

Smart Locks Compared

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 Measure your deadbolt and photograph both sides.
- 2 Pick replace, retrofit, or hidden.
- 3 Choose the brand that fits: Schlage, Yale, August, Eufy, or Level.
- 4 Confirm Wi-Fi reaches the door.
- 5 Set up two ways in and register for warranty.
- 6 Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 if you want it done right.

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Smart Locks Compared — Schlage, Yale, August, Eufy & Level

Schlage, Yale, August, Eufy and Level — which one fits your door and your family.

————— An Extended Guide · No. 1866 · SMART LOCKS —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Smart locks come in three mounting styles. Some replace your whole deadbolt, some clip onto the inside and keep your old key working, and one hides completely inside the door. The brand you pick decides which style you get and how it talks to your phone.

- Schlage Encode and Encode Plus: solid, replace the deadbolt, Wi-Fi built in.
- Yale Assure Lock 2: modular, you add the Wi-Fi or Matter part you want.
- August (now under Yale): keeps your existing key, clips on the inside.
- Eufy: the fingerprint specialists, good value.
- Level: hides inside the door so it still looks like a normal lock.

GOOD TO KNOW

There is no single best lock. The right pick depends on your door, whether you want a fingerprint, and which phone you carry. I will walk you through all of it.

If you want to skip the reading, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I will tell you which one I would put on your door. I install these all over Portage County.

1. Why the brand matters more than you think

The name on the box decides a lot.

When folks ask me which smart lock to buy, they usually expect me to name one model. The truth is the brand shapes almost everything that matters. It decides how the lock mounts on your door, how it reaches your phone, whether you get a fingerprint reader, which app you tap every day, and how long the warranty lasts.

That is why I treat this as a brand decision first and a model decision second. Once we settle on the right family, picking the exact model is easy. Get the family wrong and you can end up with a lock that will not fit your door or will not talk to your phone, and that is a return and a wasted afternoon.

- How it mounts: replace the deadbolt, clip on inside, or hide inside the door.
- How it connects: Wi-Fi built in, a small plug-in bridge, or the newer Matter standard.
- How you open it: keypad, fingerprint, app, or old-fashioned key.
- Which app runs it and how good that app is for codes and logs.
- Warranty, which ranges from one year to three.

TIP

Before you shop, snap a photo of your current deadbolt from both sides and measure the hole spacing. That one photo saves more returns than anything else I can tell you.

I install and service all five of these brands, so I have no favorite to sell you. Where a lock is more trouble than it is worth for the way you live, I will say so plainly.

2. The three ways a smart lock mounts

Replace, retrofit, or hide.

Every smart lock on the market lands in one of three mounting styles, and knowing yours cuts the field in half before you even look at brands.

- 1 Replace the deadbolt: you take off your whole deadbolt, inside and out, and put the smart lock in its place. Schlage, Yale, and Eufy work this way.
- 2 Retrofit: you leave the outside of your deadbolt exactly as it is, including your key, and swap only the thumb-turn on the inside. August works this way.
- 3 Hide inside the door: the smart parts live inside the door bore, so the outside still looks like an ordinary deadbolt. Level works this way.

Each style suits a different person. Replacing gives you a keypad on the outside, which seniors tend to love because there is no phone fumbling at the door. Retrofitting is the least disruptive and keeps the key you already carry. Hiding keeps the clean look of your front door and is the most discreet.

WATCH OUT

A retrofit or hidden lock still needs a deadbolt that works smoothly by hand. If your current bolt sticks or you have to lift the door to turn it, fix that first or the motor will struggle.

If you are not sure which style your door can take, that is exactly the kind of thing I check on a first visit.

3. How these locks reach your phone

Wi-Fi, a bridge, or Matter.

A smart lock is only smart if it can reach your phone from away from the house. There are three ways brands pull that off, and the difference shows up in your wallet and your setup.

- Wi-Fi built in: the lock connects straight to your home Wi-Fi with nothing extra to buy. Schlage Encode and Encode Plus work this way.
- A plug-in bridge: the lock speaks a short-range signal, and a small box you plug into an outlet relays it to your Wi-Fi. August and some Eufy models work this way.
- Matter: a newer industry standard that lets many brands work with one home app. Encode Plus, the newer Yale, and Level support it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Built-in Wi-Fi is the simplest for most people because there is no extra box to lose or unplug. The trade-off is that Wi-Fi uses a little more battery than the bridge style.

