



An Extended Guide · No. 1885

Robot Mower vs. Lawn Service vs. Riding Mower — The Five-Year Math

An honest, no-pressure way
to weigh cost and effort

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Let's do the honest math together

There are three sensible ways to keep a lawn mowed: buy a robot mower, hire a lawn service, or run a riding or push mower yourself. Over five years each has a real cost — in money, yes, but also in time and effort. This guide helps you weigh all of it, calmly.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks think through choices like this in plain language, with nothing to sell. I don't sell mowers and earn no commission, so this is just honest advice from your kitchen table.

I'm going to be careful here: I won't make up dollar figures, because prices swing with the season, the brand, and what the fellow down the road charges. Instead I'll show you the pieces that make up the real cost, so you can plug in your own local quotes and current prices and get an answer that's actually true for you.

★ I'll sit down and run your numbers with you

If you'd like a hand gathering quotes and tallying it up for your yard, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to do. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole comparison, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll weigh the three choices wisely for your own situation.

- ❑ There's no single winner — the right choice depends on your yard, your budget, and how much effort you want to spend.
- ❑ A robot mower is a bigger cost up front, then cheap and nearly effortless to run.
- ❑ A lawn service is little or nothing up front, but an ongoing bill every season, for zero effort from you.
- ❑ A riding or push mower you run yourself is moderate up front and cheap to run — but the effort and time are all yours.
- ❑ Over five years, add up purchase, parts, power or gas, AND the value of your time and effort — not just the sticker.
- ❑ Get real local quotes and current prices before you decide; don't guess.

✓ The piece people forget

Most folks compare price tags and stop there. The honest comparison also counts your time and effort — which, as we get older, is often the piece that matters most.

The four pieces of the real cost

Any honest five-year comparison adds up the same four things. Keep these in mind and no option can hide its true cost from you.

- **Purchase cost up front.** What you pay on day one — the machine, or nothing at all if you hire out.
- **Parts and upkeep.** Blades, filters, belts, batteries, oil, repairs — the small costs that add up over years.
- **Running cost.** Electricity to charge a robot, or gasoline for an engine — and a service rolls its fuel into the bill.
- **Time and effort.** The hours you spend, and how hard the work is on your body. This one isn't on any price tag, but it's real.

We'll walk each option through these four pieces. I'll keep the money talk general and true, and point you to plug in your own numbers — because a figure I made up would do you more harm than good.

✓ Put a value on your time

Before we start, decide roughly what an hour of your Saturday is worth to you. It needn't be exact. It just keeps 'effort' from quietly counting as free when it isn't.

Option one: the robot mower

A robot mower is the big-cost-up-front, tiny-cost-after choice — and the one that asks the least of your body.

Up front, you buy the machine, and a capable one is a real chunk of money — the fancier wire-free models cost several times what a basic wired one does. **Parts** are modest: blades are small and cheap and swapped now and then, and eventually the battery. **Running cost** is just the electricity to charge it, which is genuinely small.

Effort is where it shines. After setup, the lawn mows itself on a schedule while you do something else — no pushing, no pull-starts, no heat, no sweat. For anyone who finds mowing hard on the back, knees, or breathing, that's the headline. You'll still clean it, swap blades, and winterize it — a little upkeep, covered in our other guides.

✓ Spread the up-front cost over five years

That big purchase feels large on day one, but divided across five seasons of near-free, near-effortless mowing, it often pencils out better than it first looks. Do the division before you flinch at the sticker.

Option two: hiring a lawn service

Hiring out is the no-machine, no-effort, pay-as-you-go choice. You trade an ongoing bill for having none of the work or worry.

Up front, you buy nothing — no machine to store, maintain, or winterize. **Parts and running costs** aren't yours either; they're baked into what the crew charges. What you have instead is an **ongoing bill** every time they come, through every mowing season, year after year. Over five years that steady stream can add up to more than you'd expect — which is exactly why you tally it out.

Effort is essentially zero: someone else does it all, usually fast, and often tidies the edges too. The trade-offs are the recurring cost, being on someone else's schedule, and having a crew in your yard. For many folks, especially on a bigger lot, that's a fair trade.

✓ Get the per-visit price and the season count

To compare honestly, you need two local numbers: what a visit costs and how many visits a season. Multiply, then multiply by five. That's the figure that goes up against a machine you'd buy once.

Option three: a riding or push mower you run yourself

Doing it yourself is the familiar choice — moderate to buy, cheap to run, but the time and the sweat are all yours.

