



An Extended Guide · No. 1276

Running Your Generator on Propane: A Plain-English Guide

Connecting, starting,
and what to expect

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! Before you begin — a quick safety note.

This guide covers work involving propane and engine exhaust, which can cause serious injury, fire, or property damage if something goes wrong. It's here for general information only, not professional advice. If you're not completely comfortable — or if your local codes require a licensed pro — please stop and hire a qualified propane supplier or generator installer. Turn off the power at the breaker before any electrical step. Never work on gas lines yourself; if you smell gas, leave right away and call your gas company or 911. There's no shame in calling a pro — that's often the smart, safe choice. You follow this guide at your own risk. — Bill

A Note From Bill

So you've got a dual-fuel or tri-fuel generator and propane is your fuel of choice — good call. This guide is the friendly walk-through of actually running on it: connecting, starting, and knowing what's normal.

I'll keep this one focused. We already have a guide that compares all three fuels and one on choosing dual- versus tri-fuel — this page is just about the doing part, once propane is the fuel in your hand.

What you'll get out of this guide

- What to have ready before you connect a cylinder
- The right order: selector, connection, start-up
- What kind of power to expect on propane
- How to shut down and swap cylinders safely
- Town and country notes, and the CO safety rule that never changes

★ Not sure propane's even the right call?

That's a different question, and a fair one — there's a whole guide in this series comparing gasoline, propane, and natural gas. This page assumes you've already got a cylinder and you're ready to use it. Questions either way? Call me at (330) 200-8042.

Running on Propane, in One Page

Everything below is detail. If you only remember five things, remember these.

- ❑ Connect the cylinder with the valve closed, then check the connection for leaks before you open it.
- ❑ Set the fuel selector to propane before you start the engine — never while it's running.
- ❑ Expect a little less power than the gasoline number on the box — often around 10% less.
- ❑ Run it outdoors only, 20+ feet from the house, exhaust pointed away. CO is invisible and deadly.
- ❑ Store spare cylinders outdoors, upright, away from heat — never in the house or garage.

✓ One habit worth building

Get in the habit of checking the cylinder gauge (or its weight) before an outage starts, the same way you'd check a flashlight's batteries.

Why Propane Is Such a Popular Choice

Before the how-to, a quick reminder of why so many folks lean on propane for backup power in the first place.

- **It waits patiently.** A propane cylinder doesn't go stale sitting in the garage for a year — it's ready whenever you need it.
- **It burns clean.** Less gunk means less carburetor trouble down the road.
- **It's easy to keep a spare.** A second cylinder is simple to store and swap in.
- **It's a little gentler to start** in most weather, since there's no stale-fuel gumming to fight.

The trade-off is power — propane makes a bit less than gasoline. For most households running the essentials, that trade is well worth it. More on the power side in a moment.

★ My honest take

For the outages we actually get around here, propane is usually the quiet hero. It's the fuel I recommend most often when someone asks me to just pick one.

What You'll Need Before You Start

Running on propane is simple, but it goes smoother when you've got everything on hand first.

- A **propane cylinder or tank** with fuel in it — check the gauge or heft it to judge the weight.
- The **hose and regulator** that connects your cylinder to the generator's propane inlet.
- A little **soapy water** in a spray bottle or cup, to check connections for leaks.
- Your generator's **manual**, if you have it — models vary a little in their exact fittings.

If you haven't connected a propane supply to this generator before, there's a full guide in this series on cylinders, hoses, and regulators that walks through the hardware in detail. This page assumes that part's done and you're ready to run.

✓ Keep it together

A small tote by the generator with the hose, a wrench if yours needs one, and that spray bottle saves you hunting for parts in the dark.

Set the Selector Before You Start — Not After

Every dual- or tri-fuel generator has a way to choose its fuel: a knob or a valve. Getting the order right matters.

Before you ever pull the cord or hit the button, set the selector to **propane**. Starting the engine on one setting and then switching is not how these are designed to work — the engine should already be expecting propane when it fires.

- Find the selector — usually a labeled knob or lever near the control panel.
- Turn or set it to propane (often labeled LP or Propane).
- Only then move on to connecting fuel and starting up.

! Never switch fuels on a running engine

If you ever need to change fuels mid-use, stop the engine first, let it cool, and follow the proper changeover steps. There's a whole guide in this series on switching fuels safely — worth reading before you ever need it in a hurry.

Connecting a Cylinder, the Safe Way

At a high level, connecting propane follows the same friendly pattern every time.