Front doors are often far from the router here in Atwater and Ravenna, where houses sit back from the road. A weak signal at the door is the number one reason a smart lock drops offline. I bring a signal tester on install day and add a range extender if the door needs one.

Do not let the connection method scare you off. Every one of these works fine once it is set up with enough signal. It just changes what is in the box.

4. Schlage Encode and Encode Plus

The workhorse I reach for most.

Schlage is the brand I install most often, and the Encode line is the reason. These replace your deadbolt, put a lit keypad on the outside, and have Wi-Fi built right in, so there is no bridge to buy. For a senior who wants to punch in a code and hear the bolt turn, it is hard to beat.

- Encode: Wi-Fi built in, keypad, and a physical key backup. Holds a large number of codes, up to around two hundred fifty.
- Encode Plus: adds Apple Home Key, so an iPhone or Apple Watch can tap the lock to open it, and adds Matter. Holds up to one hundred codes.
- Both carry a three-year warranty, the longest in this group.

TIP

The plain Encode does not have a fingerprint reader. If a fingerprint is a must-have for you, Schlage is not your brand, and I will point you to Eufy or the Yale Touch instead.

Schlage runs through its own app called Schlage Home, which is one of the better apps for setting up scheduled codes and reading the lock history. I will cover apps in their own chapter.

My honest take: if you want a sturdy, no-drama keypad lock and you do not need a fingerprint, the Encode is the safe choice. The three-year warranty and the built-in Wi-Fi are what tip it for me.

5. Yale Assure Lock 2

Build it the way you want.

Yale takes a build-it-yourself approach with the Assure Lock 2. You pick the body style, then add the connection part you want as a separate small module that slots in the back. That sounds complicated, but it means you only pay for what you need and you can upgrade later without buying a whole new lock.

- Choose a keypad version or a key-free, keypad-only version with no keyhole at all.
- Add a Wi-Fi, Matter, or Z-Wave module depending on how you want it to connect.
- The Assure Lock 2 Touch version adds a fingerprint reader and stores up to about twenty prints.
- Runs on the Yale Access app, the same app August uses.

GOOD TO KNOW

The key-free version has no keyhole to pick or jam, which some folks love for security. Just remember there is no key backup, so the battery and a backup code become your lifeline.

The modular design is the big selling point. If you are not sure you need Wi-Fi today, start with Bluetooth and add the module later. The one catch is that the warranty tends to be shorter than Schlage, often around a year, so check the exact box before you buy.

My take: Yale is the thinking person's lock. If you like the idea of a fingerprint plus a clean key-free face, the Assure Lock 2 Touch is a strong pick.

6. August, now part of the Yale family

Keep your key, swap only the inside.

August made its name on one clever idea: leave the outside of your door completely alone. You keep your existing deadbolt, your existing key, and the look of your door. You only swap the thumb-turn on the inside for the August motor. That is the whole install, and it is why August is the least disruptive lock I fit.

- Retrofit design: your outside key still works for everyone who already has one.

- Connects with a small plug-in bridge for away-from-home control, on the models that need it.
- Auto-unlock can sense your phone and open the door as you walk up.
- Runs on the Yale Access app, since August is now under the Yale umbrella.

WATCH OUT

Because August hides on the inside, there is no outside keypad. To open it without your key you need your phone. For a senior who does not always carry a phone to the door, that is a real drawback.

August shines for renters and for anyone who does not want to change how the door looks. It is also a kind choice when several family members already have keys and you do not want to re-key everyone.

My take: pick August when keeping your existing key matters most, or when you cannot or do not want to change the outside of the door. Skip it if you want keypad entry at the door.

7. Eufy, the fingerprint value pick

A lot of lock for the money.

Eufy earned a spot on this list by doing fingerprints well at a friendly price. Their locks replace the deadbolt and typically give you several ways in on one lock, including a fast fingerprint pad, a keypad, the app, and a key. For families who want a fingerprint without paying a premium, Eufy is where I point them.

