BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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QR-Code Scams on Parking Meters, Flyers & Menus

Those little squares are just links in disguise — here's how to use them without getting caught

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

A QR code is just a web link hidden in a pattern of squares, so you can't tell a safe one from a fake by looking. Scammers paste their own codes over real ones, especially on parking meters, and on menus, flyers, and fake delivery notices, to send you to a page that steals your card or login.

Don't judge the code — judge where it takes you: when you scan, read the web address your phone shows and find the real name just before the '.com' before you type anything. For payments, skip the sign's code entirely and use the official app or website you trust. If a code already caught you, call your bank, change any password you entered, and report it at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

- A QR code is a link in disguise — check where it really goes.
- For payments, use the real app, not a code on a sign.
- Beware pasted-over stickers, especially on parking meters.

1 The Short Version

Those little square barcodes are everywhere now — on parking meters, restaurant menus, flyers, parcels, and posters. Point your phone's camera at one and it whisks you to a website. They're genuinely handy, which is exactly why scammers have started planting their own. A fake QR code can send you to a copycat payment page or a site that tries to steal your login or card details, and it's nearly impossible to tell a good code from a bad one just by looking.

The reassuring news: you don't have to judge the code. You judge where it takes you, before you type anything. This guide shows you the handful of places fake codes turn up, the habit that keeps you safe, and how to pay for parking or a meal without getting caught.

- A QR code is just a link in disguise — you can't tell a safe one from a fake by sight.
- Scammers stick fake codes over real ones, especially on parking meters and posters.

- Before you type anything, check the web address the code opened.
- When money's involved, use the official app or website instead of a code on a sign.

> **TIP**
> Here's the whole guide in one habit: treat a QR code like a stranger handing you a note with an address on it. You'd read the address before following it. Do the same — glance at the web address your phone shows before you go any further.

2 What a QR Code Really Is

A QR code is simply a web link written as a pattern of squares so a camera can read it. When you point your phone at one, it reads the hidden address and offers to open it. That's all it is — a shortcut to a website, no more trustworthy than any other link.

Because the address is hidden inside the pattern, you can't see where a code leads until your phone shows you. That's the catch scammers exploit: a fake code looks identical to a real one, but points somewhere harmful. Your safety comes from checking the address your phone reveals, not from the square itself.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> The term 'quishing' is sometimes used for QR-code phishing — phishing that arrives through a QR code instead of an email link. Same trick, same defenses: don't trust the link, check where it really goes.

3 Where Fake Codes Turn Up

Scammers put their codes where you're likely to scan without much thought, often in a hurry or outdoors.

- Parking meters and lots — a fake sticker over the real 'pay here' code sends your payment to the scammer.

- Restaurant menus and table tents — a swapped code leads to a fake payment or 'order' page.
- Flyers, posters, and yard signs — for 'deals,' events, or charities that don't exist.
- Parcels and 'missed delivery' notices left at your door — leading to fake fee-payment pages.
- Emails and letters that look official, using a code instead of a clickable link.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> The parking-meter trick is especially common because you're outdoors, rushed, and expecting to pay by phone. If a code is on a sticker that looks added-on or is peeling at the edges, be extra wary — scammers literally paste theirs over the real one.

4 The Habit That Keeps You Safe

One simple routine protects you from nearly every QR scam: look before you leap. When you scan a code, your phone shows you the web address before opening it — read it first.

1. Point your camera at the code, but don't rush to tap the link that pops up.
2. Read the web address shown in the little banner or preview. Look at the main part, just before '.com'.
3. Ask yourself: does this match the business or service I expect? A city parking site, say, not a random name.
4. If it looks odd, shortened, misspelled, or unrelated — don't open it.
5. When in doubt, skip the code entirely and go to the official app or website yourself.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> For anything involving payment or a login, the safest move is to not use the sign's code at all. Open the parking app you trust, or type the restaurant's or city's known website into your browser. A code is a convenience, never a requirement.

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.

5 Reading a Web Address Like a Pro

Knowing which part of a web address matters turns you into a quick, confident judge. The important part is the name right before the '.com' (or '.org', '.gov'), reading right to left.

- 'cityofkent.gov/parking' — the real part is 'cityofkent.gov'. Trustworthy-looking.
- 'kent-parking-pay.com' — a name dressed up to look official but isn't the city's real site. Be wary.
- 'pay.random-site.ru/kent' — the real part is 'random-site.ru'; 'kent' is just window dressing. Avoid.
- A '.gov' address is reserved for genuine government bodies, so a city parking site ending in '.gov' is a good sign.

GOOD TO KNOW

Scammers love to stuff a trusted word like your bank's or city's name into the early part of an address, where it means nothing. Always find the real name just before the '.com' — that's the part that can't be faked.

6 What a Fake Page Tries to Get

If you do land on a scam page, knowing what it's after helps you recognize it and back out in time.

- Your card number, 'to pay' for parking, a delivery fee, or a meal.
- Your login for a bank, email, or shopping account, through a fake sign-in screen.
- Personal details — address, date of birth — 'to confirm your identity.'

- Permission to install an app, or a prompt to 'update' something to continue.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Be very suspicious of any parcel or delivery notice asking you to pay a small 'redelivery' or 'customs' fee by scanning a code. Real carriers rarely chase small fees this way, and the page exists only to grab your card.

7 Paying for Parking Without the Risk

Parking is where most people meet these scams, so it's worth a clear routine. You can pay safely every time with a couple of habits.

