

Recording Live

THE 60-SECOND VERSION

- 1 The whole idea in a nutshell.
- 2 An over-the-air DVR records the free channels your antenna already receives.
- 3 The current (4th-generation) Tablo is the easy pick: no subscription for its DVR (confirm current).
- 4 It connects to your antenna and your home Wi-Fi, and streams to your TVs and phone.
- 5 It has built-in storage you can expand with a USB hard drive.
- 6 Alternatives include HDHomeRun (with Channels DVR); avoid the discontinued Fire TV Recast.

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Recording Live Antenna TV (Tablo and Simple DVRs)

Antenna TV A no-subscription DVR for your free over-the-air channels

————— An Extended Guide · No. 280 · NO. W1-10 —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

The whole idea in a nutshell.

- An over-the-air DVR records the free channels your antenna already receives.
- The current (4th-generation) Tablo is the easy pick: no subscription for its DVR (confirm current).
- It connects to your antenna and your home Wi-Fi, and streams to your TVs and phone.
- It has built-in storage you can expand with a USB hard drive.
- Alternatives include HDHomeRun (with Channels DVR); avoid the discontinued Fire TV Recast.
- No cable bill, no DVR bill The headline is that you can record free TV without paying monthly for either the channels or the DVR. That's the appeal in one sentence.

WELCOME

1.! Read this first — this records free TV, with no monthly bill

The whole appeal here is recording the free over-the-air channels your antenna already pulls in — the local ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and PBS — so you can pause live TV and record your shows, without a cable or satellite bill. The current Tablo even does its DVR with no subscription at all (confirm that's still true when you buy). If you've cut the cord, this is how you get the one thing people miss: a DVR. A DVR for your free antenna channels. You put up an antenna and love the free local channels — but you miss being able to record a show or pause live TV. That's exactly what an over-the-air DVR like Tablo brings back, with no monthly fee. I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County, Ohio. Plenty of folks here have cut cable and put up an antenna (see my antenna guides for the Cleveland and Akron channels). The one thing they miss is the DVR. This guide shows how to get it back — recording free TV, on your schedule. We'll cover how an over-the-air DVR works, why the current Tablo is the easy recommendation, the alternatives worth knowing, and how to set it up and watch on your TVs and phone. No subscriptions required for the main path. Want help choosing or setting one up? I'm glad to help you pick an over-the-air DVR and get it recording your local channels on every TV in the house. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

HOW IT WORKS

2. How an over-the-air DVR works

It sits between your antenna and your screens.

An over-the-air DVR is a small box with a tuner (or two, or four) inside. Your antenna plugs into it, and it joins your home Wi-Fi. It catches the free broadcast channels, records the shows you ask it to onto its storage, and then sends live or recorded TV out over your Wi-Fi to apps on your televisions and phones. The number of tuners is just how many channels it can handle at once — a two-tuner box can record two shows (or record one while you watch another), a four-tuner box four. For most households, two tuners are plenty; a busy family that records a lot might want four. Tuners = how many at once Think of tuners like lanes on a road: two tuners let you record two things (or record one and watch another) simultaneously. Most homes are happy with two.

THE TABLO

3. Why the current Tablo is the easy pick

No subscription, built-in storage, friendly apps.

The latest Tablo (its fourth generation) is the one I most often point folks to, for one big reason: its DVR needs no subscription — no monthly fee, no contract (do confirm this is still the case when you buy, since terms can change). It comes with built-in storage good for roughly fifty hours of recordings, and you can plug in a USB hard drive to hold far more. It connects to your antenna and Wi-Fi, carries a couple of weeks of on-screen TV guide so you can browse and schedule recordings, and even throws in dozens of free internet channels on top of your local ones. As a rough price (confirm current), the two-tuner model runs around \$100 and the four-tuner around \$140. Confirm 'no subscription' when you buy. The current Tablo's no-fee DVR is a genuine selling point, but older Tablo models did charge for the guide. Make sure you're getting the current (4th-generation) unit and that the no-subscription DVR still applies.

WHERE YOU WATCH

4. Watching on your TVs and phone

The box feeds every screen in the house over Wi-Fi.