- The C220 offers around six ways to unlock, including fingerprint, and runs many months on common AA batteries.
- Some models read a fingerprint in a fraction of a second.
- A few Eufy models need a separate bridge for away-from-home control, so check the box.
- Not every Eufy model works with Apple Home, so match the model to your phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

Eufy fingerprint pads are quick and accurate in good conditions. Like all fingerprint readers, they can struggle with very cold or very dry fingers in an Ohio January. The keypad is always there as a backup.

Eufy runs on its own app. It handles everyday codes and fingerprints well. If you live deep in Apple's world, double-check that the exact model you want supports Apple Home, because some Eufy locks stop at Alexa and Google.

My take: Eufy is the best value for a fingerprint lock. Just confirm the connection and the phone support on the specific model before you buy.

8. Level, the invisible lock

Smart on the inside, plain on the outside.

Level took the opposite road from everyone else. Instead of a chunky keypad, Level hides all the smart parts inside the door itself. From the outside and the inside it looks like an ordinary, handsome deadbolt. Nobody can tell it is smart, which is the whole point for people who care how their front door looks.

- The Level Bolt hides fully inside the door and keeps your existing handle and key.
- The Level Lock replaces the visible hardware but still looks like a normal deadbolt.
- Supports Matter and works nicely with Apple Home for tap-to-open on newer models.
- Opens by app, by auto-unlock as you approach, or by key.

WATCH OUT

Level keeps its clean look by leaving off the keypad on the hidden models. That means phone or key entry only, which again is harder for someone who does not carry a phone to the door.

Because the motor is tucked inside the door, Level needs a deadbolt that already turns smoothly by hand. If your bolt is stiff, we fix the door first. The batteries live inside the bore too, so I show every Level customer where they hide.

My take: Level is for the person who wants smart entry without any of it showing. Beautiful solution, as long as you are happy opening with a phone or a key.

9. Keypad, fingerprint, or app

What each brand lets you touch.

How you actually open the door every day is the part that matters once the novelty wears off. Here is what each brand offers so you can match the lock to your hands and your habits.

- Keypad: Schlage, Yale keypad models, and Eufy all put lit number pads on the door. Best for seniors who want no phone at the door.

- Fingerprint: Eufy and the Yale Assure Lock 2 Touch have readers built in. Schlage Encode and base Level do not.
- App and auto-unlock: all five open from a phone, and most can sense you walking up and unlock on their own.
- Physical key: all except the key-free Yale and the hidden Level models keep a traditional keyhole.

TIP

I almost always set up at least two ways in. A keypad code plus a backup key, or a fingerprint plus a code. One method alone is one bad day away from a lockout.

For most of my senior customers, a lit keypad is the winner. It never runs out of charge like a phone, the numbers are big, and you do not need to find your reading glasses. A fingerprint is a lovely bonus but I treat it as the second method, never the only one.

If a particular way of opening the door is important to you, tell me, and I will steer you to the brands that do it well.

10. The apps you will actually use

This is where you will spend your time.

You will set up the lock once, but you will open the app many times to add a code, check who came in, or help a grandchild get a passcode. So the app matters more than most buyers expect. Here is the honest rundown.

- Schlage Home: clean and reliable. Strong for scheduled codes and reading the lock history. My favorite of the group.
- Yale Access: shared by Yale and August. Good activity feed and easy guest sharing.
- Eufy: its own app, handles codes and fingerprints well, a few more menus to learn.
- Level and Apple Home: Level leans on Apple Home for the slickest experience on iPhones.

GOOD TO KNOW

Every one of these apps works on both iPhone and Android, but the Apple Home tap-to-open trick is iPhone and Apple Watch only. If you carry an Android, that one feature is not for you, and that is fine.

When I set up a lock, I spend part of the visit in the app with you. We add your codes, label them in plain words, and I show you the one or two screens you will ever really need. The rest of the menus you can safely ignore.

If an app ever changes and a button moves, that is exactly what my forty-nine-dollar remote screen-share is for. I hop on, find the new button, and you are back in business in minutes.

11. Apple, Google, and Alexa support

Match the lock to your gadgets.