Up front, a push mower is modest and a riding mower is a bigger buy, though often less than a premium robot. **Parts and upkeep** are the real ongoing story on a gas machine: oil, filters, spark plugs, belts, blades, the odd repair, and winterizing the engine. **Running cost** is gasoline, which rises and falls with the pump.

Effort is the whole question. You give up the hours — and on a push mower, real physical work in the heat. A riding mower eases the strain but still means pull-starts or ignitions, fueling, bouncing over the yard, and storing a big machine. For some that time is pleasant; for others, as the years go on, it's the part they'd most like to hand off.

! Be honest about the strain

Pushing a mower in July heat is hard work, and it sends more older folks to the doctor than anyone likes to admit. If mowing leaves you winded or sore, weigh your health as part of the cost — it belongs in the math.

Seeing the three side by side

Once you see the pattern, the choice gets clearer. Each option is strong in different pieces — none wins on all four.

The robot is heavy up front and feather-light afterward. The service is nothing up front and a steady bill forever. The do-it-yourself machine sits in the middle on money but asks the most of you in time and effort. There's no trick here and no villain — just three honest trade-offs.

The diagrams in this guide lay the three out across the four pieces so you can see the shape of each at a glance. Think about which pieces matter most to you — for many seniors, the effort column quietly outweighs the rest.

✓ Weigh the pieces you care about most

If money is tight, the up-front and ongoing columns lead. If your back or your time is the scarce thing, the effort column leads. Both are right — the answer just depends on which is true for you.

Counting the hours honestly

Time is the piece with no price tag, so it's the one most often left out — and for a lot of people, it's the one that should decide.

Add up a season's mowing: the hours on the machine, plus fueling, cleaning, sharpening, and the trip to the shop when something breaks. Multiply by the years. That's a real slice of your life, and only you can say what it's worth. A robot gives most of it back; a service gives all of it back; doing it yourself spends every hour.

There's also the quieter cost of worry — the nagging 'I need to get to the lawn' that hangs over a weekend. Handing that off has a value too, even if it never shows up on a receipt.

★ Let's count your hours together

If you're not sure how many hours your lawn really eats, I can help you tally an honest season — mowing, upkeep, the lot. Seeing the number often settles the decision. Call (330) 200-8042.

Which choice tends to suit whom

Patterns emerge after years of these conversations. See which one sounds most like you — then confirm it with your own numbers.

- **The robot suits** someone who wants the effort gone, has a yard a robot handles well, and is comfortable spending more once to save for years.
- **The service suits** someone who'd rather not own or store a machine, has a bigger or trickier lot, and doesn't mind a steady seasonal bill.
- **Doing it yourself suits** someone who still enjoys the work (or the savings), is in good shape for it, and already owns a mower that runs.

Plenty of folks land in between — a robot for the main lawn and a push mower for the trimming, or a service for the big cuts and a robot to keep it tidy between. Mixing is perfectly sensible.

✓ Whether a robot even fits your yard comes first

Before the money question, make sure a robot would actually work on your lawn — slopes, trees, and layout all matter. Our 'good fit' guide walks through that; sort fit first, then do the five-year math.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The five-year math often lands differently depending on your stage of life and what you're optimizing for. See which picture fits you.

Watching the budget, still able

If money is the tighter constraint and mowing isn't yet hard on you, the math tends to reward keeping effort in-house.

- A mower you already own and can run is the cheapest five years, by far.
- A push or riding mower keeps ongoing costs low if you do the upkeep.
- A service's steady bill is the one to scrutinize hardest here.
- A robot can still win if you spread its cost over many seasons.

Trading money for ease and safety

If the effort of mowing is getting hard — on the back, the knees, the breathing — the math shifts, and the effort column starts to lead.

- A robot removes the physical work for a one-time cost spread over years.
- A service removes the work entirely for an ongoing, predictable bill.
- Both spare you the July heat and the pull-start — worth real money.
- Count your health and safety as part of the cost; they belong there.

★ Not sure which picture is you?

Tell me about your yard, your budget, and how mowing feels on your body these days, and I'll help you weigh it honestly — with no stake in the answer. Call (330) 200-8042.

The numbers to gather before you decide

Here's your homework — the handful of real figures that turn this guide into an answer for your own yard. None are hard to get.

- **Robot:** the current price of a model that fits your yard, plus a rough blade and battery cost down the road.
- **Service:** a local quote per visit, and how many visits a season they'd do.
- **Yourself:** the price of the mower you'd buy (or \$0 if you own one), plus a year's gas and upkeep.
- **Your time:** the hours a season mowing eats, and what an hour is worth to you.

