



An Extended Guide · No. 1231

First Start and Breaking In a New Generator

Getting your new generator
ready the right way

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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. Even on day one, before the generator has done a lick of work for you, that rule already applies — so let's start this new relationship with it safely, outdoors, right from the very first pull.

Welcome to your new generator

That box in your garage or driveway is about to become one of the more reassuring things you own — but the first day matters more than people expect. A few things done right now save headaches (and maybe an engine) for years to come.

I'm Bill, and I've walked a lot of folks through their first start. It's a genuinely exciting day, and also one where a little bit of care up front pays off for as long as you own the machine.

This guide is written for the first hours and first weeks with a new generator: what to do before you ever pull the cord, the first start itself, and the one easy-to-miss step — the break-in oil change — that protects the engine for the long haul.

★ Text me a photo of the label before day one

If you'd like a second set of eyes before your first start, snap a photo of the generator's data label and text it to me at (330) 200-8042. I'll help you make sure you're set up right from the start.

The whole guide, on one page

If you only take away a handful of things from this guide, make it these.

- ❑ Most new generators ship dry — with no oil in the engine. Check and fill before the very first start.
- ❑ Use fresh fuel, not something that's been sitting in a can for months.
- ❑ The first start happens outdoors, 20 or more feet from the house, with nothing plugged in yet.
- ❑ Plan an early break-in oil change after the first few hours of running — follow your manual's exact number.
- ❑ Run it under a small real load before you trust it, rather than finding out during an actual outage.
- ❑ Register the warranty and keep the manual somewhere you'll actually find it again.
- ❑ Do this whole routine on a calm day, not in the middle of a storm.

✓ Read the manual's first-start section first

Every model has its own quirks — some want the choke set a certain way, some have a specific break-in interval. Five minutes with the manual before you start saves guesswork later.

It ships dry — read that again

This is the single most important thing to know before you touch the pull cord or the start button.

To prevent leaks and damage in shipping, most small engines — including your new generator — leave the factory with no oil in them at all. Running an engine dry, even for a few seconds, can score the internal parts and shorten its life dramatically, sometimes on day one.

So before anything else: find the oil fill on your generator (the manual will show you exactly where), and fill it with the type and amount the manual calls for. Some manufacturers include a bottle of oil in the box; many don't. Either way, don't assume — check.

! Never skip the oil check on a new unit

It's tempting to just fill the tank and go, especially if you're eager to see it run. Please don't. A generator started dry can be damaged in seconds, and that damage is often not something a warranty forgives.

What's in the box, and what isn't

Before you do anything else, take a few minutes to unpack calmly and take stock.

Lay everything out and check it against the manual's parts list. Look the generator over for any shipping damage — dents, cracked plastic, a loose part rattling inside. If anything looks off, it's much easier to sort out with the seller before you've started the engine than after.

- Find the manual. If it's missing, most manufacturers post a digital copy on their website using the model number.
- Locate the oil fill, the fuel fill, the choke, and the ignition switch or start button.
- Look for the data label listing the model and serial number, and take a photo of it for your records.
- Check whether a funnel, oil bottle, or tool kit is included, or whether you'll need your own.
- See if there's a reset button for a tripped low-oil or CO shutoff — handy to know where it is before you ever need it.

✓ Photograph the serial number now

Do this before the label gets greasy or scratched up from years of use. It's the first thing you'll need for a warranty claim or a parts order down the road.

Step one: the right oil

With the engine confirmed empty, filling it correctly is the real first step of owning a generator.

Use whatever grade and amount your manual specifies — a common grade for small engines is 10W-30, but follow your manual rather than assuming, since it varies by model and climate. Check the level with the dipstick or sight glass the way the manual describes, usually with the generator sitting level.

How much is enough

Small engines don't take much oil, and overfilling can cause its own problems, like smoking or a rough run. Fill slowly, check often, and stop right at the mark the manual shows — more isn't better here.

✓ Keep a rag handy

Checking oil is a little bit of a messy job the first few times. A shop rag or paper towels nearby saves your driveway and your patience.

Step two: fresh fuel

Oil gets the engine ready to run; fuel is what actually gets it started.

Use fresh fuel for the first fill — not a can that's been sitting in the shed since last season. Gasoline goes stale within a matter of months and can gum up a brand-new carburetor just as easily as an old one. If you're using gasoline, consider adding stabilizer right from this first fill, especially if the generator will mostly sit and wait between outages. Our fuel-types guide covers the gasoline, propane, and dual-fuel choice in more depth, and our fuel-storage guide covers keeping whatever you choose fresh over time.