If you already have an Amazon Echo, a Google speaker, or you live on an iPhone, you will want the lock to play along. Support varies, so let us sort it out plainly.

- Apple Home: Encode Plus, newer Yale, and Level do tap-to-open with an iPhone or Apple Watch. The plain Encode does not.
- Amazon Alexa: nearly all of these work with Alexa so you can ask whether the door is locked.
- Google Home: most work with Google so you can check the lock by voice.
- Eufy: great with Alexa and Google, but check Apple support model by model.

WATCH OUT

Be careful about voice-unlocking the door. Asking a speaker to lock is fine, but I usually turn off voice-unlock so a shout through a window cannot open your house. Checking status by voice is the safe, useful part.

You do not need any of these gadgets for a smart lock to work. The lock, its keypad, and its own app do everything on their own. The voice assistants are a bonus for folks who already have them.

If you are unsure what you already have, I can look during a first visit. I would rather match the lock to your real setup than have you buy something that fights with your Echo.

12. Matter, and whether you should care

A new standard with a simple promise.

You will see the word Matter on boxes and in reviews, and it causes a lot of confusion. Here is the plain version. Matter is an industry agreement that lets locks, lights, and plugs from many brands all work inside one home app instead of each needing its own.

- Encode Plus, the newer Yale with its module, and Level support Matter.

- The payoff is that one app, like Apple Home, can run your lock alongside other Matter gear.
- You do not need Matter for the lock to work on its own.
- Matter is handy if you plan to build a bigger smart home over time.

GOOD TO KNOW

For most of my customers who just want to lock the front door and hand out a few codes, Matter is a nice-to-have, not a must-have. The lock's own app already does everything you need.

Where Matter earns its keep is down the road. If you think you will add smart lights or a video doorbell later and want one app to rule them all, buying a Matter lock now keeps that door open, so to speak.

My advice: do not pay a big premium for Matter unless you have real plans to grow your setup. If a Matter model costs about the same, there is no harm in having it ready for the future.

13. Warranty and support, brand by brand

What happens when something fails.

A lock lives outdoors through Ohio summers and winters, so the warranty is not a detail, it is part of the value. Coverage varies more than you might guess across these brands.

- Schlage: typically a three-year warranty on the electronics, the longest here, and a big reason I lean Schlage for hard-used doors.
- Yale and August: often around a year, sometimes two on certain models, so read your exact box.
- Eufy: varies by model, generally reasonable for the price.
- Level: check the current box, as coverage has shifted over time.

TIP

Keep your receipt and register the lock in its app on install day. A warranty claim is painless when you can prove the purchase date, and miserable when you cannot.

A warranty covers the lock failing on its own. It does not cover a dead battery, a door that was never adjusted right, or a signal problem. Those are the issues I see most, and they are usually quick fixes, not warranty cases.

This is where having a local person helps. If your lock acts up, you can call me at (330) 200-8042 instead of sitting on hold with a company out of state. I can often sort it on a quick visit or a remote screen-share, and if it truly is a warranty failure, I will help you file it.

14. Batteries and the Ohio winter

Cold is hard on every lock.

Every smart lock here runs on batteries, and every one of them drains faster when the mercury drops. A January cold snap in Portage County can cut battery life noticeably and slow a fingerprint reader. This is not a defect, it is just chemistry, and it is easy to plan around.

- Most of these locks run several months to a year on a set of batteries.
- Cold weather and a weak Wi-Fi signal both shorten that life.
- The app warns you well before the battery dies, often weeks ahead.
- Keep a backup way in that does not need the lock's battery, like a key or a hidden lockbox.

WATCH OUT

Do not use rechargeable batteries in these locks unless the maker says they are fine. Rechargeables put out slightly lower voltage and can make the lock think it is dying when it is not.

My routine is simple. When the app first says the battery is getting low, change it that week, do not wait. I tell customers to replace batteries on a calendar, say every fall before the cold, rather than waiting to be surprised on a frozen morning.

If you ever do get caught with a dead lock and no key, that is a lockout, and I cover exactly how to avoid and handle those in my battery and lockout guide. Short version: always keep one no-battery way in.

15. Security and the physical key

Smart does not mean flimsy.

