cleaner, the handyman, the new tenant.
3. Add a camera outside only, aimed at the entry or a shared area, never inside a unit.
4. Put a smart thermostat in during a vacancy to cap the heat and prevent a freeze.
5. Write the smart devices into the lease and tell tenants about any camera in writing.
6. At turnover, wipe old codes and hand the account over cleanly to the next person.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You do not have to wire up your whole building. One door and one thermostat on one unit is a complete, useful start. You can grow from there at your own pace.

The rest of this guide walks each step slowly, with the common brands and the rules to respect. Take it one page at a time. The hard part is not the gadgets — it is doing it in a way that is fair, legal, and simple to hand over.

WHAT THIS IS

# 2 What Smart Tech for a Rental Really Means

For an owner, smart tech is not about gadgets for their own sake. It is about three plain problems. Keys get lost, copied, and have to be changed between tenants.

You cannot see what happens at the entry when you are not there. And an empty unit either wastes heat or, worse, freezes a pipe. Each of those has a simple, proven answer that runs from your phone.

- A smart lock replaces the key with a code you can create, share, and erase instantly.
- An outdoor camera lets you check the entry and shared areas without driving over.
- A smart thermostat lets you hold a safe, low temperature in a vacant unit from afar.
- An app ties them together so one person — you — stays in control of all of it.

As the owner, you have one big advantage over a renter: you can actually replace the hardware. A renter has to clip a device over existing fixtures. You can swap the whole deadbolt or the whole thermostat if you choose, because it is your property. That opens up sturdier, more permanent options than a tenant would ever use.

> **TIP**
>
> Keep it boring and reliable. The best landlord setup is the one that still works three tenants from now with no fuss, not the one with the most features.

WHY IT MATTERS

## 3 Why This Pays Off for an Owner

Think about what a single lost key costs you. A drive across town, a locksmith or a new lock, and new keys cut for everyone. Now picture doing that between every tenant, just to be safe. A keypad lock ends that cycle. You change the code from your kitchen table, and the old one stops working the instant you do.

The savings add up quietly across a year. No rekeying between tenants. No meeting the cleaner to let them in. No wondering whether a former tenant kept a copy. And a smart thermostat quietly trims the heating bill on a vacant unit, which otherwise runs warm for an empty room or, left off, risks a burst pipe in a cold snap.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The real win is time and peace of mind, not just money. Being able to let a plumber in from your phone, on a workday, without leaving your own job, is worth a great deal.

None of this is complicated once it is set up. The afternoon you spend fitting one lock pays you back every turnover for years. That is the kind of small, practical upgrade that makes owning a rental less of a headache.

WHO IT'S FOR

# 4 The Small Landlord's Situation

This guide is written for the owner of one, two, or a handful of units — the person who manages their own rentals rather than a large company with a staff. You know your tenants' names. You take the calls yourself. You want tools that make the job lighter without turning you into an IT department.

- You own the property, so you can replace locks and thermostats, not just clip things on.
- You handle turnovers, cleaners, and repairs yourself or with a trusted few.
- You want fewer trips across town and fewer keys floating around.
- You want to do it fairly and legally, respecting the people who live there.

If you use a property manager, most of this still applies — you will just decide together who holds the app and the account. And if you are brand new to any of it, that is fine. Everything here is beginner-friendly, one step at a time, with no assumption that you have done it before.

> **TIP**
>
> If you own several units, resist the urge to outfit them all at once. Get one unit right, learn what you like, then copy that same setup to the others. Consistency is its own reward.

START SIMPLE

# 5 Pick One Door and One Thermostat

The fastest way to get stuck is to try to do everything at once. So do not. Choose one unit — ideally one that is empty or turning over, so you are not working around a tenant.

That unit becomes your practice run. Fit one lock and, if the season calls for it, one thermostat. Learn the app on that single door before you touch another.

1. Choose a unit that is vacant or about to turn over.
2. Confirm it has Wi-Fi reaching the door and the thermostat, or plan to add it.

3. Fit a keypad deadbolt on the entry door first.
4. Set up the app and create a code for yourself and one for a cleaner.
5. Only once that feels easy, add a camera outside or a thermostat.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> A vacant unit is the ideal classroom. You can take your time, make mistakes, and reset things without a tenant waiting on you.

By the time that first unit is done, the second one takes half the time. You will know which brand you like, which app makes sense to you, and how you want to handle codes. That is worth far more than rushing.

SMART LOCKS

# 6 Why Codes Beat Keys for a Rental

A key is a physical thing that can be copied at any hardware store, lost in a parking lot, or quietly kept after a tenant moves out. You never truly know how many copies exist. A code is different. It lives in software. You create it, you share it, and you delete it — and when you delete it, it is gone for good, with no copy anywhere.

For a rental, that difference is everything. Between tenants, you do not rekey a lock or cut new keys. You simply retire the old codes and issue fresh ones.