You don't plug the Tablo directly into one TV. Instead, you add its free app to the streaming devices you already use — Roku, Amazon Fire TV, Google TV, Apple TV — and to your phone or tablet. Open the app and you get live local channels, the guide, and your recordings, on whichever screen you're at. That means one little box in the house serves the living-room TV, the bedroom TV, and your phone in the kitchen, all at once (up to the number of tuners for live channels). It's a tidy way to spread free TV and a DVR across the whole home without running cables everywhere. One box, every screen. Because it streams over your Wi-Fi, a single DVR box can feed every TV and phone in the house. Just add its app to each streaming stick you already have.

ANTENNA BASICS

5. A quick antenna refresher

The DVR is only as good as the antenna feeding it.

An over-the-air DVR records whatever your antenna receives, so a good antenna comes first. A flat indoor antenna in a window often does well if you're reasonably close to the broadcast towers; farther out, or in a valley, an attic or roof antenna reaches more reliably. Point it toward the towers (for us, generally the Cleveland and Akron area) and run a channel scan. My separate antenna guides cover choosing and aiming one for Portage County and the Cleveland-Akron channels — worth a read if you're starting from scratch. Once your antenna is pulling in solid channels, the DVR simply records them. Good antenna first, then the DVR. If some channels come in weak or pixelated on the antenna alone, the DVR will record them weak too. Get the antenna solid first — see my antenna guides — then add the recorder.

SETTING IT UP

6. Setting one up, step by step

An afternoon job, no cable installer required.

Place the DVR box near where your antenna cable ends and where it can reach your Wi-Fi (or an Ethernet cable to your router, which is even more reliable). Screw the antenna's coax cable into the box, plug in its power, and if you're adding a USB hard drive for more recording space, plug that in too. Then install the DVR's app on your phone or a streaming device, and let it walk you through connecting the box to Wi-Fi and scanning for channels. Once it finds your channels and downloads the guide, you're recording: browse the guide, pick a show, and choose record (or record the whole series). Wire it to the router if you can. If the DVR box can sit near your router, a short Ethernet cable between them makes streaming to your TVs rock-solid. Wi-Fi works too, but a wired box rarely stutters.

THE ALTERNATIVES

7. Other ways to record free TV

Tablo isn't the only path — here's the honest landscape.

- HDHomeRun (by SiliconDust): a networked tuner box that works with free or paid DVR software like Channels DVR, Plex, or its own app. More flexible and a favorite of tinkerers; a bit more setup. Confirm current models and prices.
- Channels DVR: polished DVR software (paired with an HDHomeRun) with a subscription for its guide and features — a step up in features and cost.
- A USB drive on some TVs: a few Samsung, LG, Fire, and Roku TVs can record live TV to a plugged-in USB drive. It's basic and availability varies by model and region — check your TV's manual.
- Fire TV Recast: Amazon's old over-the-air DVR, now discontinued — don't buy one new.
- Tablo for simple, HDHomeRun for flexible. If you want the simplest no-fee path, Tablo. If you're a tinkerer who wants to feed Plex or Channels DVR and don't mind more setup, HDHomeRun is the flexible choice.

STORAGE

8. How much recording space you need

Built-in is a start; a USB drive makes it generous.

The current Tablo's built-in storage holds around fifty hours of recordings — fine for keeping up with current shows. If you want to build a big library or record a lot of movies, plug a USB hard drive into the box; that can expand your space enormously (the Tablo supports large drives). A plain external USB hard drive from any electronics store works; you don't need anything special. Once attached and set up in the app, new recordings land on the bigger drive and you rarely think about space again. Add a USB drive for a real library. If you like keeping seasons of shows or lots of movies, a USB hard drive turns the DVR into a roomy library. Fifty built-in hours fills up faster than you'd think for a dedicated recorder.

KEEPING UP OR BUILDING A LIBRARY

9. Two ways people come to this — and both are fine

People want an over-the-air DVR for two reasons — simply to time-shift the shows they watch, or to build a lasting library of recordings. Both are easy; the storage choice differs. If you just want to time-shift You record tonight's shows to watch later and then delete them.