Get current prices and real local quotes — don't trust a number from a year ago or a figure someone guessed. Then multiply each out over five years and set them next to each other. The winner for your situation usually jumps right out.

★ I'll help you build the little table

If columns and multiplying aren't your idea of fun, I'll sit down and build the five-year table with you from your own quotes. No math anxiety required. Call (330) 200-8042.

The costs that hide from the sticker

Each option carries a few costs that don't show up on the price tag. Knowing them up front keeps your five-year number honest.

The robot has setup, the odd stuck-mower rescue, winterizing, and eventually a battery. **The service** can raise its rates, and you're on their schedule, not yours. **Doing it yourself** has the shop trips when the engine won't start, the storage space, and the slow toll on your body over years.

None of these is a dealbreaker — they're just the fine print. Fold a sensible guess for them into each column so no option looks artificially cheap next to the others.

✓ Add a small cushion to each

Pad every option a little for the surprises — a repair, a rate hike, a replacement part. The choice that still looks good with a cushion is the one that'll feel right in year three.

Five years, and what's left at the end

Part of the math is what you're holding when the five years are up. The three options end quite differently.

After five years with a **robot**, you own a machine that — cared for — likely has life left, maybe needing a fresh battery. With a **riding mower**, you own an aging machine that's worth something and still runs if maintained. With a **service**, you own nothing — you paid for the result, not an asset, and year six starts the bill over again.

That's not a knock on the service — plenty of people happily rent the result forever. It's just a piece to see clearly: two options leave you with a machine, and one leaves you free of machines entirely. Decide which you'd rather have.

✓ **Owning versus renting the result**

Think of it like owning a tool versus hiring a job done. Neither is wrong. Just know which one you're choosing, so year six doesn't surprise you.

A simple decision checklist

Walk down this list and the right choice for you tends to settle itself. Check what's true for you.

- ☐ I've confirmed a robot would actually fit my yard (slopes, trees, layout).
- ☐ I have a current price for a robot that suits my lawn.
- ☐ I have a real local quote per visit and visits per season for a service.
- ☐ I know what a mower I'd run myself costs, plus a year of gas and upkeep.
- ☐ I've tallied the hours a season mowing takes me.
- ☐ I've put an honest value on my time and my physical effort.
- ☐ I've multiplied each option out over five years and set them side by side.
- ☐ I've padded each a little for repairs, rate hikes, and surprises.

✓ If two are close, let effort break the tie

When the money comes out close, the humane tiebreaker is effort and health. Buy yourself the easier five years — you won't regret it.

A word for weighing this as the years go on

I help a lot of folks who mowed their own lawns for decades and are now wondering whether they still should. If that's you, here's my honest take.

There's real pride in keeping your own lawn, and if the work still feels good, keep at it with my blessing. But pride shouldn't cost you a fall off a riding mower on a slope, or a heat spell that lands you in trouble. As mowing gets harder, shifting that effort to a robot or a crew isn't giving up — it's spending money on exactly the right thing.

The five-year math usually tilts toward less effort as we age, because the value of your comfort, safety, and free time keeps climbing. That's not a sales pitch — I've got nothing to sell — it's just what the honest numbers tend to show.

★ No pressure, just a clear picture

If you're torn between keeping it up and handing it off, I'm glad to help you see the trade-offs plainly, with no stake in which way you go. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes in the math

A few predictable slip-ups lead people to the wrong answer. Avoid these and your comparison will be sound.

- **Comparing only sticker prices** — and ignoring five years of ongoing cost and effort.
- **Counting your own time as free** — it isn't, especially as it gets harder.
- **Forgetting the service's recurring bill** adds up year after year with nothing owned at the end.
- **Using made-up or stale numbers** instead of current prices and real local quotes.
- **Skipping the fit question** — doing the robot math before checking a robot even works on your yard.

! Don't let the biggest number scare you off

The robot's up-front price looks alarming next to a service's single visit — but that's not a fair fight. Compare five years to five years, or you'll mislead yourself.

You don't have to pick just one

The three options aren't a strict either-or. Some of the happiest setups I've seen blend them to fit a particular yard and body.

A robot can keep the main lawn tidy day to day while you (or a handyman) handle the trimming and the hard corners with a push mower. Or a service can do the big seasonal cuts and the heavy edges while a robot keeps things even in between. On a tricky lot, a blend often beats forcing any one option to do everything.