A cleaner gets a code that works on cleaning days. A contractor gets one that works for the length of the job. Each person has their own, so you can see and control who comes and goes.

- Codes can be created and erased in seconds, from anywhere.
- Each person gets their own code, so access is never anonymous.
- No physical copies exist to be lost or kept after move-out.
- Most keypad locks still take a physical key as a backup, which you keep.

> **TIP**
> Even with codes, keep one physical backup key in a safe place off-site. Batteries die and Wi-Fi hiccups. A backup key is your calm fallback, not a failure.

LOCK TYPES

# 7 Keypad Deadbolts vs Retrofit Add-Ons

There are two broad families of smart lock, and as an owner you can use either. The first replaces the whole deadbolt with a keypad lock. The second, called a retrofit, clips over the inside of your existing deadbolt and leaves the outside and your keys unchanged. Renters lean on the retrofit kind because they cannot alter the door. You are not so limited.

- Full keypad deadbolt: replaces the lock, adds a keypad on the outside for codes. Sturdiest for a rental.
- Retrofit interior lock: mounts inside over the existing deadbolt; the outside and keys stay the same.
- Either can be run from an app once connected to the unit's Wi-Fi.

For a rental you own, a full keypad deadbolt is usually the better fit. The keypad on the outside is what lets a cleaner or contractor punch in a code with no key and no app. A retrofit lock keeps the keypad off the door, which is handy for a tenant but less so when strangers need entry. Choose the keypad deadbolt when access by code is the whole point.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Keep whatever you remove. If you ever sell the unit or a tenant wants the plain lock back, having the original hardware in a labeled bag saves you a trip to the store.

LOCKS, STEP BY STEP

# 8 Fitting a Keypad Deadbolt

Swapping a deadbolt for a keypad model is a screwdriver job, not an electrician one. It usually takes under an hour on your first try. The new lock reuses the same hole the old deadbolt sat in, so there is rarely any drilling. Read the box's instructions, because each brand differs slightly, but the shape of the job is always the same.

1. Unscrew and remove the old deadbolt — the thumb-turn inside and the keyed part outside.

2. Slide out the latch in the edge of the door and fit the new one that came in the box.
3. Mount the outside keypad half, feeding its cable through to the inside.
4. Attach the inside half with its battery pack and screw the two halves together.
5. Put in the batteries, then follow the app to connect the lock to the unit's Wi-Fi.
6. Test it: lock and unlock with a code, and with the backup key, before you leave.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Check the lock lines up and turns smoothly before you call it done. A deadbolt that binds will drain batteries fast and may leave someone stuck outside. A minute of adjustment now saves a callout later.

Once it is on and connected, the physical work is finished. Everything after this — codes, schedules, alerts — happens in the app, from wherever you are.

CODES

## 9 One-Time and Scheduled Codes for Turnover

The magic of a keypad lock is not the keypad — it is the kinds of codes you can make. A permanent code works until you delete it. A scheduled code works only on certain days or hours, which is perfect for a weekly cleaner. A one-time code works once and then dies, ideal for a single delivery or a one-off repair. You decide for each person.

- Permanent code: for you, or a long-term tenant. Works until removed.
- Scheduled code: works only on set days or times — a cleaner every Friday, say.
- One-time code: works a single time, then expires on its own.
- Named codes: give each person their own, so you know who used the door and when.

Because each code is separate and named, you get a simple log of comings and goings without ever watching a camera. If the cleaner's code was used Tuesday, you know the cleaner came Tuesday. If a contractor's code gets used after the job is done, you see that too, and you can delete it on the spot.

**TIP**

Give every regular visitor their own code rather than sharing one. A shared code tells you nothing when it is used. Separate codes turn your lock into a quiet, honest record of who came and went.

CODES, STEP BY STEP

## 10 Setting Up a Cleaner or Contractor Code

Here is the everyday task you will do most: giving a worker their own code. It takes about a minute in the app once the lock is set up. The screens vary a little by brand, but every smart-lock app has an access or guest section where codes live.

1. Open the lock's app and choose the door you want.
2. Find the access, codes, or guests section.
3. Add a new code and give it a clear name, like 'Cleaner' or 'Plumber - Smith job.'
4. Choose the type: permanent, scheduled for set days, or one-time.
5. Pick a number you have not used elsewhere, and save it.
6. Send the code to the person by text or call, and tell them when it works.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

When the job is over, delete the code. There is no harm in leaving a scheduled code, but a deleted code is one less thing to track. Tidy as you go and your list stays clean.

That is the whole rhythm of running a smart lock: add a code when someone needs in, remove it when they no longer do. Do that and you never think about keys again.

TURNOVER

## 11 Resetting the Lock Between Tenants

Turnover is where a smart lock earns its keep. With a keyed lock, a careful owner rekeys or replaces the lock between every tenant, because you can never be sure who has a copy. With codes, that worry disappears. You simply wipe every code the old tenant and their guests had, and create fresh ones for the new tenant. The lock itself stays put.