- A two-tuner Tablo with its built-in storage is plenty.
- Set a few series to record and watch them at your leisure.
- Delete what you've watched to keep space free. If you want to keep a library You like holding onto seasons of shows or lots of movies.
- Add a USB hard drive to the box for far more space.
- A four-tuner model helps if the household records a lot at once.
- Organize recordings into series so your library stays tidy. I'll set it up the way you watch. Whether you just want to catch the shows you miss or build a real library, I'll set the DVR up to match how your household watches. Call (330) 200-8042.

WHAT YOU CAN RECORD

10. What you can and can't record

Free broadcast TV — not your streaming apps.

An over-the-air DVR records the free broadcast channels your antenna receives: the local network affiliates and their sub-channels (the extra free channels like weather, classic TV, and movies that ride along). That covers the evening news, network shows, PBS, sports that air on broadcast TV, and more — all free. What it can't record is Netflix, Disney+, or other streaming services — those aren't broadcast channels, they're apps, and they have their own watch-later features. The DVR is strictly for the free, over-the-air side of your viewing, which for many cord-cutters is a big part of it. It complements your streaming apps. Think of it as the free-TV recorder alongside your streaming apps: the DVR handles local news, network shows, and sports; Netflix and friends handle themselves.

COMMON MISTAKES

11. Common mistakes

Avoid these for a smooth experience.

- Skimping on the antenna — a weak signal means weak recordings. Get the antenna solid first.
- Buying an old Tablo that still charges for the guide — make sure it's the current, no-subscription model.
- Buying a Fire TV Recast — it's discontinued; don't.
- Expecting it to record Netflix — it only records free broadcast channels.
- Relying on shaky Wi-Fi for the box when a short Ethernet cable would be rock-solid.

WATCH OUT

Match the model to today's terms The over-the-air DVR world has changed — some old boxes are discontinued and some older Tablos still charge a guide fee. Confirm you're buying the current model and that its DVR is subscription-free.

CHECKLIST

12. Your over-the-air DVR checklist

From antenna to recorded show.

- A solid antenna pulling in your local channels (see my antenna guides).
- Chose a current Tablo (two or four tuners) with no-subscription DVR — confirmed.
- Connected antenna coax and Wi-Fi (or Ethernet) to the box.
- Added a USB hard drive if you want a big library.
- Installed the app on your TVs and phone.
- Scanned channels, downloaded the guide, scheduled your shows.
- Set the series, forget it Once your favorite shows are set to record as a series, the DVR just quietly catches every episode. That's the cable-DVR convenience, back — without the bill.

THE MONEY SIDE

13. Why this saves real money

Free channels plus a one-time box beats a monthly cable DVR fee.

Cable and satellite companies charge every month for the box, the DVR service, and the channels themselves. An over-the-air setup flips that: the local channels are free forever, and a Tablo-style DVR is a one-time purchase with no monthly DVR fee on the current model. Over a year or two, the savings easily cover the box several times over. For many households, the free local channels — news, network shows, PBS, broadcast sports — plus one or two streaming apps for the rest cover everything they actually watch, at a fraction of a cable bill. The DVR is what makes that combination feel complete. See my cord-cutting and streaming-bill-audit guides for the bigger picture. The DVR completes the cord-cut The one thing that keeps people tethered to cable is often the DVR. An over-the-air recorder removes that last tie — and the last bill.

HELPING A RELATIVE

14. Setting one up for a parent

Free TV they can record, with nothing new to pay each month.

For an older parent who's cut cable (or is thinking about it), an over-the-air DVR gives back the familiar comfort of recording their stories, the news, and the ball game — without a cable bill. Keep it simple: a two-tuner box, the app on the TV they use most, and their favorite shows set to record as series so there's nothing to fiddle with. Show them how to find the recordings in the app and how to delete watched ones, and you've handed them a self-running, no-bill DVR. Many are delighted to find cutting cable didn't mean giving up recording after all. I'll make it familiar and easy I'm glad to set a parent up with an over-the-air DVR, pre-load their shows, and show them the simple app — so it feels just like the DVR they knew, minus the bill. Call (330) 200-8042.

COMMON QUESTIONS

15. Common Questions

The over-the-air DVR questions I hear most.