- Make sure the **cylinder valve is closed** before you connect anything.
- Attach the hose fitting to the cylinder and to the generator's propane inlet, snug but not forced.
- Dab a little **soapy water** on the connection, then open the cylinder valve slowly — bubbles mean a leak, so stop and tighten or reseal the fitting.
- Once it's leak-free, you're ready to start.

That's the everyday version. If you're setting up a permanent hookup to a larger tank, or want the full detail on hoses and regulators, there's a dedicated guide in this series for that.

! If you ever smell gas

Propane has a rotten-egg smell added on purpose so leaks are easy to notice. If you smell it and soapy water confirms a leak, close the valve, don't light anything or flip switches, and sort it out in the open air before trying again.

Starting Up on Propane

With the cylinder connected and the selector set, starting on propane is often the easiest of the three fuels.

- Set up in your safe outdoor spot, exhaust pointed away from the house.
- Confirm the selector is on propane and the cylinder valve is open.
- Start the engine — pull cord, key, or button, depending on your model. Many propane starts don't need the choke the way a cold gasoline start does.
- Let it settle and run a minute before plugging anything in.

Every model has its own quirks, so your manual is the final word. But that basic rhythm — safe spot, fuel confirmed, start, settle — is nearly universal.

✓ First time on propane?

Do a practice run in daylight, with nothing plugged in, just to get comfortable with the sound and feel before you actually need it during an outage.

What to Expect for Power on Propane

This is the one honest trade-off with propane, and it's worth understanding up front.

The big wattage number printed on most generators is the **gasoline** rating. Running the same unit on propane typically makes **around 10% less power** — a bit more or less depending on the model. It's not a flaw; it's just how propane burns compared to gasoline.

- If propane is your real plan for outages, **size your expectations — and your generator — against the propane number**, not the gasoline one.
- You may need to be a bit more selective about what runs at once compared to a gasoline day.
- There's a whole guide in this series on sizing that walks through running and starting watts, fuel by fuel.

! Don't find this out mid-outage

If you've never run your specific generator on propane, do a test run beforehand with your usual essentials plugged in, so you know what it can comfortably carry.

Running It Smoothly Once It's Started

Once it's up and running on propane, the habits are the same good habits as any generator.

- Add your loads a **few at a time**, biggest motor first, rather than plugging everything in at once.
- Keep an eye on the cylinder gauge or heft it occasionally so you're not caught off guard by an empty tank.
- Give it room to breathe — don't crowd it against a wall, fence, or under a tarp.

Propane's steady, clean burn means less babysitting than gasoline — no choke fiddling once it's warm, and no worry about the fuel going stale while it waits its turn.

✓ Two tanks beat one

If you can, keep a second full cylinder on hand. Swapping a spent tank for a full one takes a minute; finding gasoline in a wide outage can take all day.

Running on Propane in Town or the Suburbs

Propane fits neighborhood life especially well — it's tidy, it's quiet to handle, and it doesn't involve trips to a gas station during a storm.

What usually matters most here

- **A tucked-away spot for the cylinder.** Keep it outdoors, upright, and out of the way — beside the generator's own safe outdoor running spot, not in the garage.
- **A spare tank in reserve.** Even in a shorter town outage, having a second cylinder means you're not scrambling to find an exchange station.
- **Keeping the peace.** Propane burns clean, so there's less exhaust odor to bother neighbors than a gasoline unit working hard.
- **The sump pump and fridge** are usually the priority — propane handles that kind of everyday load comfortably.

A common town setup is a couple of 20-lb cylinders — the same size as a gas grill tank — kept on hand and swapped as needed through a multi-day outage.

✓ Renting or sharing walls?

A generator usually isn't practical in an apartment or condo. A battery power station is often the better fit for phones, a lamp, and a small medical device — happy to help you weigh that.

Running on Propane on a Well or in the Country

Out in the country, propane often becomes the main event rather than a backup plan — especially when there's no gas line and a well pump depends on you.

What usually matters most here

- **The well pump's surge.** Most well pumps are 240-volt and need a strong jolt to start. Remember propane makes a bit less power than the gasoline rating — size for the surge on propane, not the bigger gasoline number.
- **A bigger tank matters.** Country properties often already have a larger propane tank in the yard for heat or cooking — tapping into that, the safe professional way, can mean days of runtime instead of swapping small cylinders.
- **Longer outages favor propane.** When help and fuel stations are farther away, a fuel that doesn't go stale and doesn't run out at the pump is worth a lot.
- **Cold matters more out here.** Rural outages often come with winter storms — there's a dedicated guide on propane in cold weather worth reading before your first hard freeze.