1. After the old tenant is out, open the app and review the full list of codes.
2. Delete every code tied to the old tenant, their family, and their visitors.
3. Delete old cleaner or contractor codes too, unless you still use those people.
4. Create a new code for the incoming tenant and any new cleaner.
5. Change the lock's own app password if the old tenant ever had app access.
6. Do a walk-through test: the new codes work, the old ones do not.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Do not just add the new tenant's code and leave the old ones. Delete the old ones first. An unused code is an open door you forgot about.

Five minutes of tidying between tenants replaces an afternoon with a locksmith. That is the single clearest payoff of the whole setup.

WHO HOLDS THE ACCOUNT

## 12 Account Ownership at Turnover

Every smart device lives inside an account, and who holds that account matters more than any single code. As the owner, the account for a lock, camera, or thermostat you installed and pay for should be yours — tied to your email, not a tenant's. That way, when a tenant leaves, you still control the device without chasing anyone for a password.

- Set up the device under an account that is yours, with your email and phone.
- Give a tenant their own code or limited app access, not the master account.
- Never register your lock or camera under a tenant's personal account.
- If a tenant brings their own device, that one is theirs and stays theirs.

There is an important line to draw here. A device you own and install is yours to control. A device the tenant buys and installs — their own doorbell, their own plug — belongs to them, runs on their account, and they take it when they leave. Keep those two worlds separate and turnover stays clean for both of you.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

If a property manager runs the day-to-day, decide early whose account the devices live under. Putting them under the management company's account, not a single staff member's personal one, saves grief if that person moves on.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

CAMERAS

# 13 Exterior and Common Areas Only

Cameras are useful to an owner for the outside of the property: the entry door, a shared porch, a parking area, a common hallway in a small multi-unit. They let you check a delivery, see who came to the door, or settle a dispute about the shared space. Used that way, a camera is a sensible, welcome safeguard.

There is one rule that sits above all the rest, and it is not a suggestion. A camera must never point inside a tenant's unit, and you must never place one inside the space a tenant rents. The inside of a rented home is private. Watching it, or even appearing to, crosses a legal and ethical line that can cost you far more than any camera is worth.

**WATCH OUT**

No camera inside a tenant's unit — ever. Not in a bedroom, a living room, or a bathroom, and not pointed through a window from outside. Keep every lens on exterior and shared space only.

- Good: entry door, shared porch, driveway, parking area, a common hallway or laundry.
- Never: inside any rented unit, or aimed to see into one.
- Tell tenants in writing about any camera that watches a shared area they use.

CAMERA TYPES

# 14 Battery, Plug-In, and Doorbell Cameras

For outdoor use, you have three handy shapes. A battery camera needs no wiring and can go almost anywhere outside, though you recharge it now and then. A plug-in camera needs an outlet nearby but never needs charging. And a video doorbell combines a camera with the doorbell itself, which is perfect for watching an entry.

- Battery camera: mounts anywhere outside, no wiring; recharge the battery occasionally.
- Plug-in camera: needs an outdoor outlet, but runs forever once placed.
- Video doorbell: a camera at the door that also rings your phone when someone presses it.
- Live view and alerts are usually free; saved video history usually needs a small monthly plan.

For a rental entry, a video doorbell or a weatherproof battery camera aimed at the door is the common choice. For a shared driveway or parking area, a plug-in camera on an exterior wall, powered from a nearby outlet, saves you recharging trips. Match the camera to the spot, and make sure the property's Wi-Fi actually reaches it.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Weather matters outdoors. Buy a camera rated for outdoor use and shelter it from direct rain and sun where you can. An indoor camera stuck outside will not last a winter.

CAMERAS, STEP BY STEP

# 15 Placing an Exterior Camera

Placing an outdoor camera well is more about aim than anything technical. You want it high enough to be out of easy reach, angled to cover the entry or shared area, and framed so it never sees into a unit. Spend a few minutes getting the angle right before you screw anything down.

1. Pick a spot that covers the entry or shared area from above, out of arm's reach.
2. Hold the camera up and check the app's live view to see exactly what it captures.

3. Adjust the angle until it shows the shared space and nothing inside any unit.
4. Mount it with the bracket provided, into solid trim or wall.
5. Connect it to the property's Wi-Fi and set motion alerts to your phone.
6. Review the recording once to confirm the view and the night vision are good.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Before you fix the mount, look hard at what is in the frame. If you can see through a window or a door into a tenant's living space, change the angle. The view you set is the view you are responsible for.

Once the aim is right and the alerts reach your phone, the camera quietly does its job. You only hear from it when something moves, and you can look in any time from the app.

CAMERA PRIVACY

## 16 Where You May and May Not Point a Lens

The law on cameras varies by state and locality, and it is a serious area, so the safe approach is to stay well inside the clear lines rather than near the edges. The clear line for a landlord is simple: watch shared and exterior space, never private rented space. When in doubt, aim it away from the tenant's living area, not toward it.