A fair question I hear is whether a smart lock is as secure as a plain deadbolt. The honest answer is that the good ones are just as strong, and some add protection a plain lock cannot. What matters is the grade of the bolt and how it is installed, not whether it has a chip in it.

- These brands use the same heavy deadbolt hardware as traditional locks.
- Codes and fingerprints mean no key to copy, lose, or leave under the mat.
- You can delete a code the moment someone no longer needs it, which you can never do with a copied key.
- Auto-lock can relock the door behind you so you never leave it open by mistake.

GOOD TO KNOW

The key-free Yale and the hidden Level models have no keyhole at all, which removes lock-picking as a worry entirely. The trade is that you must keep a backup code and a charged phone.

The weak point of any lock is usually the door frame, not the lock. A strong bolt in a soft frame still kicks in. When I install, I check the strike plate and add longer screws into the stud if the frame needs it. That upgrade does more for your safety than any feature on the box.

Smart locks also let you see when the door was opened, which is a quiet kind of security all its own. More on that in my caregiver codes guide.

16. Who each brand is best for

The short matchmaker.

Let me boil all of this down to the kind of plain matchmaking I do at the kitchen table. Find yourself in this list and you are most of the way to a decision.

- Want a simple, sturdy keypad lock with the longest warranty: Schlage Encode.
- Want tap-to-open with an iPhone and the long warranty: Schlage Encode Plus.
- Want a fingerprint plus a clean key-free face, and like to customize: Yale Assure Lock 2 Touch.
- Want to keep your existing key and barely change the door: August.
- Want a fingerprint without paying a premium: Eufy.
- Want smart entry that nobody can even see: Level.

TIP

If two brands both fit, pick the one with the better warranty and the app you find easier to read. Those two things decide how happy you are a year later.

Notice that the right answer depends on how you want to open the door and how your door is built. That is why I resist naming one winner for everyone. A lock that is perfect for your neighbor in Kent might be wrong for your door in Atwater.

If you are still torn, that is normal, and it is exactly what a short visit sorts out. I will look at your door, ask how you live, and give you one clear recommendation.

17. Bill's pick

If you made me choose one.

People always push me for my single pick, so here it is, with the honest reasoning behind it. For the typical home I serve in Portage County, where the customer wants a dependable lock, a keypad at the door, and the least fuss, I reach for the Schlage Encode first.

- Wi-Fi is built in, so there is no extra bridge to buy, lose, or unplug.
- The lit keypad means no phone fumbling at the door, which my senior customers love.
- The three-year warranty is the longest in this group.
- The Schlage Home app is the easiest I have found for codes and lock history.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a fingerprint is on your wish list, my pick shifts. I would steer you to the Yale Assure Lock 2 Touch for a premium feel, or to Eufy if value matters most.

And if keeping your current key is the whole reason you are buying a smart lock, then August is my pick for you, full stop. The best lock is the one that fits how you actually live, not the one with the most features.

So my pick is Schlage Encode for most, with clear second choices when your needs point elsewhere. I will not sell you more lock than you need, and I will tell you when a cheaper option is the smarter buy.

18. Common mistakes when buying

Save yourself a return.

Over the years I have seen the same handful of buying mistakes trip people up. None of them are your fault, the boxes are confusing. Here is how to dodge every one.

- Buying before measuring: the wrong hole spacing or door thickness means a return. Measure first.
- Assuming fingerprint is included: Schlage Encode and base Level do not have one. Check the model.

- Forgetting the Wi-Fi signal: a weak signal at the door is the top cause of a lock dropping offline.
- Picking a no-keypad lock for someone who does not carry a phone to the door.
- Ignoring the warranty length, which ranges from one year to three.

WATCH OUT

Beware bargain locks from brands you have never heard of on the big shopping sites. The hardware is often flimsy and the app can vanish when the company does. Stick to the five names in this guide.

The other quiet mistake is buying for features you will never use. A lock that does twelve tricks is not better than one that does the three you actually need, if those three are harder to find in a cluttered app. Simple and reliable wins.

If you want a second set of eyes before you spend the money, send me the model you are eyeing at (330) 200-8042 and I will tell you if it fits your door and your phone. That quick check is free, and it beats a return trip to the store.

19. What install day actually looks like

From old deadbolt to working code.