If your generator runs on propane, you're in luck for freshness — propane doesn't go stale the way gasoline does, so a fresh tank today will still be fresh whenever you need it.

✓ Don't overfill the tank

Leave a little room for the fuel to expand, especially in warm weather. Filling to the very brim is a common first-day habit worth avoiding.

The first start

With oil in and fresh fuel ready, you're finally ready for the moment you bought this thing for.

Set the generator up outside, at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away from any window, door, or vent — yours and the neighbor's. Make this an ironclad habit starting today, because it's the same setup you'll use in a real outage, half-asleep and stressed. Practicing it now, calm and unhurried, is exactly the point.

- ❑ Set it up outdoors, 20+ feet from the house, exhaust pointed away.
- ❑ Confirm nothing is plugged into it yet.
- ❑ Open the fuel valve and set the choke as the manual describes for a cold start.
- ❑ Flip the run switch or ignition to on.
- ❑ Start it with the electric start or the pull cord, following the manual's steps.

! Outdoors, every single time, starting today

This is the same rule that applies for the life of the generator: never indoors, in a garage, shed, carport, basement, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan running. Building the habit on day one makes it automatic when it counts.

Let it run a few minutes first

Resist the urge to plug something in the second it fires up.

Let the engine run for a few minutes at idle, unloaded, so it can warm up and settle into a steady rhythm. Listen for a smooth, even sound rather than surging or sputtering, and take a look underneath for any drips of oil or fuel.

This is also a good moment to double-check that nothing feels off — an odd smell, an unusual vibration, excessive smoke from the exhaust (a little at first start is normal and should clear). If everything seems calm and steady, you're ready for the next step.

✓ A little smoke at first start is normal

Don't be alarmed by a brief puff of smoke or a slightly rough first few seconds. It usually settles down quickly. Smoke that continues or gets heavier is worth stopping to investigate.

The break-in oil change — don't skip this one

If this guide has one page to bookmark, it's this one. It's the step new owners are most likely to forget.

As a brand-new engine breaks in during its first few hours of running, tiny metal particles come off the moving parts as they wear against each other and settle into the oil. That first batch of oil is doing real, dirty work — and it isn't meant to stay in the engine for the long haul. Your manual will specify a break-in interval, often measured in a small number of running hours, at which point that first oil should be drained and replaced.

This early change matters more than any oil change you'll do for the rest of the generator's life, because it clears out those fine particles before they can do any wear on the engine over the long run. After this one, you'll settle into the regular schedule covered in our maintenance guide.

! Mark your calendar now, while you're thinking about it

It's easy to run a new generator a few times, feel good about it, and forget the break-in change entirely. Write the target hours or date somewhere you'll actually see it — on the generator itself, if that helps.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The first-day routine is the same everywhere, but what you're breaking the generator in for looks different depending on where you live.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, your first test run is likely to be a fairly relaxed affair — a lamp, the fridge, maybe the internet box, in your own driveway on a nice afternoon.

- A small or mid-sized generator's break-in routine is quick, and the first test load is usually light and simple.
- This is a great chance to practice the whole outdoors setup, even though your actual outages are likely shorter.
- Use the calm first run to figure out where it'll live day to day and how you'll wheel it out.
- If cords are your whole plan, this is the day to test them too, not just the generator.

If you are out in the country on a well

On a well, the stakes of getting this right are a little higher — a generator that's going to run a well pump and maybe a whole panel deserves an unhurried first day.

- If a transfer switch or interlock is part of your plan, coordinate your first real test with your electrician's visit so you can see the whole system work together.
- Test with the well pump specifically in mind, since it's usually the biggest surge in the house.
- Longer, more serious outages ahead mean the break-in oil change and the ongoing maintenance habit both matter even more.
- Walk through the whole outdoor setup with whoever else in the house might need to start it someday too.

★ Want a hand with the first run?

I'm glad to come out for your very first start, especially if a well pump or a panel hookup is part of the plan. We'll do the oil, the fuel, the first test, and the labeling together. Call (330) 200-8042.

Your first test run under some load

An unloaded generator running smoothly in the driveway is a good sign, but it hasn't really been tested yet.

Once the engine has warmed up and is running steady, plug in something small first — a lamp or a fan — and watch how the generator handles it. Then, if you're comfortable, add something with a real motor in it, like the refrigerator, so you can see it handle an honest starting surge.

- Start with a light load, then add a motor-driven appliance to see a real surge in action.
- Watch and listen for the engine to dip and recover smoothly, not strain or stall.
- This is a good day to test whatever cords or hookup you plan to actually use in an outage.
- If anything trips, stalls, or seems overwhelmed, that's useful information now — much better to learn it today than during a storm.