- Shared areas you control — entries, lobbies, parking, laundry — are generally reasonable to monitor.
- A tenant's unit is private. No camera inside it, and none aimed to see in.
- Audio recording has its own, often stricter rules. Many owners turn camera audio off to be safe.
- Rules vary by state and locality — check yours, and ask an attorney if you are unsure.

Because the details differ so much from place to place, this guide keeps it general on purpose. The principle, though, travels everywhere: a tenant has a reasonable expectation of privacy inside their home, and a camera that intrudes on it can bring real legal trouble. Respect that line and you stay on firm ground.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

When you are not certain whether a camera placement is allowed, a short call to a local attorney is cheap insurance. It is the one area where guessing is not worth the risk.

THERMOSTATS

# 17 Capping Costs in a Vacant Unit

An empty unit is a quiet money leak. Leave the heat running at a comfortable temperature for no one, and you pay for warmth nobody uses. Turn it off entirely in winter, and you risk a frozen, burst pipe that costs far more than a season of heating. A smart thermostat lets you walk the middle line from your phone: a low, safe temperature that protects the pipes without wasting heat.

- Hold a vacant unit at a low, safe temperature that prevents freezing.
- Raise it remotely the day before a showing, so the unit is comfortable for visitors.
- Get an alert if the temperature drops too far — an early warning of a heating failure.
- Set it back to a cost-saving level the moment a showing ends.

This is where a smart thermostat shines for an owner specifically. A tenant mostly wants comfort. You want control of a space no one is standing in. Being able to see and set the temperature of an empty unit from miles away, and to be warned if it falls dangerously low, is genuine protection for the building itself.

**WATCH OUT**

Set a low-temperature alert for every vacant unit in cold months. A warning that the heat has failed, before the pipes freeze, can save you a flood. It is the single most valuable alert a landlord can turn on.

THERMOSTAT FIT

# 18 The C-Wire and Whether It Will Work

Before you buy a smart thermostat, you need to know one thing: whether the unit's heating system can run one. Most smart thermostats need steady power, which comes from a wire called the C-wire, short for common wire. Many homes have it; some older ones do not. And some heating types — electric baseboard, certain radiators — do not use a wall thermostat a smart one can replace at all.

- Look behind the old thermostat for a wire in the terminal marked C. That is the C-wire.
- No C-wire? Some thermostats include an adapter; some systems can have one added.
- Electric baseboard or line-voltage heat needs a special thermostat, not a standard smart one.
- Steam or hot-water radiators vary — check the thermostat's compatibility list first.

The easiest way to check is right on the thermostat makers' websites, which offer a compatibility tool: you enter the wires you see behind your old thermostat and it tells you whether their model fits. Do that before you buy, not after. A thermostat that will not power up is a frustrating return trip.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If the wiring looks unfamiliar or the system is old, bring in a heating pro rather than guessing. Miswiring a thermostat can damage an expensive furnace. When unsure, get a hand.

THERMOSTAT, STEP BY STEP

# 19 Installing and Setting a Safe Floor

Fitting a smart thermostat is a careful but doable job once you have confirmed it fits. The golden rule is to cut the power first and to label the wires as you go. Take a photo of the old wiring before you touch it — that single photo is your map back if anything confuses you.

1. Turn off the power to the heating system at the breaker.

2. Take a clear photo of the old thermostat's wiring before removing it.
3. Label each wire with the sticker provided, then disconnect and remove the old unit.
4. Mount the new base and connect each wire to its matching labeled terminal.
5. Attach the new thermostat, restore power, and follow the app to connect it to Wi-Fi.
6. Set a low safe-temperature floor for vacancies, and a low-temperature alert.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Keep the old thermostat in a labeled bag. If you ever sell or a system is replaced, having the original on hand is useful, and it costs nothing to keep.

With the thermostat connected, you can set and forget a vacancy schedule, then adjust it from your phone the day a showing is booked. The empty unit stays protected without a single drive across town.

VACANCY

20

# Protecting an Empty Unit From a Freeze

A burst pipe is one of the worst surprises an owner can face. Water finds its way into walls, floors, and the unit below, and the repair dwarfs any heating bill. The good news is that a frozen pipe is almost always preventable, and smart tech makes prevention nearly automatic.

- Hold a vacant unit above freezing with the thermostat, not off entirely, in cold weather.
- Turn on a low-temperature alert so you hear the moment the heat fails.
- Consider a simple smart leak sensor near the water heater or under a sink for early warning.
- If a hard freeze is forecast and you worry, you can let a tap drip and open cabinet doors.
- Know where the unit's water shutoff is, so you can act fast if a sensor warns you.

The thermostat and a leak sensor together give you two layers: one keeps the heat from falling, the other warns you if water appears anyway. For a few small devices, you buy yourself real protection against a repair that could run into the thousands. That is a trade any careful owner takes gladly.