When I come out to fit a smart lock, the whole job usually takes under an hour on a door that is in good shape. I want you to know what to expect, because the mystery is the only scary part. On a standard install there is no drilling of new holes, since these locks use the deadbolt bore your door already has.

- 1 I take off your old deadbolt, inside and out, and check the hole spacing and the door thickness.
- 2 I fit the new lock's outside piece, run the cable or post through the door, and attach the inside piece.
- 3 I load the batteries and wake the lock, then adjust the bolt so it throws smoothly with no lifting of the door.
- 4 I connect it to your Wi-Fi and the app, and test the signal right at the door.
- 5 We add your codes together, label them in plain words, and set auto-lock the way you like it.

WATCH OUT

If your door sags or the bolt sticks by hand, that gets fixed first. A motor cannot force a bolt a key already fights, and skipping that step is the top cause of trouble later.

Before I leave, I run the lock through every way it opens at least twice: the keypad, the app, and the key if it has one. I want to see the bolt turn with my own eyes, not just trust the box.

Then we sit down and I show you the one or two screens you will ever really need, and I leave a simple card by the door with your codes and my number on it. No manual to dig through later, and no guessing on a cold morning.

20. Two more fingerprint brands worth knowing

Kwikset and Lockly, beyond the big five.

I built this guide around five brands because they cover almost everyone, but two more come up often enough that you deserve an honest word on them, especially if a fingerprint is what you are after.

- Kwikset Halo Touch: a Wi-Fi fingerprint deadbolt that stores a large number of prints, up to around one hundred across a group of users, and keeps them on the lock itself rather than in the cloud.
- Lockly: a fingerprint specialist known for a scrambling keypad where the numbers move around so a watcher cannot learn your code.
- Both replace the deadbolt the way Schlage and Eufy do.
- Both run their own app, so you learn one more set of screens.

GOOD TO KNOW

Kwikset storing fingerprints on the lock, not in the cloud, is the kind of privacy detail I like. Your fingerprint pattern never leaves your front door.

I do not fit these as often simply because the big five cover most needs and I know their quirks cold after years of installs. That familiarity is worth something when a lock acts up on a cold morning and you want it sorted fast.

If you already own a Kwikset or a Lockly, or you have your heart set on one, I will happily install and set it up. The principles in this guide still hold: confirm the signal at the door, set up two ways in, and keep the receipt for the warranty.

My honest take is that you cannot go wrong staying with the five main names, but these two are legitimate choices, not bargain-bin gambles. The ones to avoid are the no-name locks I warned about earlier.

21. Setting up the app the first time

What the first screens ask of you.

Every one of these locks wants you to make a free account in its app before it will do anything clever. This first-time setup is where folks get nervous, so let me walk through the shape of it. It is the same on every brand even though the buttons differ.

- 1 Download the lock's app from your phone's app store and make an account with your email and a password.
- 2 Tap to add a device, and the app walks you through waking the lock and holding your phone near it to pair.
- 3 Connect the lock to your home Wi-Fi by picking your network and typing its password.
- 4 Create your own main code and name it, then name the lock something plain like Front Door.
- 5 Turn on the settings you want, like auto-lock and a low-battery alert.

TIP

Use an email you actually check and a password you can find again. I keep a written note of these for my customers, because a locked-out app account is a needless headache later.

The one spot people stumble is the Wi-Fi step. These locks only join the slower, longer-reaching part of your home network, the part often labeled 2.4, not the faster 5. If the app cannot find your network, that is usually why, and it is an easy fix.

None of this is hard, but it is fiddly the first time, and a small typo in a Wi-Fi password sends people in circles. This is exactly the kind of thing my forty-nine-dollar remote screen-share handles in minutes, with me watching your screen and pointing at the next button.

22. When a lock drops offline

Almost always the signal.

The most common complaint I hear after a smart lock is working is that the app says the lock is offline or will not respond from away from home. Nine times in ten it is not the lock failing, it is the Wi-Fi signal at the door being too weak to hold a steady connection.

- The keypad and the lock itself keep working even when the app says offline. You can still get in.
- Offline only means the lock lost its reach to your phone when you are away.