A typical country setup pairs a larger dual-fuel generator, sized with the well pump's starting surge in mind, with a substantial propane supply — sometimes cylinders, sometimes a tap into an existing yard tank installed by a professional.

★ Well-pump backup, done right

Sizing for that starting surge and connecting it safely is exactly the kind of job I help country customers with. Water is the thing you miss first in an outage — let's make sure propane can actually carry that load.

The Rule That Matters No Matter the Fuel

Propane burns cleaner than gasoline, but its exhaust still contains carbon monoxide. This rule doesn't change with the fuel.

CO is **invisible** and has **no smell**. Breathing enough of it can make you pass out — or worse — before you realize anything's wrong. It takes roughly a hundred lives a year, almost always in situations that were preventable.

- Run the generator **outdoors only**, at least **20 feet** from the house.
- Point the exhaust **away** from doors, windows, and vents.
- **Never** run it in a garage, basement, shed, or carport — even with the door open.
- Put **battery-backup CO alarms** on every level of the house and near bedrooms, and test them.
- If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy or sick, get outside into fresh air and call 911.

! A clean-burning fuel is not a safe-to-run-indoors fuel

It's tempting to think propane's cleaner burn makes it safer in a garage. It doesn't. The CO rule is the same for every fuel, every time.

A Few Habits That Keep Propane Trouble-Free

Propane is one of the easier fuels to live with, as long as you treat it with the respect it deserves.

Do	Don't
Store cylinders outdoors, upright, away from heat	Store a cylinder indoors or in a hot car
Check hoses and connections with soapy water now and then	Use a flame to check for a leak — ever
Keep the valve closed when a cylinder isn't in use	Leave a connected valve open unattended
Get cylinders inspected and requalified on schedule	Keep using a cylinder that's rusted, dented, or out of date

None of this is complicated — it's just worth doing the same careful way every time.

! If you ever smell rotten eggs

That smell is added to propane on purpose so a leak gets noticed. If you smell it, don't flip switches or light anything — get everyone away from the area and call your propane supplier or 911 from a safe distance.

Shutting Down the Right Way

Turning off a propane generator is just as simple as starting it, in reverse.

- Unplug or switch off whatever's connected first.
- Let the engine run free, unloaded, for a minute so it settles.
- Turn off the engine itself.
- If you're done for a while, close the cylinder valve so nothing's feeding the line unattended.

Closing the valve when you're finished is a small habit that avoids any fuel sitting pressurized in a line you're not using.

✓ Jot down the routine

Tape a simple start/stop checklist to the generator itself. It's a small thing that saves fumbling in the dark during an actual outage.

Swapping or Refilling a Cylinder Mid-Outage

Outages don't always end before your propane does. Here's the safe, simple version of changing tanks.

- Stop the engine and let it cool before touching any fuel connection.
- Close the empty cylinder's valve, then disconnect the hose.
- Connect the full cylinder, check the connection with soapy water, then open its valve slowly.
- Restart as usual.

How long a tank lasts, and what sizes make sense for your household, is its own topic — there's a dedicated guide in this series on tank sizes and runtime. And if you're wondering whether a swap counts as “switching fuels,” it doesn't — you're staying on propane the whole time, just moving to a fresh tank.

✓ Keep the spare where you can reach it

A second cylinder stored right next to the generator's safe spot means a swap takes a minute, even in bad weather.

A Quick Word About Winter

Propane has one real weakness: deep cold. It's worth knowing before your first hard freeze, even if this isn't the full story.

Propane has to **vaporize** — turn from liquid to gas — to feed the engine, and that process slows down as the temperature drops. A smaller cylinder, especially one that's low, may struggle to keep up with a big load on a bitter night.

- A larger tank, kept fairly full, holds up better in the cold than a nearly-empty small one.
- There's a whole guide in this series devoted just to cold-weather propane, with the fixes that matter for an Ohio winter.

✓ Ohio winters and generators

If you're reading this in the fall, that cold-weather guide is worth a look before you actually need it at 2 a.m. in a snowstorm.

Why Propane Is Gentler on Your Generator

One quiet perk of propane: it's simply easier to keep running well.

- No stale fuel gumming up a carburetor — propane doesn't degrade sitting in a tank the way gasoline does.
- Fewer fuel-system cleanings and less varnish buildup over the years.
- You'll still want the basics: oil changes on schedule, and an air filter and spark plug check now and then, per your manual.

There's a whole guide in this series comparing maintenance across all three fuels, but the short version is: propane asks the least of you between outages.

★ An easy yearly once-over

Once a year I'm glad to stop by, run it, change the oil, and make sure the propane side is leak-free and ready. Think of it as an oil change for your peace of mind.