**TIP**

Check your vacant units' alerts at the start of every cold stretch. A quick glance to confirm the heat is on and the alert is armed is a small habit that prevents a large disaster.

LOCK BRANDS

21

# Lock Brands an Owner Will Meet

You do not need to memorize brands, but it helps to know the landscape. Smart locks split into the two families we met earlier: full keypad deadbolts, which replace the lock, and retrofits, which clip over an existing one. As an owner, the keypad deadbolts are usually your pick, because the outside keypad is what lets a worker in with no key and no app.

- Keypad deadbolts that replace the lock: Schlage Encode and many Yale Assure models. Sturdy, with an outside keypad for codes.
- Retrofit interior locks: August, SwitchBot, and similar, which keep your existing keyed outside and thumb-turn.
- Many keypad locks also keep a physical key as backup — handy for you to hold.
- Some tie into a wider system, so a lock, camera, and doorbell share one app.

For a rental, a keypad deadbolt like the Schlage Encode or a Yale Assure keypad model is the natural choice, precisely because it replaces the lock and gives you a keypad on the door. A retrofit is better suited to a tenant who cannot change the hardware. Since you own the door, you get to pick the sturdier option.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

Pick one lock brand and stick with it across your units. One app, one way of making codes, one set of batteries to stock. Consistency makes you faster at every turnover.

CAMERA BRANDS

## 22 Outdoor Camera Brands an Owner Will Meet

Outdoor cameras come from a handful of well-known makers, and most do the core job well. The differences are in battery versus plug-in, how video history is stored, and whether you want everything in one app. Remember, whichever you choose, the rule is unchanged: exterior and shared areas only.

- Ring: doorbells and stick-up cameras, battery or plug-in, with a recognizable app.
- Blink: runs long on simple batteries, budget-friendly for a basic exterior view.
- eufy: often stores video on the device itself, which can mean no monthly fee for history.
- Arlo and Wyze: more weatherproof battery and plug-in options at a range of prices.
- Live view and alerts are usually free; saved video history usually needs a small monthly plan.

For a landlord, the practical questions are two. Does the camera reach the property's Wi-Fi from where you want to mount it? And do you need saved video history, which usually means a small monthly fee, or is a live view and an alert enough? Answer those and the brand almost chooses itself.

> **TIP**
>
> If you dislike monthly fees, look at a camera that records to a card or a base station on-site, so you own the footage without a subscription. Just make sure it is stored securely.

THERMOSTAT BRANDS

## 23 Thermostat Brands and the Fit Question

Smart thermostats come from a few trusted makers, and for an owner the headline question is always fit, not features. The fanciest thermostat is useless if it will not power up on your furnace. So start with the maker's compatibility check, then pick the model that suits the unit.

- The major makers all offer online compatibility checkers — use one before buying.

- For a vacant-unit floor temperature, you need remote control and a low-temperature alert, not every bell and whistle.
- A simpler model with reliable scheduling often beats a feature-packed one for a rental.
- Electric baseboard or line-voltage heat needs a specialized thermostat, not a standard smart one.

Because thermostats touch the heating system directly, this is the one device where matching the hardware matters more than the brand. A reliable, remotely controlled thermostat that holds a safe temperature and warns you of a freeze is exactly what a rental needs. Leave the elaborate home-automation features for a home you live in.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If a unit's heat is baseboard or radiator and no smart thermostat fits, you can still protect it with a simple smart temperature sensor that alerts you when the room gets too cold.

ONE APP

## 24 Keeping Accounts and Apps Simple

Every smart device comes with its own app and account, and left unchecked you can end up juggling a dozen. The way to stay sane is to decide, up front, how few apps you can live with. Some owners pick one brand that makes locks, cameras, and more, so a single app covers a unit. Others accept two or three apps but keep them all under one email they control.

- Favor one brand family per unit where you can, so one app runs more devices.
- Use a single owner email and strong password across your device accounts.
- Write down which unit uses which app and account, in a simple list you keep safe.
- Turn on the app's two-step login, so a stolen password alone cannot get in.

A short written list — unit, device, app, account email — is worth its weight in gold. When you are standing at a door wondering which app opens this lock, that list answers it instantly. Keep it somewhere private but reachable, not taped to the unit.

**TIP**

Treat your device accounts like your bank login. A strong, unique password and two-step verification on each one keeps your doors and cameras truly in your hands.

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**WI-FI**

## 25 The Unit Needs Internet for Smart Devices

Every one of these devices — lock, camera, thermostat — leans on an internet connection to reach your phone. That raises a practical question for an owner: whose internet are they using? In a vacant unit, there may be no Wi-Fi at all. In an occupied one, the tenant's Wi-Fi is theirs, and you should not expect to run your devices on it.

- A device needs Wi-Fi where it is mounted — check the signal reaches the door or thermostat.
- In a vacant unit you control, you may keep a basic internet line for your own devices.
- Do not plan to run owner devices on a tenant's personal Wi-Fi.
- Some locks work locally for codes even if Wi-Fi drops, but you lose remote control until it returns.