Q: Do I really not pay a monthly fee? On the current Tablo, the DVR has no subscription — no monthly fee for recording or the guide (confirm it's still the case when you buy, and that it's the current 4th-generation model; older Tablos did charge). Q: Do I still need an antenna? Yes — the DVR records the free channels your antenna receives. A good antenna comes first; see my antenna guides for aiming it at the Cleveland and Akron towers. Q: How do I watch the recordings? Through the DVR's free app on your Roku, Fire TV, Google TV, Apple TV, or phone. One box streams to every screen in the house over your Wi-Fi. Q: Can it record Netflix or other streaming shows? No — it only records free broadcast channels (local networks and their sub-channels). Streaming apps have their own watch-later features. Q: What about the Amazon Fire TV Recast? It's discontinued — don't buy one new. The current Tablo, or an HDHomeRun with DVR software, are the paths today. Not sure what fits your setup? Tell me your antenna and the TVs you use, and I'll point you to the right DVR. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

QUICK RECAP

16. The quick recap

The whole guide in one glance.

- An over-the-air DVR records the free channels your antenna gets.
- The current Tablo is the easy pick: no-subscription DVR (confirm current).
- It connects to antenna + Wi-Fi and streams to all your screens via its app.
- Built-in storage holds ~50 hours; add a USB drive for more.
- Alternatives: HDHomeRun (+ Channels DVR). Avoid the discontinued Fire TV Recast.
- It records broadcast TV, not Netflix — a complement to your apps.
- Free TV, on your schedule A good antenna and a no-fee DVR give you the local channels, the news, and the game — recorded on your schedule, with no monthly bill.

LIVING WITH IT

17. Day to day with your DVR

Once it's set up, it mostly runs itself.

After setup, using it is just like the cable DVR you remember: open the app, browse the guide, hit record on what you want, or set a series so every episode is caught automatically. Your recordings sit in a list; tap one to play, and delete it when you're done to free up space. You can pause and rewind live TV too, which is a treat on the free channels. The box updates its guide on its own and quietly records in the background — there's very little upkeep beyond occasionally clearing out shows you've watched. Just like old times, minus the bill Record, pause, rewind, binge later — the DVR habits you already know work exactly the same here. The only thing missing is the monthly charge.

IF SOMETHING'S OFF

18. Quick fixes if something acts up

A few common hiccups and their cures.

- A channel records pixelated or drops out: that's antenna signal, not the DVR — improve or re-aim the antenna, rescan channels.
- Playback stutters on a TV: usually Wi-Fi — move the box closer to the router or wire it with Ethernet.
- The app can't find the box: make sure the box and the streaming device are on the same Wi-Fi network (not a guest network).
- Out of recording space: delete watched shows, or add a USB hard drive.
- Guide looks wrong: let it refresh, or rescan channels after you move the antenna.

- Most hiccups are antenna or Wi-Fi If recordings look bad, suspect the antenna; if playback stutters, suspect the Wi-Fi. Those two cover the great majority of over-the-air DVR gripes.

YOU CAN DO THIS

19. A little reassurance

If you've cut the cord already, this is the easy last step.

Setting up an over-the-air DVR is no harder than setting up a streaming stick — plug in the box, install an app, follow the on-screen setup. There's nothing to break, and the apps are built for ordinary folks, not technicians. If you've managed an antenna and a Roku, you can manage this. Keep this guide handy, take it a step at a time, and don't hesitate to call for a hand. Getting your DVR back — free and bill-free — is a lovely finishing touch on cutting the cord. One box, one app, done Plug in the box, add the app to your TV, scan the channels. That's the whole job — and then you're recording free TV like the old days.

THE BIG PICTURE

20. Where this fits in cutting the cord

The last piece of a no-cable living room.

For a lot of Portage County households, the modern setup looks like this: a good antenna for free local channels, one or two streaming apps for the shows and movies you love, and an over-the-air DVR to record the free side. Together, that covers nearly everything a cable package did, at a fraction of the cost — and you only pay for the streaming you actually use. If you're weighing the whole move, my cord-cutting master plan and the streaming-bill-audit guide walk through the money and the choices. The DVR in this guide is often the piece that makes people feel ready to finally drop cable for good. I'll help you plan the whole thing If you're thinking about cutting cable, I'll help you plan the antenna, the apps, and the DVR so nothing you watch gets lost — and the bill shrinks. Call (330) 200-8042.