✓ This is confidence-building, not just testing

There's real peace of mind in knowing, ahead of time, exactly what your generator can handle and exactly how to hook it up. That's worth an afternoon.

Reading the manual, really

I know — nobody wants to hear 'read the manual.' But for a generator, it earns the ten minutes.

Every model has its own specifics: oil grade and capacity, break-in interval, choke positions for a cold versus warm start, and what its warning lights or shutoff indicators mean. A generator isn't the place to rely on general knowledge from a different machine you've owned.

Keep the manual somewhere you'll actually find it during an outage, not just in a drawer you forget about. Some folks tape a laminated quick-start card to the generator itself, and keep the full manual in the same spot as their other important papers.

✓ Snap photos of the key pages

A few photos of the oil-fill instructions, break-in interval, and troubleshooting page on your phone means you'll have them even if the paper manual goes missing.

Registering the warranty

This is the kind of task that's easy to put off and then forget entirely — do it this week, while it's fresh.

Registering typically takes a few minutes online or by mail and starts your official coverage on record with the manufacturer. Keep your receipt and the date of purchase together with the manual, since you may need them if you ever have a warranty claim.

This is also a good moment to jot down the purchase date and where you bought it, in the same place you're keeping the manual and the serial number photo. Future you, dealing with a hiccup years from now, will be grateful.

✓ A simple folder does the trick

A single folder or envelope with the receipt, the manual, and a photo of the data label covers you for years, and it takes five minutes to set up today.

Labeling the outlets

A generator you can operate calmly, without hunting for the right switch, is a generator you'll actually use well when it matters.

Take a few minutes with a label maker or painter's tape and a marker to mark what each outlet, switch, or breaker does — especially if a transfer switch or interlock is part of your setup. During a real outage, in the dark, in the cold, tired, is not the time to be figuring this out for the first time.

- Label which outlet is which, especially if there's more than one type.
- If you have a 240-volt outlet for a hookup, mark it clearly and separately from the household outlets.
- At the panel, if you have a transfer switch or interlock, label which breakers are on the generator circuit.
- Consider a simple laminated card near the generator listing the start-up steps in order.

✓ Do this with whoever else might need to run it

If a spouse, adult child, or neighbor might ever need to start this generator without you there, walk them through it now and make the labels for them too, not just for yourself.

A calm dry run before you ever need it

Here's the whole point of everything in this guide: do all of this on a calm, ordinary day, not for the first time during a storm.

Pick an afternoon with nothing else going on. Walk through the entire routine, start to finish — setting it up outside, starting it, plugging in a real load, running it for a while, and shutting it down properly. Time yourself, even, so you know roughly how long the whole process takes.

By the time you actually need this generator, you want the whole routine to feel familiar, almost boring. That's the goal — boring, calm, practiced, not a stressful first encounter in the middle of bad weather.

★ I love helping with this one

A guided dry run is one of my favorite visits — we set it up together, you get comfortable with every step, and by the time I leave, you genuinely know your generator. Call (330) 200-8042 to schedule one.

Common first-day mistakes

A short list of the slip-ups that account for most of the frustration (and the occasional damaged engine) I see with brand-new generators.

- **Starting it dry** because the box didn't obviously say 'add oil first.' Always check.
- **Using old fuel** left over from another gas can in the garage, because it seemed wasteful not to use it up.
- **Skipping the break-in oil change** because the generator 'seems to be running fine.'
- **Running the first test indoors or in the garage** 'just for a minute' to see if it starts — don't. Outdoors, every time, starting now.
- **Never actually reading the manual**, and then guessing at oil grade, break-in interval, or choke settings.

! The mistake that costs the most

Starting a dry engine, even briefly, is the first-day mistake most likely to cause real, sometimes unrepairable damage. Every other item on this list costs you convenience; this one can cost you the engine.

What the first few weeks look like

Once the break-in oil change is behind you, the generator settles into an easier rhythm.

From here, you're moving from 'break-in' into ordinary upkeep — checking the oil before each use, running it under load every so often so it stays ready, and keeping an eye on fuel freshness. Our maintenance guide picks up exactly where this one leaves off and covers that ongoing rhythm in full.

Keep doing what you started here: a quick check before each run, a note of the date and hours, and outdoor-only starts every single time. The habits from week one are the habits that carry you through years of reliable use.

✓ Hang onto your break-in notes

Whatever you used to track the break-in hours and oil change makes a great start to an ongoing maintenance log. Keep it going rather than starting fresh.