- A front door far from the router, with walls and a steel door in between, is the usual cause.
- Cold weather and a low battery can make a borderline signal drop more often.

WATCH OUT

Before you blame the lock, check whether your home internet is up at all. A router reboot or an internet outage takes every smart device offline, not just the lock.

- 1 Open the app at the door and see whether it connects when you are standing right there.
- 2 Reboot your router by unplugging it for a slow count of thirty, then plugging it back in.
- 3 If it connects up close but not from away, the signal at the door is the problem.
- 4 Add a plug-in Wi-Fi extender partway between the router and the door.

Here in Portage County, where many houses sit well back from the road and the router often lives in a back office, a weak signal at the front door is the rule, not the exception. I carry a signal tester and an extender on every install for exactly this reason. It is a quick fix, not a lock you need to return.

23. Privacy and where your data lives

A fair question worth a plain answer.

People rightly ask what a smart lock knows about them and where that information goes. Here is my honest, plain answer, because you deserve to understand it before you put one of these on your door.

- The lock keeps a history of when it opened and which code was used, so you can confirm visits.
- On most brands that history lives in the maker's app, reached through your account.
- Fingerprint patterns on the better locks are stored on the lock itself, not sent to the cloud.
- Your account is protected by your password, so a strong one matters.

GOOD TO KNOW

A smart lock does not have a camera or a microphone. It records times and codes, not sound or pictures. If you want video, that is a doorbell camera, a separate device with its own choices to make.

The practical privacy steps are simple. Use a real password on your lock account, do not reuse it from another site, and turn on the extra sign-in code if the app offers one. Those three habits cover the great majority of the worry.

I also tell families to be thoughtful about who they share app access with, because an admin on the account can see the history and manage codes. Share that power only with the family members who truly need it, a point I cover more in my caregiver codes guide.

If privacy is a real concern for you, lean toward the brands that keep fingerprints on the lock, and keep your code list tidy. The whole system is as private as the care you put into the account behind it.

24. Plain answers to the questions I hear most

Quick ones, straight.

At the kitchen table the same questions come up again and again. Here are the short, honest answers so you are not left wondering.

- Will it work if the power goes out: yes, these run on their own batteries, not your house power. The Wi-Fi features pause until the internet returns, but the keypad still opens the door.
- Can someone hack it: a determined thief kicks a weak door frame long before bothering to hack a lock. Reinforce the frame and use a real password and you are far safer than with a key under the mat.
- Does it need a subscription: no, the lock and its app work without a monthly fee. A few extra cloud features on some brands are optional.
- Can I still use my key: yes on every model except the key-free Yale and hidden Level, which use a backup code instead.

WATCH OUT

If a store clerk tells you a smart lock needs a monthly subscription just to open your door, be careful with that advice. The basic locking and codes never cost a monthly fee on these brands.

Another common one: will it fit my door. Almost certainly, if you have a standard deadbolt. The measurements that matter are the hole spacing and the door thickness, and a quick photo of both sides lets me tell you for sure before you buy.

And the big one, is it worth it. For someone who struggles with keys, worries about a lost copy, or wants to let a helper in on a schedule, a smart lock earns its keep in peace of mind. For someone perfectly happy with a key and no helpers, there is no shame in staying with what works.

25. When to Call Bill

Your local help, start to finish.

You can buy any of these locks yourself, and plenty of my customers do. Where I earn my keep is making sure the one you picked fits your door, connects on the first try, and is set up so you actually enjoy it instead of fighting it. I have been doing hands-on tech work for more than thirty years, and smart locks are a big part of my week.

- Not sure which brand fits your door: I will look and give you one clear pick.
- Bought a lock and want it installed right, with the frame reinforced: that is my bread and butter.
- Lock dropping offline or acting up: often a quick signal or battery fix.
- Want your codes, fingerprints, and app set up and explained in plain words: I do that on every install.

GOOD TO KNOW

My first visit is a flat ninety-nine dollars. A remote screen-share, where I fix an app or a setting without coming out, is forty-nine dollars. And my Support Plan is thirty-nine dollars a month for folks who want me on call all year.