The cleanest arrangement is a small internet connection that is yours, serving the devices you own, separate from whatever the tenant arranges for themselves. In a single-family rental that may not be practical, in which case you and the tenant agree in writing how the owner devices connect. Sort this out before you mount anything.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

A lock that keeps working for codes even when the internet drops is a real comfort. You lose the remote view until the connection returns, but no one gets locked out in the meantime.

THE LEASE

## 26 Writing Smart Tech Into the Lease

The surest way to avoid a dispute is to put the smart devices in the lease from the start. A tenant who signs knowing there is a keypad lock and an exterior camera has agreed to it in writing. A tenant who discovers a camera they were never told about, on the other hand, has every reason to be upset — and may have a legal complaint.

- State that the unit has a smart lock, and explain how the tenant gets and uses their code.
- Name any exterior or shared-area camera and what it watches.
- Make clear the tenant may not remove, disable, or cover the owner's devices.
- Say who controls the device accounts — you, the owner — and that the tenant keeps their own code private.
- Spell out that no camera watches inside the unit.

Leases and their requirements vary by state and locality, so treat this as a conversation with your own attorney rather than a template to copy. The goal is simply that nothing about the technology is a surprise. Surprises are where trust and legal standing both break down.

> **TIP**
>
> Have your attorney review your lease language on smart devices once. A single careful review protects you across every tenant who signs afterward.

DISCLOSURE

## 27 Telling Tenants in Writing

Disclosure is the companion to the lease. Even beyond the signed document, good practice — and in many places the law — is to tell tenants plainly, in writing, about any device that could affect their privacy, especially a camera. Doing so is not just legally wise. It builds the trust that keeps a tenancy smooth.

- Tell tenants, in writing, about any camera covering an area they use.

- Explain what the camera sees and, just as important, what it does not — never inside their unit.
- Let them know the smart lock keeps a record of code use, so there are no surprises.
- Give them a clear way to reach you with any privacy concern.

Frame it as protection for everyone, because it is. A camera on a shared entry deters break-ins and package theft that would hurt the tenant too. When you present it that way, in the open, most tenants welcome it. The trouble only ever comes from devices discovered rather than disclosed.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Never install a hidden camera anywhere a tenant could expect privacy. A secret camera is the fastest way to turn a minor convenience into a serious legal problem. Everything out in the open, always.

THE LAW

## 28 Rules Vary — Check Your State

Landlord-tenant law is a patchwork. What is perfectly fine in one state may be restricted in the next, and local rules can add another layer. This guide stays general on purpose, because the only responsible specific advice is: check the rules where your property sits, and when a question has real stakes, ask a local attorney.

- Camera placement, audio recording, and notice requirements all vary by state and locality.
- Some places require written notice before certain changes; some govern entry to a unit.
- An HOA or condo board may add rules about exterior devices on shared walls or common areas.
- When the answer isn't clear, a short consult with a local attorney settles it cheaply.

There is one federal thread worth knowing as background: a longstanding rule protects small satellite dishes and antennas placed in a resident's own exclusive-use area. That is a tenant protection, not a landlord tool, but it is the kind of rule that surprises owners, so it is worth being aware the layers exist. Beyond awareness, leave the legal reading to a professional.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

Treat 'it varies — check locally' not as a dodge but as the honest truth. The owners who get into trouble are usually the ones who assumed the rule in their town matched a rule they read somewhere else.

SAFETY & SCAMS

29

# Protecting Your Accounts

Your locks and cameras are only as safe as the accounts behind them. A weak password or a clicked scam link can hand a stranger the keys to your rental. The threats are rarely clever hackers; they are reused passwords and pushy messages. A few plain habits keep you safe.

- Use a long, unique password on every device account, and turn on two-step login.
- Never set up or change a device from a link in a text or email — go straight to the official app.
- No real company will call and ask for your account password. Hang up.
- Keep the device apps updated, since updates often fix security holes.

**WATCH OUT**

If a message says your lock or camera account has a 'problem' and you must 'verify' your password through a link, it is a scam. The real company never works that way. Slow down and go to the app yourself.

The same caution applies to who you share codes with. A code is access to someone's home. Send it only to people you have hired and verified, and remove it the moment the job is done. Treating every code as seriously as a key keeps the whole system trustworthy.

TENANT PRIVACY

## 30 Respecting the People Who Live There

It is worth pausing on the human side, because it is easy for an owner to think only about control. A smart lock can show you when a code was used. A camera can show you a shared entry. Both are reasonable. But a tenant's home is their home, and the comings and goings of their private life are not yours to watch.

- Use lock records to manage access and turnover, not to monitor a tenant's daily movements.
- Keep every camera on shared and exterior space, never aimed to study who visits a tenant.
- Do not use your remote access to enter a unit without the notice your state requires.
- If a tenant raises a privacy worry, hear it out and address it promptly.