When you run the math, you can compare blends too — just tally each piece the same way. The goal isn't to crown one winner; it's to land on the setup that fits your yard, your budget, and your effort best.

✓ Let the yard shape the blend

A flat open main lawn with a few steep or wooded corners is the classic case for a blend: robot on the easy part, a person on the parts a robot struggles with.

Don't overthink it

This is a lot of careful math for a lawn. Let me bring it back to earth before we finish.

All three options keep your grass mowed; none is a mistake. The point of the five-year math isn't to find a single correct answer — it's to make sure you choose with your eyes open, counting the effort and the years, not just the sticker. Once you've done that, trust your gut.

If the numbers come out close, pick the one that'll make your summers more pleasant. A lawn is supposed to be something you enjoy, not a chore that hangs over every warm Saturday.

✓ Pick the choice you'll be glad of in July

Imagine a hot Saturday three summers from now. The option that makes you smile in that picture — rather than sigh — is usually the right one.

A few Northeast Ohio realities

Our local conditions nudge the math a little, so they're worth a mention as you weigh the three.

Our mowing season runs roughly spring through fall, with wet springs that delay the first cut and a long enough stretch of growth to rack up a fair number of service visits — so tally those visits honestly. Many lots around here are hilly or wooded, which can limit whether a robot fits at all, so the fit question matters more here than on a flat subdivision lot.

Winter is a factor too: every option except the service means storing a machine through our cold months. A robot winters indoors easily; a riding mower wants a garage and some engine care. Our winter-storage guide covers the robot side if you go that way.

✓ Count a full Ohio season of visits

If you're pricing a service, make sure the visit count covers our whole spring-to-fall season — not a short summer. That number is often bigger than people first guess.

Questions to ask as you shop

Whether you're talking to a dealer, a lawn crew, or to me, these questions get you the numbers the math needs.

Q: For a robot: what's the current price for my size and type of yard?

Prices swing, so get the current figure for a model that actually fits your lawn — and ask about blade and battery costs over time.

Q: For a service: what's the per-visit price and how many visits a season?

You need both to project five years. Ask whether rates are likely to rise and whether edging and cleanup are included.

Q: For a mower I'd run: what's the all-in yearly upkeep?

Gas, oil, blades, belts, and the occasional repair. Ask the dealer for a realistic yearly figure, not just the purchase price.

Q: Honestly, how much of my time and effort will this take?

The quietest and most important question. Answer it truthfully for each option — it's often what decides the whole thing.

✓ There's no silly question

If a salesperson rushes you or waves off the ongoing costs, that's a reason to slow down, not to buy. A good answer to a plain question is the least you should expect.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks weighing these three choices, answered plainly.

Q: Which one is cheapest over five years?

It depends entirely on your yard, your local quotes, and whether you count your time. Often doing it yourself is cheapest in dollars if you're able and own a mower; a robot and a service trade a bigger or ongoing cost for far less effort. Run your own numbers.

Q: Isn't a robot mower just too expensive up front?

It looks that way next to a single service visit, but that's not a fair comparison. Spread over five years of near-free, near-effortless mowing, it often pencils out competitively — do the five-year division before you decide.

Q: Why won't you just tell me the dollar amounts?

Because any figure I made up would likely be wrong for your area and this year's prices, and a wrong number is worse than none. The pieces are the same everywhere; the dollars you must gather locally and current.

Q: I'm getting older — does that change the answer?

Often, yes. As mowing gets harder, the value of your comfort, safety, and time rises, which tends to tilt the math toward a robot or a service. That's not giving up — it's spending on the right thing.

★ Want help running your five-year math?

This is exactly the kind of clear-eyed, no-pressure decision I love to help with — and I've nothing to sell you either way. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

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 weighing a robot mower against the alternatives 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. I'll help you choose the right machine, get it set up and mapped, connect it to your Wi-Fi and your phone, and show you how to run it. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site — app settings, schedules, a quick question — I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. For anything that calls for a ladder, wiring, or digging, I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro rather than risk it.