If Something's Not Quite Right

Propane is forgiving, but a few small things can trip up a start. Here's the short list to check first.

What's happening	Check this first
Won't start on propane	Selector actually set to propane; cylinder valve fully open; hose connection snug
Runs rough or weak	Cylinder isn't nearly empty; connection isn't leaking; not an extremely cold night
Smell of gas near the unit	Stop, don't start it — check connections with soapy water in fresh air
Starts, then dies	Valve opened slowly enough; regulator seated correctly

If you've checked the basics and it's still not cooperating, that's a reasonable point to stop troubleshooting and call in some help rather than keep guessing in the cold and dark.

★ **When you'd rather just call**

No shame in it at all — a quick call often sorts out in five minutes what could be an hour of guessing on your own. (330) 200-8042.

A Simple Propane Routine Worth Building

A few small habits, done consistently, are what actually make propane trouble-free when you need it.

- ❑ Check the cylinder gauge or weight every so often, not just when an outage is already here.
- ❑ Keep at least one spare cylinder filled and ready.
- ❑ Run the generator monthly for a little while, even off-season, to keep it limber.
- ❑ Glance at hoses and connections for wear once in a while.
- ❑ Know where your soapy-water leak-check bottle lives.

✓ Little habits, big payoff

None of this takes more than a few minutes a month, and it's the difference between a generator that starts on the first try and one that doesn't.

When to Give Me a Call

Running on propane is meant to be simple, and most of it is. But a few moments are better handed off.

- Setting up your very first propane connection to a new generator.
- Sizing a generator — or your expectations — correctly for propane's slightly lower power.
- Connecting to a larger yard tank instead of small cylinders.
- Sorting out a start-up problem you can't pin down.
- A yearly check-up so it's ready before the season's first storm.

I come to you, here in Portage County and nearby, and I explain everything in plain language at whatever pace suits you.

★ Bill's Home Tech

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Everyday Cheat Sheet

Dog-ear this page. It's the fast answer to what comes up most when you're running on propane.

I want to...	Remember this
Connect a cylinder	Valve closed, connect hose, check with soapy water, then open valve slowly
Start it up	Selector to propane BEFORE starting; choke usually not needed
Know the power hit	Plan on roughly 10% less than the gasoline number
Store spares	Outdoors, upright, away from heat — never indoors
Swap a tank	Stop engine, cool, close old valve, connect new, leak-check, restart
Stay safe from CO	Outdoors only, 20+ feet from the house, alarms working inside
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

Words People Use

A few propane-specific terms, in everyday language.

Q: Propane (LP)

Liquid propane gas — the fuel in cylinders used for grills and larger home tanks. Stores for years without going stale.

Q: Fuel selector

The knob or valve on a dual- or tri-fuel generator that picks which fuel the engine burns. Set it before starting.

Q: Regulator

The device that steps propane down to the right pressure for the generator's engine.

Q: Vaporization

The process of liquid propane turning to gas so the engine can burn it — it slows down in cold weather.

Q: Cylinder

A portable propane tank, like the 20-lb size used for a gas grill.

Q: Derate

The word for a generator making somewhat less power on one fuel than another — propane is typically derated about 10% versus gasoline.

Q: Carbon monoxide (CO)

The invisible, odorless gas in engine exhaust that can kill. The reason a generator must always run far outdoors, on any fuel.