The irony is that respecting privacy also protects you. An owner who clearly uses these tools for their proper purpose — access and the safety of shared space — has nothing to answer for. An owner who oversteps invites complaints, bad feeling, and legal risk. The restrained path is both the right one and the safe one.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A good test before any action: would you be comfortable explaining it to the tenant to their face? If yes, you are almost certainly on the right side of the line.

MULTI-UNIT

## 31 When You Have More Than One Door

Several units multiply the value of smart tech, but only if you keep it organized. The owner with four doors and four different lock brands, each in its own app, soon gives up. The owner who standardized on one lock, one camera line, and one thermostat across all four spends a minute per turnover and never thinks about it.

- Standardize on one lock brand, one camera line, and one thermostat across units.
- Name every device clearly by unit — 'Unit 2 front door,' not 'front door.'
- Keep one master list of units, devices, apps, and accounts in a safe place.

- Stock the batteries your chosen devices use, so a dead battery is a five-minute fix.

Common areas in a small multi-unit — a shared entry, a laundry room, a parking lot — are where exterior cameras earn their keep, because they protect every tenant at once. Just keep each lens on the shared space and away from any unit's door that faces inward. Shared-area coverage, handled openly, is usually welcomed by tenants.

> **TIP**
>
> Set a yearly reminder to check batteries and firmware across all your units on one date. Batching the maintenance means it actually gets done, instead of waiting for a device to fail.

TENANT DEVICES

## 32 When a Tenant Wants Their Own

Sooner or later a tenant will ask to add their own smart device — a video doorbell, a camera, a smart thermostat. This is usually a good sign: they care about the place. Your job is to set fair, clear limits so their additions do not damage the property or cross the same privacy lines you respect yourself.

- Let them know, in writing, what they may add and how it must be installed without damage.
- A renter-safe doorbell or camera that clips on and leaves no holes is usually fine on their own door.
- Their device points at their own entry — the same rule applies to them as to you about shared space.
- Their device, their account; they take it and restore the original when they leave.
- Say clearly that they may not alter or replace the owner's lock without permission.

Think of it as two sets of devices living politely side by side: yours, which you control and keep at turnover, and theirs, which they control and take with them. As long as each stays on its own account and respects everyone's privacy, both can coexist happily.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

A tenant who invests in a doorbell for their own door is helping watch your property too. Welcome it within fair limits rather than forbidding it outright.

INSURANCE

33

# Talk to Your Agent About the Upgrades

Smart devices touch your insurance in two ways, and both are worth a short call to your agent. First, some safeguards — a leak sensor, a monitored camera — may earn a discount or at least sit well with an insurer. Second, your coverage expectations should match reality, so your agent should know what is installed.

- Ask whether leak sensors, smart locks, or monitored cameras affect your policy or premium.
- Confirm the camera footage you keep is stored in a way your insurer and the law accept.
- Remember the landlord's policy covers the building; a tenant's belongings are their own insurance.
- Keep records of what you installed, in case they matter to a future claim.

This guide does not give insurance or legal advice, and it cannot, because policies and rules differ for everyone. The one solid recommendation is simply to tell your agent what you are doing and ask how it fits your coverage. A five-minute call answers questions that otherwise only surface at claim time.

**TIP**

Keep a simple folder — photos of each device, where it is, and when you installed it. If you ever file a claim, that folder turns a long conversation into a short one.

COMMON WORRIES

# 34 Common Worries, Answered

Owners tend to circle the same few questions before they begin. Here are plain answers to the ones that come up most.

- What if the battery dies and a tenant is locked out? Keypad locks keep a physical key backup, and warn you well before the battery is empty.
- Can I watch a tenant to catch a lease violation? No — cameras stay on shared and exterior space, never inside a unit.
- What if the Wi-Fi goes down? Locks still work by code locally; you lose only the remote view until it returns.
- Do I have to tell tenants about a camera? In many places, yes, and it is always the wise thing — tell them in writing.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> There is no wrong place to start. Even one keypad lock on one door, set up well, saves you a rekey at the next turnover. Begin small.

If a worry is holding you back, that is normal. The answer is usually simpler than the fear, and you can always talk it through with someone who has set these up before you commit.

A SIMPLE START

# 35 If You Only Do Three Things

Maybe the whole guide feels like a lot. That is fine. If you do nothing else, do these three, and you will have the most useful parts of a landlord's smart setup in place.

1. Fit one keypad deadbolt on one unit's entry door, so you give out codes instead of keys.
2. Set up the account under your own email, with a strong password and two-step login.
3. In your next cold vacancy, add a smart thermostat and turn on a low-temperature alert.

That is a complete, working start. The cameras, the multi-unit standardizing, the lease language — all of it makes the system better, but those three steps alone end the rekeying treadmill and protect an empty unit from a freeze. Everything else can follow at your pace.