21. Two Tuners or Four? Picking for Your Household

Match the number of tuners to how your house actually watches.

A tuner is the part inside the box that grabs one channel. The more tuners, the more things the DVR can do at the same moment. It is the one spec worth thinking about before you buy, because adding tuners later usually means buying a different box.

For most households, two tuners are plenty. Two lets the box record one show while you watch (or record) another at the same time. A single person, or a couple who rarely want two different channels at once, will almost never bump into the limit. Four tuners earn their keep in a busier home, where two shows might record on a Tuesday night while someone else watches a live ballgame on a third.

- Live each evening, one or two viewers, light recording: two tuners.
- Several TVs going at once, or heavy prime-time recording: lean toward four.
- Remember live viewing also uses a tuner, not just recordings.

GOOD TO KNOW

The tuner count only limits how many different broadcast channels the box handles at once. Any number of TVs can watch the same recorded show, because a recording plays back from storage, not from a live tuner.

If you are honestly not sure, two tuners covers the great majority of homes and costs less. You can always add a second two-tuner setup down the road if your habits change, though most folks find one box is all they ever need.

22. Those Extra Free Sub-Channels

Your antenna pulls in far more than the big networks.

When your DVR scans for channels, you will notice each main station carries several extra ones riding alongside it. These are called sub-channels, and they are completely free, part of the same over-the-air broadcast. A single local station might carry its main network plus three or four more.

These sub-channels are a quiet treasure for a lot of folks. They tend to run classic television, old movies, Westerns, game shows, weather, and other specialty programming around the clock. Your DVR records them exactly the same way it records the main networks, so you can set a classic movie or an old series to record just as easily.

- Classic-TV and old-movie channels that run day and night.
- A standalone weather channel with the local forecast on a loop.
- Networks aimed at specific audiences and interests.
- All free, all recordable, all through the one antenna.

TIP

After a channel scan, spend a few minutes browsing the guide through every channel the box found. People are often surprised how much is there once they look past the five big networks they expected.

The exact lineup of sub-channels depends on which stations your antenna reaches, so your list will differ from a neighbor's in another town. If some seem to come and go, that is usually antenna signal rather than the DVR, and my antenna guides can help you pull them in more reliably.

23. Pausing and Rewinding Live TV

One of the nicest tricks, and it works on free channels.

A DVR does not only record shows for later. It also lets you pause live television, walk away to answer the door, and pick up right where you left off. It does this by quietly recording the channel you are watching into a temporary buffer, so there is always a little cushion of show stored up behind you.

That means you can rewind to catch a line of dialogue you missed, pause the news while you grab a cup of coffee, and then fast-forward back to live when you are ready. On the free antenna channels, this feels like a small luxury, and it is one of the things people miss most after cutting cable.

- 1 While watching a live channel, press pause when you need to step away.
- 2 The box keeps recording in the background while you are gone.
- 3 Press play to resume from the exact moment you paused.
- 4 Fast-forward to skip back up to the live broadcast when you want.

GOOD TO KNOW

The pause cushion lasts only so long, and it is tied to the channel you are on. Change channels and that buffer usually starts fresh, so a long pause works best if you stay put on one channel.

If you want to be sure you keep a whole show, actually set it to record rather than relying on the live pause. The pause buffer is for short breaks; a proper recording is what saves the full program to watch tomorrow.

24. Skipping Past the Commercials

Watching a recording means you control the pace.

One real pleasure of a DVR is that a recorded show is yours to move through at your own speed. You are no longer stuck sitting through every ad break the way you are with live TV. A one-hour program often watches in well under an hour once you glide past the commercials.

The simplest way is to fast-forward. When a break starts, hold the fast-forward button, watch for the show to return, and ease back to normal speed. Most DVR apps offer a few fast-forward speeds, so you can creep or race depending on how long the break runs. A quick rewind fixes it if you overshoot.

- Fast-forward through breaks at the speed that suits you.
- Use the on-screen progress bar to judge how far to skip.
- A short tap back corrects it if you jump past the start of the show.