Starting Up on Propane

The same easy rhythm every time

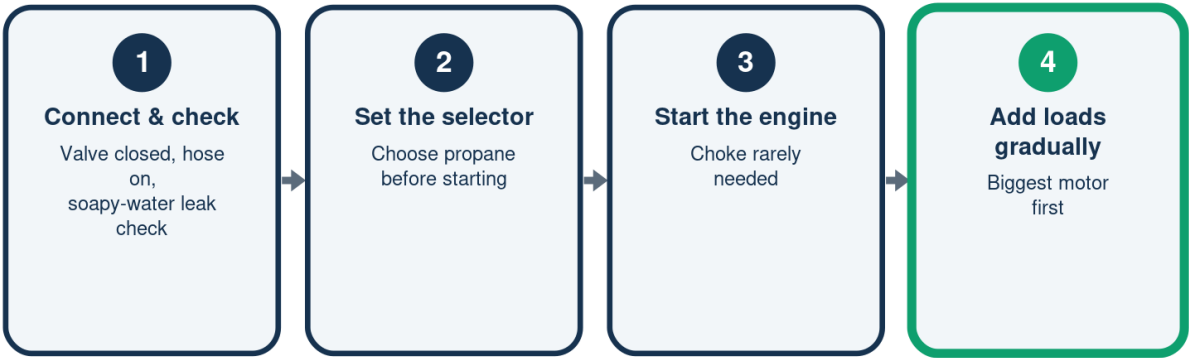


Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

What Changes on Propane

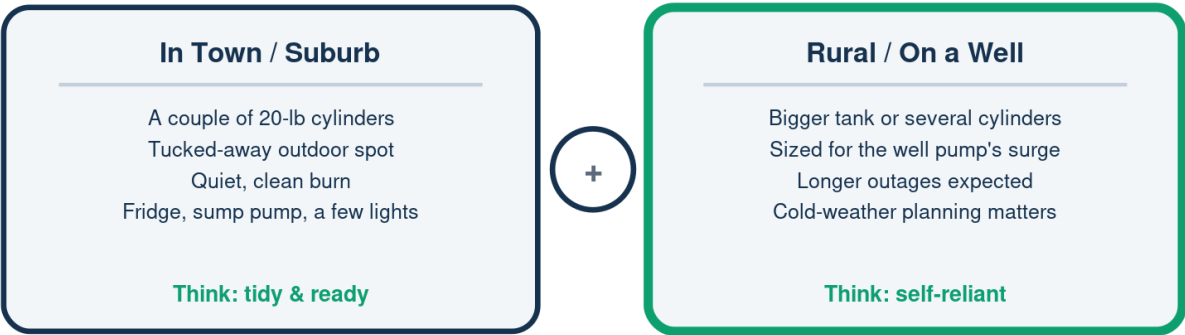
Compared to running the same generator on gasoline

	Gasoline	Propane
Power	Full rated power	About 10% less
Storage	Goes stale in months	Stores for years
Starting	Often needs choke cold	Usually starts without it
Upkeep	Can gum up over time	Burns clean

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

Town Propane vs. Country Propane

Same fuel, different priorities

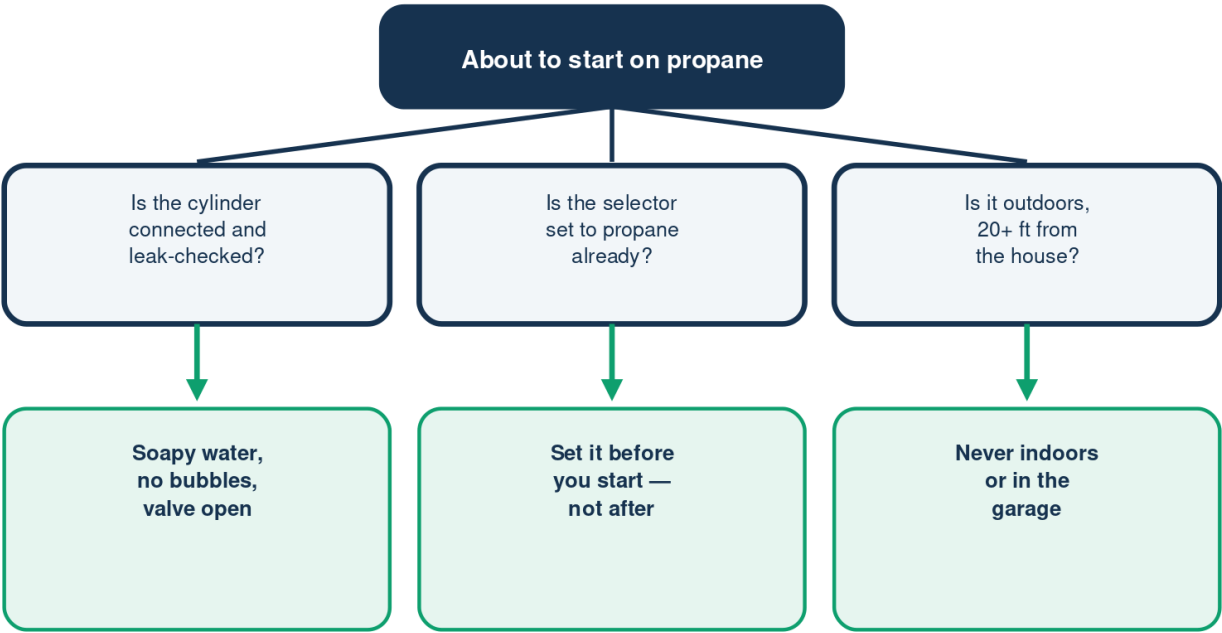


Same propane — different scale

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

Ready to Start on Propane?

Three quick checks before every start



If you ever smell gas: don't flip switches — get away and call your propane supplier or 911.

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.

— *Bill*



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