I serve Atwater, Ravenna, Kent, Streetsboro, Aurora, Hudson, Stow, Mogadore, Tallmadge, and the rest of Portage County. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or email bill@billshometech.com. My booking assistant Sophie can get you on the calendar if I am on a job.

If I have helped you and you are happy, a quick review means the world to a local one-man shop. You can leave one at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. Thank you, and stay safe out there.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this near the door. It is the one-glance version of the whole guide.

- Keypad, no fingerprint, longest warranty: Schlage Encode.
- Tap-to-open with iPhone: Encode Plus, newer Yale, or Level.
- Keep your existing key: August.
- Best value fingerprint: Eufy.

- Want it hidden: Level.
 - Fingerprint plus key-free face: Yale Assure Lock 2 Touch.
- 1 Measure your deadbolt before you buy.
 - 2 Pick the mounting style first: replace, retrofit, or hidden.
 - 3 Confirm the Wi-Fi reaches your door.
 - 4 Register the lock and keep the receipt for warranty.
 - 5 Set up at least two ways in.

TIP

Change the battery the week the app first warns you, not the morning it dies.

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Deadbolt — The strong sliding bolt in your door that a smart lock replaces or motorizes.

Retrofit lock — A lock, like August, that swaps only the inside thumb-turn and keeps your existing key and outside hardware.

Keypad — The lit number pad on the outside of the lock where you punch in a code to open the door.

Fingerprint reader — A small pad that opens the lock when it recognizes your enrolled finger.

Bridge — A small box you plug into an outlet that relays the lock's short-range signal to your home Wi-Fi.

Matter — An industry standard that lets locks and other gear from many brands work inside one home app.

Apple Home Key — A feature that lets an iPhone or Apple Watch tap the lock to open it.

Auto-unlock — A setting where the lock senses your phone approaching and opens the door for you.

Auto-lock — A setting that relocks the door on its own after a set number of seconds.

Access code — A number you set for yourself or a visitor to open the lock on the keypad.

Strike plate — The metal plate on the door frame that the bolt slides into; longer screws here make the door far harder to force.

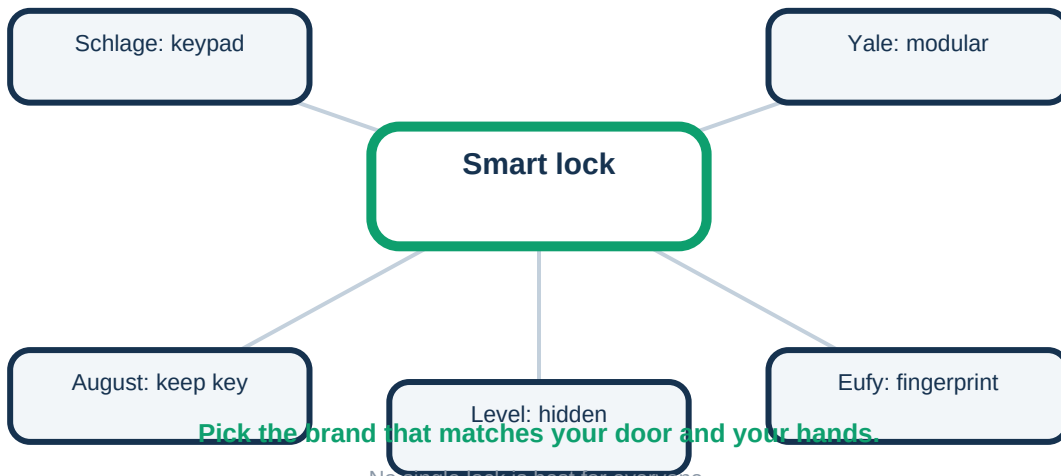
Lock history — The in-app list showing when the door was locked or unlocked and by which code.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Five smart lock brands

What each one is known for



No single lock is best for everyone.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Replace vs keep your deadbolt

The two most common mounting choices

Replace (Schlage, Yale, Eufy)

- New lock inside and out
- Lit keypad at the door
- Fingerprint on some models
- Full install on the door

Keep deadbolt (August, Level)

- Outside looks unchanged
- Your existing key still works
- Open by phone or key
- Least disruptive install

Replace for a keypad; keep for your key and the original look.

Illustration — a schematic; details vary by device and setup.

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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