WATCH OUT

Let a recording get a head start before you begin watching it. If a one-hour show has been recording for twenty minutes before you sit down, you can fast-forward through breaks and never catch up to the live edge.

Some DVR platforms offer fancier commercial-skipping features, and these come and go and sometimes carry conditions, so treat any such feature as a bonus rather than the main reason to buy. Plain fast-forward always works, and for most folks it is all they want.

25. Watching Your Recordings Away From Home

Your free TV can travel with you, within reason.

Because a networked DVR streams over the internet to its app, many of them let you watch your recordings and sometimes live channels when you are away from the house, using the same app on your phone or tablet. You open the app on the road, and it reaches back to the box at home over your internet connection.

This is handy for watching a recorded show at a relative's house, catching the local news while traveling, or keeping up with a series from a hotel. The feature and how well it works vary by brand and by your home internet's upload speed, so treat remote viewing as a nice extra rather than a guarantee.

- Open the DVR's app on your phone while away and sign in.
- Recordings play back over the internet from the box at home.
- Live channels may also stream remotely, depending on the brand.
- A solid home internet connection makes this far smoother.

WATCH OUT

Streaming video away from home can use a lot of cellular data if you are not on Wi-Fi. If you plan to watch on the road, connect to Wi-Fi where you can, or check your phone plan so a long show does not surprise you.

Remember the box still needs its home internet up and running for this to work. If the power or internet at the house goes out, the remote view goes dark until it is back. For most, that is a rare hiccup, and the convenience the rest of the time is lovely.

26. Browsing the Guide and Scheduling Shows

The on-screen guide is the heart of day-to-day use.

Once the box has scanned your channels, it downloads a program guide, usually covering the next week or two. This is the same kind of grid you remember from cable: channels down the side, time across the top, and the shows laid out so you can see what is on now and what is coming up.

To record, you simply move to a show in the guide and choose record. The box asks whether you want just that one airing or the whole series. Pick series and it will catch every episode automatically, even if the time slot moves, as long as the guide knows about it.

- 1 Open the guide in the DVR's app or on screen.
- 2 Scroll to the day, time, and channel you want.
- 3 Highlight a show and choose record.
- 4 Decide between this single airing or the whole series.

TIP

Use the guide's search box and voice feature if it has one. Typing or saying a show's name is far faster than scrolling hour by hour through a week of listings to find it.

The guide refreshes itself in the background, so you rarely think about it. If it ever looks blank or out of date, give the box a little time connected to the internet to pull a fresh copy, or rescan channels if you have recently re-aimed the antenna.

27. Padding Recordings for Sports and Live Events

Live games run long, so give your recordings extra room.

Here is a lesson every sports fan learns the hard way: a scheduled game or awards show almost never ends exactly on time. Extra innings, overtime, a long speech, or a late start can push the real finish well past the slot in the guide. If your DVR stops recording at the printed end time, you miss the best part.

Most DVRs let you add padding, which simply means recording a few extra minutes before and after the scheduled time. For live sports, generous padding at the end is the safe move, because you would rather have a few spare minutes than miss the final score.

- Add a cushion at the end of any live sports or awards recording.
- A little padding at the start covers an early kickoff too.
- Watch your tuner count during busy nights so a padded game does not block another recording.
- When a game may run very long, consider recording the following program as well.

WATCH OUT

Padding one recording can overlap the next show and tie up a tuner. On a crowded evening, heavy padding on several recordings is exactly when a two-tuner box can run out of room. Space things out or lean on a four-tuner box if sports nights get busy.

If you often follow a game that has run late, recording the show that airs right after it is a simple insurance policy. The overrun usually lands in that next recording, and you can delete it once you have seen the ending.

28. Choosing a USB Drive for More Space

A plain external drive turns the DVR into a roomy library.

When the built-in storage starts to fill, the easy fix is to plug in an external USB hard drive. These are sold at any electronics store, and you do not need anything fancy or expensive. A standard external drive adds far more recording space than the box holds on its own.

There are two common kinds: a larger drive that needs its own power plug, and a smaller portable drive powered through the USB cable. Either works for most DVRs, though a powered desktop drive is the sturdier choice for a box that records around the clock. Check your DVR's notes for any size limit before buying a very large drive.