1. Favor the official parking app for your town or the meter's listed company — download it from the App Store or Play Store, not from a code on the pole.
2. If you must scan the meter's code, check the address carefully before entering anything.
3. Watch for stickers that look added-on, crooked, or peeling — a classic sign of a pasted-over fake.
4. When unsure, pay with coins or a card at the machine if that option exists, or find a staffed lot.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Once you've set up and signed into your town's real parking app, you can ignore the meter codes entirely from then on. A one-time setup turns a daily risk into a non-issue.

8 Dining Out and Menus

Scan-to-see-the-menu is common and usually harmless, but scan-to-pay deserves more care.

- Viewing a menu by code is low-risk — you're just reading, not typing.

- If a code asks you to pay or 'start a tab,' check the address, or ask the staff for the real link or a card reader.
- Be wary of a menu code that leads to a login or asks for more than payment basics.
- A legitimate restaurant is happy to take your payment the normal way if you'd rather.

> **TIP**
> There's no shame in telling a server 'I'd rather not scan — can I pay with a card?' Staff hear it all the time, and it sidesteps any question about the code entirely.

9 If You Scanned and Entered Details

If you scanned a bad code and typed in card or login details, act quickly and be kind to yourself — these are built to look real.

1. If you entered card details, call your bank or card company right away to watch for and stop fraud, and consider a new card.
2. If you entered a password, change it on the real site immediately, and anywhere you reused it.
3. Turn on two-step verification for that account so a stolen password alone isn't enough.
4. If you installed anything, remove it and run your phone's built-in security check.
5. Report it to the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If you're not sure what you entered or what to change first, that's a perfect moment to call me. We'll figure out exactly what was exposed and lock it down in the right order, calmly.

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.

10 Codes in the Mail and at Your Door

Fake QR codes don't only live on public signs — they also arrive in your mailbox and on your doorstep, dressed up to look official. These deserve the same caution as any other code.

- A letter that looks like it's from a utility, the DMV, or the IRS, with a code to 'pay' or 'verify.'
- A 'missed delivery' slip on your door with a code to reschedule or pay a small fee.
- A parking ticket look-alike on your windshield with a code to pay the fine.
- A charity appeal with a code to donate — real-looking, but pointed at a scammer's account.

1. Don't scan the code; instead, reach the real organization through a number or website you look up yourself.
2. For a bill, log into your real account directly to check whether anything is actually owed.
3. For a delivery, use the carrier's own app or official tracking page.
4. When something arrives unexpectedly demanding payment, treat the surprise itself as the warning.

WATCH OUT

Government agencies and utilities don't usually demand payment through a QR code in a letter, and they never require gift cards or crypto. A mailed code that pressures you to pay quickly is a strong sign of a scam.

11 A Quick Word to Share With Family

QR codes feel modern and trustworthy, which is why a gentle reminder helps the people you care about.

- Share the one rule: a QR code is just a link — check the address before typing anything.
- For payments, use the real app or website, not a code on a sign.
- It's always fine to skip a code and pay the normal way.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Younger family members scan codes constantly and may assume they're always safe. A two-way reminder — you learn the check, they stay alert to pasted-over fakes — keeps everyone sharper.

12 Why QR Codes Are Worth a Second Look

QR codes spread quickly because they're genuinely useful, and that very usefulness is what scammers borrow. A little background helps you use them wisely rather than fearfully.

- They jumped into everyday life when restaurants and shops wanted touch-free menus and payments.
- People got used to scanning without thinking, which is exactly the habit scammers exploit.
- A sticker is cheap and easy to slap over a real code — no hacking required.
- Because the destination is hidden, the scam is invisible until your phone reveals the address.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Most QR codes are perfectly legitimate and save you real trouble. The point of this guide isn't to fear them — it's to add one quick glance at the address so the rare fake can't catch you.

13 Practice the Check Once

The address-reading habit feels unfamiliar the first time and automatic by the third. A little practice on safe codes builds the reflex.

1. Point your camera at a code you know is safe — a product box, a trusted flyer.
2. Before tapping, find where your phone shows the web address in a banner or preview.
3. Read the real name just before '.com' and notice how your phone presents it.
4. Do this a few times so that, out in the world, checking the address is second nature.

> **TIP**
>
> The exact spot where the address appears differs a little by phone, so it's worth finding yours once in a calm moment. Then at a parking meter, you'll know right where to look.

14 When to Call Bill

QR codes aren't going away, and most are perfectly fine — the goal is simply to use them with your eyes open. If you'd like help getting set up so you never have to worry at a meter or a table, that's a quick, practical visit.

I'll set up your town's real parking app and sign you in, show you exactly where your phone displays the web address so you can check it in a glance, and walk through the look-before-you-leap habit until it feels natural. And if a code has already caught you, I'll help you close any gaps fast.

- You want your real parking or payment apps set up so you can skip meter codes.
- You'd like to practice spotting a safe web address versus a fake one.
- You scanned a code and typed in details you're now worried about.
- You keep running into codes and want to feel confident around them.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Before you scan-and-pay anything, run down this list.

I want to...	Do this...
Scan safely	Read the web address your phone shows BEFORE opening it
Judge the address	Find the real name just before '.com' — does it match?
Pay for parking	Use the official app you downloaded, not a code on the pole
Spot a planted fake	Beware stickers that look added-on, crooked, or peeling
Handle a 'delivery fee' code	Ignore it — real carriers rarely chase fees this way
If you entered details	Call your bank, change the password, report at ReportFraud.ftc.gov
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

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

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