If something seems off on day one

Most first-day hiccups are minor and have simple explanations. Here's where to look before you worry.

A generator that's hard to start cold, runs rough, or trips a shutoff on day one is usually pointing to something simple: the choke not set correctly for a cold start, a fuel valve left closed, the run switch not fully on, or a low-oil shutoff doing exactly its job because the level is a touch low. Walk the basics in order — fuel on, choke set, switch on, oil full — before assuming anything serious is wrong.

If it starts and runs but something plugged into it isn't getting power, check the outlet, the cord, and any breaker or GFCI button on the generator itself before assuming the generator is at fault.

✓ When to just call someone

If you smell gas, see sparks, notice damaged wiring, or anything just doesn't feel right, stop and call a pro rather than troubleshooting further yourself. There's no shame in that call, on day one or year ten.

Keep a simple startup log

A small habit that pays off for years: write down what happened, every time, starting with day one.

You don't need anything fancy — a notebook kept near the generator, or even a note on your phone, works fine. The goal is simply to have a running record you can trust instead of relying on memory.

- ☐ The date of the first start.
- ☐ The oil grade and amount used.
- ☐ The date (or hour-meter reading) of the break-in oil change.
- ☐ Any hiccups on day one and how they were resolved.
- ☐ The date you registered the warranty.

✓ An hour meter makes this even easier

If your model has a built-in hour meter, use its reading instead of dates wherever you can — it's a more honest measure of wear than the calendar, especially if you run the generator unevenly through the year.

Your first-week checklist, all in one place

Keep this page handy until every box is checked.

- ☐ Oil filled to the level the manual specifies.
- ☐ Fresh fuel added, with stabilizer if it's gasoline that may sit a while.
- ☐ First start completed outdoors, unloaded, 20+ feet from the house.
- ☐ Ran for several minutes at idle with no leaks or odd sounds noticed.
- ☐ Tested under a small real load, including something with a motor.
- ☐ Break-in oil change scheduled or completed, per the manual's interval.
- ☐ Warranty registered and paperwork filed together with the manual.
- ☐ Outlets, breakers, and switches labeled clearly.
- ☐ A calm, full dry run completed, start to finish.

★ Send me a photo when you're done

I love seeing folks get this right. If you'd like me to look over your setup once you've worked through this list, call or text (330) 200-8042 — I'm happy to help, even just by phone.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most often from folks on their first day with a new generator.

Q: Does every generator really ship without oil?

Almost all of them do, to prevent leaks and damage in shipping. Always check the manual and the dipstick or sight glass before the first start rather than assuming.

Q: How soon do I need to do the break-in oil change?

It varies by model — your manual will give the exact number of hours. It's typically early, within the first several hours of running, well before your first regular scheduled change.

Q: Can I just use whatever oil or gas I have in the garage?

Use the oil grade your manual specifies, and fresh fuel rather than something that's been sitting around. A brand-new engine isn't the place to cut corners on either.

Q: Do I have to run it under load on the first day, or can that wait?

It can technically wait, but I recommend doing it soon, on a calm day, so you know exactly how the generator behaves before you're depending on it in an actual outage.

Q: What if I already ran mine dry by mistake before realizing?

Stop using it and don't run it again. Call the manufacturer or a small-engine shop before any further use — running dry even briefly can cause damage that's worth having checked out.

★ First generator? You'll do great

Every new owner has questions on day one — that's completely normal. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 any time, and we'll get you started off right.

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 breaking in a new generator 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.

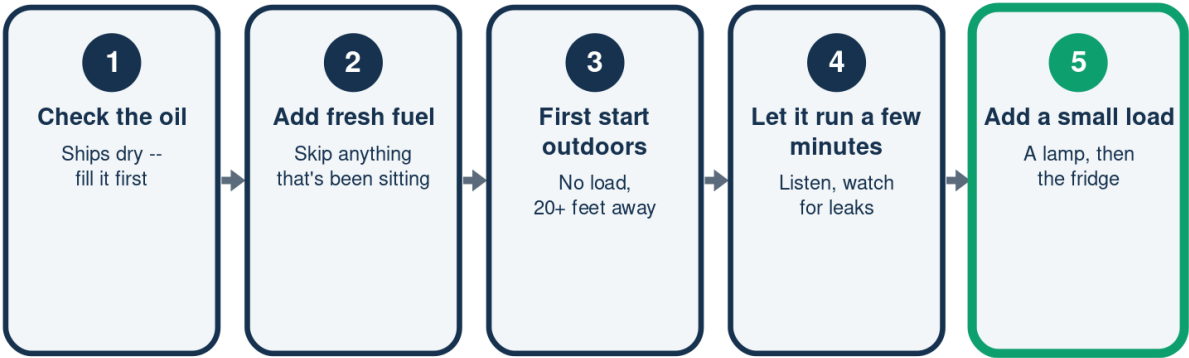
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