- A standard external USB hard drive from any store will do.
- Larger desktop drives have their own power plug and are reliable for constant use.
- The box usually must format the drive before it can record to it.
- Formatting erases the drive, so do not use one holding files you need.

WATCH OUT

When the DVR sets up a new drive, it almost always erases everything on it first. Only use a fresh or empty drive, and never plug in one that holds photos or documents you have not backed up elsewhere.

Once the drive is attached and set up in the app, new recordings simply land on it and you stop thinking about space. If you ever unplug the drive, the recordings on it go with it, so pick a tidy spot beside the box and leave it there.

29. Setting Up Series Recordings the Right Way

A few small choices keep your recordings tidy and useful.

Telling the DVR to record a whole series is where the real convenience lives, but a couple of settings decide whether your recordings list stays neat or fills up with repeats. It is worth a minute to set these when you first add a show.

The most useful option is choosing new episodes only versus all showings. Many channels rerun episodes throughout the day, and if you record everything, you will drown in duplicates. New-only keeps just the fresh episodes. You can also usually set how many episodes to keep, so the box deletes the oldest automatically once you hit your limit.

- Choose new episodes only to avoid recording endless reruns.
- Set a keep limit, such as the five most recent, to control space.
- Decide whether to keep episodes until you watch them or until space runs low.
- Name and review your series list now and then to prune shows you have lost interest in.

TIP

If you are trying to collect a classic series that only airs as reruns, do the opposite and allow all showings for a while, then switch back to new-only once you have the episodes you wanted.

Spending five minutes on these settings when you add a show saves hours of scrolling later. A well-set series list quietly catches what you want, deletes what you have finished, and never overflows, which is the whole point of having a DVR in the first place.

30. Captions and Accessibility While You Watch

The comfort features carry over to your recordings.

Broadcast television carries closed captions, the on-screen text of what is being said, and your DVR records them right along with the picture. That means you can turn captions on for live and recorded shows alike, which is a genuine help if hearing is a struggle or the household likes to watch quietly.

Captions are usually a toggle in the DVR app's playback controls or in its settings. Because the setting travels with the box's app, you can often have captions on for the bedroom TV and off in the living room, each screen to its own taste.

- Turn captions on from the playback controls or the app's settings.
- Captions work on recordings, not just live TV.
- Many streaming devices also let you adjust caption size and color.
- Pausing and rewinding makes it easy to catch a missed line.

GOOD TO KNOW

Caption size, color, and background are often set on the streaming device itself (the Roku, Fire TV, or Apple TV), not in the DVR app. If the text is too small or hard to read, check the device's accessibility settings as well.

The ability to pause, rewind, and read along turns a DVR into a real accessibility tool. A hard-to-hear line, a fast news report, a mumbled bit of a drama, all become easy to catch when you can back up and read the words. It is one more way recording your free channels makes TV more comfortable.

31. Keeping the Box Updated and Healthy

A little quiet upkeep keeps recordings reliable for years.

An over-the-air DVR mostly looks after itself, but like any small computer it runs best with the occasional bit of care. The makers send out software updates that fix bugs and sometimes add features, and the box usually installs these on its own as long as it stays connected to the internet.

Because the box is working quietly day and night, it generates a little heat. Give it room to breathe rather than burying it in a closed cabinet or stacking things on top of it. Good airflow helps it last and keeps recordings from stuttering.

- Leave the box connected to the internet so updates install themselves.
- Set it on an open shelf with air around it, not sealed in a cabinet.
- An occasional restart (unplug, wait, plug back in) clears up small glitches.
- Keep the app on your TVs and phone updated too, through their own app stores.

TIP

If recordings or playback start acting strange after months of flawless use, the first thing to try is a simple restart of the box and a check that both the box's software and the app are up to date. That clears up most odd behavior.

Think of it like a slow cooker that runs in the background: set it up well, give it a clean spot with air, let it update itself, and it just keeps doing its job. There is very little to maintain, which is exactly how a set-and-forget recorder should be.

32. An OTA DVR vs. a Live-TV Streaming Service

Two different ways to get and record local channels.