**WATCH OUT**

Done is better than perfect. One lock you actually fit this season beats an elaborate plan you never start. Begin with a single door.

FINISH THE JOB

36

# Finish the Job Soon

You now know the whole plan. Pick one unit. Fit a keypad lock and run it under your own account.

Add an exterior camera where it helps, aimed only at shared space. Put a smart thermostat in your next cold vacancy and arm a low-temperature alert. Write the devices into your lease and tell your tenants in the open.

That is the entire job.

If any step gives you pause — choosing a lock, checking whether a thermostat fits, aiming a camera so it stays on the right side of the line — that is exactly the kind of thing I help owners with. There is no such thing as a silly question here, and getting it right the first time is far easier with a hand.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

You do not have to remember all of it. You just have to remember you can call. Friendly, in-home help, and I come to you — (330) 200-8042.

Setting your rental up this way is one of the most practical upgrades you can make as an owner. Take the afternoon. Finish the job on one door. Then copy what works to the next, knowing the hard part is already behind you.

CHEAT SHEET

# Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

| I want to... | Do this... |
|---|---|
| End the rekey treadmill | Fit a keypad deadbolt; give out codes, not keys |
| Let a cleaner or pro in | Create a named, scheduled or one-time code in the app |
| Reset a unit at turnover | Delete all old codes, make new ones, change the app password |
| Keep control at turnover | Register every owner device under your own email, not a tenant's |
| Watch the property safely | Cameras on exterior and shared areas only — never inside a unit |
| Protect an empty unit | Smart thermostat holding a safe floor, plus a low-temperature alert |
| Stay on the right side of the law | Rules vary — check your state, disclose to tenants in writing |
| Avoid an account scam | No company asks for your password by link or call — go to the app |
| Get help | Call Bill: (330) 200-8042 |

AT A GLANCE

# A Picture to Follow Along

## Three Jobs, One Phone

As the owner, you handle three things from an app — safely and from anywhere.

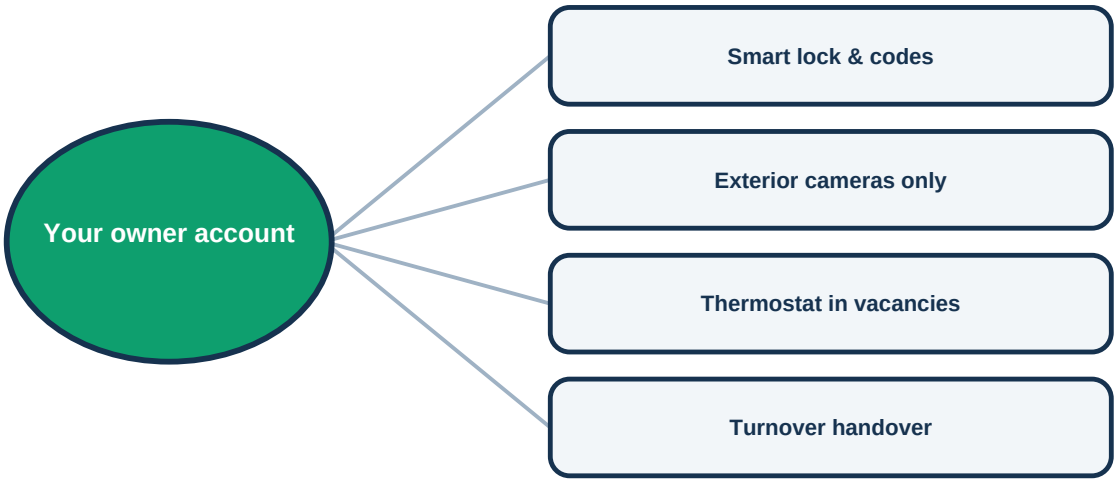



Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

# A Second Look

## The Owner's Plan, Step by Step

Do one door at a time — there is no rush to wire up everything.

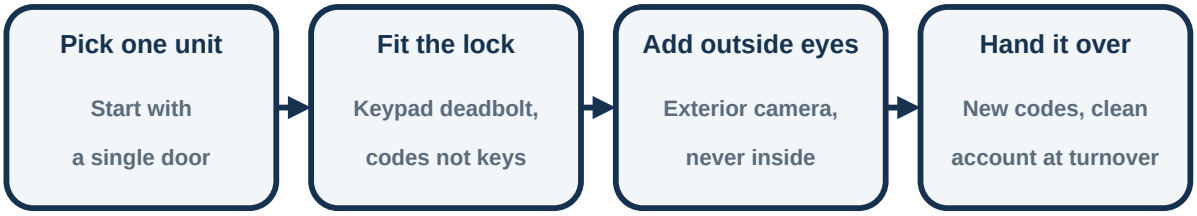



**Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.**

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

# 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 results.

HOW I CAN HELP

# Your Visit — and My Promise

*You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.*

**KEY SPECS**

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

Call or text (330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com

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