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Three Ways to Keep a Lawn Mowed

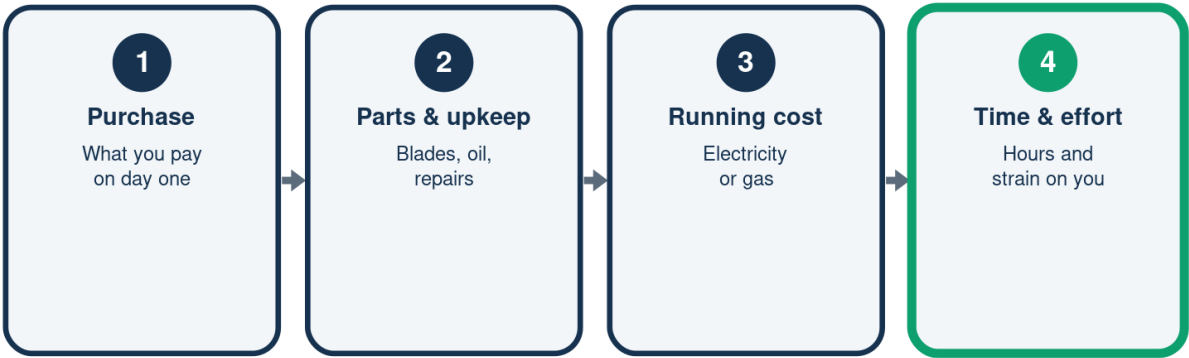
Each is strong in different pieces -- none wins on all

	Robot	Service	You do it
Up front	Higher once	Nothing	Low to mid
Ongoing	Very low	Steady bill	Gas, upkeep
Effort	Almost none	None	All yours
After 5 yrs	Own machine	Own nothing	Own machine

Fill in your own local quotes -- the pieces are the same everywhere.

The Four Pieces of the Cost

Add up all four, not just the sticker



The last piece has no price tag but is often the deciding one.

The Strong Point and the Watch-Out

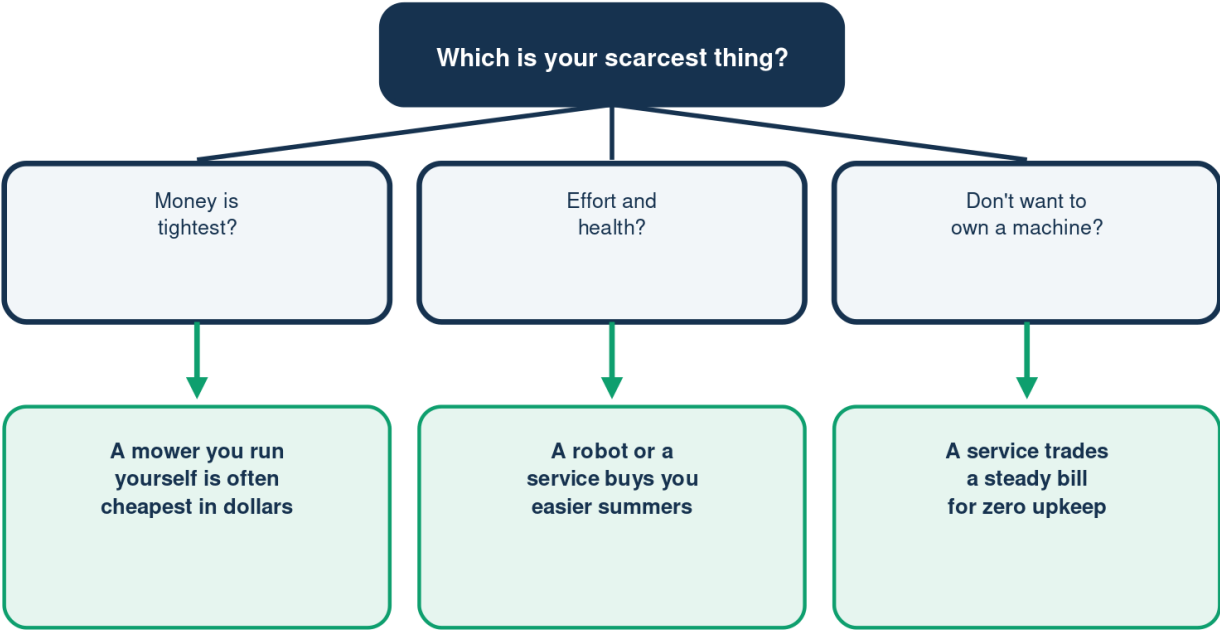
See which trade-off sounds most like you

	Strong point	Watch-out
Robot	Effort nearly gone	Higher up front
Service	Zero work for you	Bill every season
Do it yourself	Cheapest to run	Time and strain

Confirm your pick with your own five-year numbers.

What Matters Most to You?

Let your priority point to a starting choice



Get current prices and real local quotes before you decide -- don't guess.

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



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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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