Some folks ask how an over-the-air DVR compares to the live-TV streaming services that carry local channels over the internet and include a cloud DVR. They scratch a similar itch, but they are quite different under the hood, and the right pick depends on what you want.

An over-the-air DVR records the free channels your antenna pulls from the air, onto storage you own, with no monthly fee on the current no-subscription boxes. A live-TV streaming service sends channels over your internet and records to the cloud, but it charges a monthly bill and depends entirely on a steady internet connection.

- OTA DVR: free local channels, records to your own storage, no monthly fee on current no-subscription models.
- Streaming live-TV service: more channels including cable networks, but a monthly bill.
- OTA keeps working if your internet is slow or out, as long as the box reaches your TVs.
- Streaming services need reliable internet for every channel.

GOOD TO KNOW

The two are not either-or. Plenty of households use an antenna and OTA DVR for free local channels and the news, and add a streaming service only if they want cable-style channels the antenna cannot reach.

If your goal is simply recording the free local channels with no ongoing bill, the over-the-air DVR wins on cost. If you crave the extra cable networks, that is where a paid streaming service comes in. My cord-cutting and streaming-bill guides lay out the trade-offs so you only pay for what you truly watch.

33. Sharing One DVR Across a Busy Household

One box can keep several people happy at once.

A networked DVR is built to serve a whole house, not just one television. Because it streams over your Wi-Fi to the app on each screen, different people can watch different recordings in different rooms at the same time, all from the single box.

The thing to understand is the difference between recordings and live channels. Any number of TVs can play back recorded shows at once, because each pulls from storage. Live channels are limited by the tuner count, so a two-tuner box can feed two live channels at a time while recordings keep flowing freely to everyone else.

- Recorded shows can play on many TVs at the same time.
- Live channels are capped by how many tuners the box has.
- Set shared favorites so everyone can find the family's regular programs.
- A four-tuner box helps a busy household avoid live-channel traffic jams.

TIP

If two people keep wanting different live channels at the same time and bumping into the limit, that is the clearest sign your household would be happier with a four-tuner box rather than two.

For a busy family, a little courtesy helps: agree on which shows record automatically so nobody's program gets skipped, and keep the recordings list tidy so everyone can find

what is theirs. Set up thoughtfully, one small box quietly keeps a whole household in free, recorded TV without anyone treading on anyone's toes.

BILL'S HERE TO HELP

34. 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 recording your free antenna channels with a DVR 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'm a patient tech helper — not a mechanic, an electrician, or the manufacturer — so for repairs, wiring, or warranty work I'll help you understand your options and line up a trustworthy local pro. Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

How an OTA DVR Works

Between your antenna and your screens



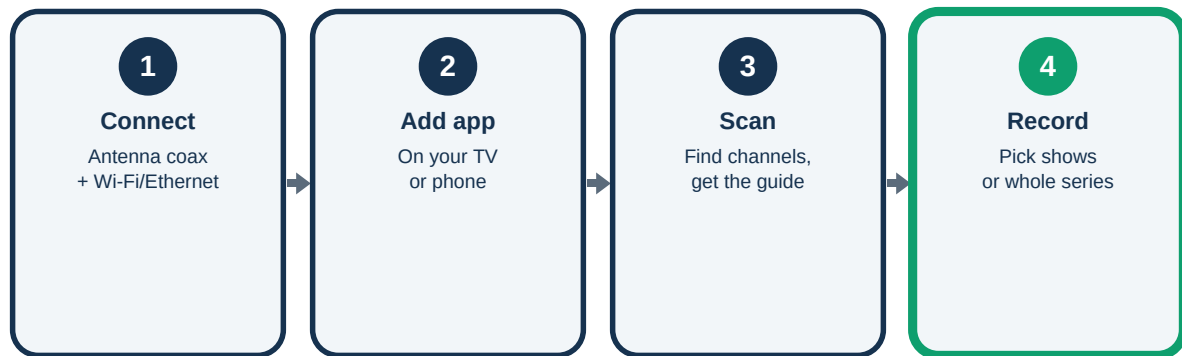
One box feeds free, recorded TV to the whole house.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Setting It Up

An afternoon, no installer



Wire the box to the router if you can -- streaming stays rock-solid.

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

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

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.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: billshometech.com/book · bill@billshometech.com

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