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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

Your First Day, Step by Step

The calm order that protects a brand-new engine



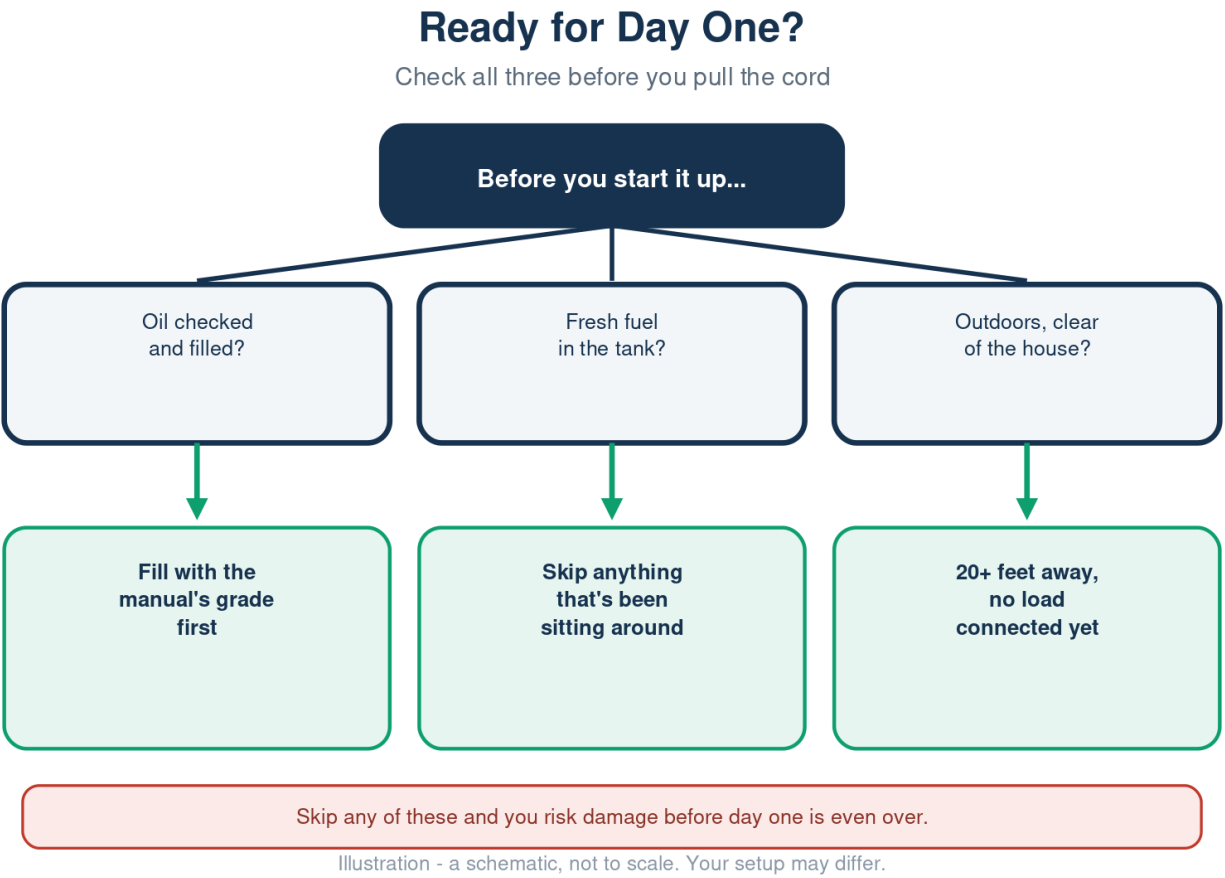
Do these in order and you're set up for years of easy starts.

Two Oil Fills That Matter Most

The first day, and the first few hours after

	When	Why It Matters
Before the first start	Ships dry	Engine needs it
The break-in change	First few hours	Clears metal bits
Every change after	On schedule	Keeps it healthy

Miss the break-in change and you skip the one that matters most.



New-Generator Paperwork Checklist

Small tasks now save headaches later

Task			Why It Matters
Register the warranty	Protects your		purchase
Save the receipt	Proof of		purchase date
Keep the manual handy	Your best		reference
Label the outlets	Fast, calm		use later

A folder with all four takes five minutes to set up.



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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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