

Retrofit or Replace?

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 Rent, or love your key? Pick a retrofit.
- 2 Want an outside keypad? Pick a full replacement.
- 3 Measure backset, thickness, and bore hole before buying a replacement.
- 4 Mount it square and tighten screws evenly.
- 5 Calibrate, then test open and closed; fix any strike misalignment.
- 6 Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 to measure and install.

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Retrofit or Replace — Which Smart Lock Install Is Yours

Keep your deadbolt and add a motor inside, or swap the whole lock for a keypad.

————— An Extended Guide · No. 1870 · SMART LOCKS —————

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

There are only two ways a smart lock gets onto a door, and knowing which one fits yours saves money, time, and frustration. A retrofit mounts on the inside and keeps your existing deadbolt and your current key. A full replacement swaps the whole deadbolt for a new one with its own keys. Both are good. They just suit different doors and different people.

- Retrofit: keeps your key, mounts inside, great for renters and the key-attached.
- Replacement: a whole new lock, often with a keypad built into the outside.
- The choice depends on your door, whether you rent or own, and how handy you are.
- Measuring three simple numbers on your door tells you what will fit.

GOOD TO KNOW

A retrofit like the August leaves the outside of your door looking exactly as it does now, and your old key still works. That is a big deal for renters and for anyone who likes keeping a key.

Most installs take under an hour with a screwdriver. If you would rather have it measured, chosen, and mounted right the first time, call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

1. The two install styles, plainly

Retrofit or full replacement.

Every smart lock install comes down to one fork in the road, and I want to make it crystal clear before anything else. Either you keep your existing deadbolt and add a smart motor to the inside of it, which we call a retrofit, or you take the old deadbolt off entirely and put a new smart one in its place, which is a full replacement. That single choice shapes everything that follows.

- Retrofit: the outside of your door stays the same, your key still works, and a motor mounts on the inside thumbturn.
- Replacement: the entire deadbolt comes off and a new smart lock goes in, usually with a keypad on the outside.
- Retrofit is less work and fully reversible. Replacement is more capable but permanent.
- Which one is right depends on your door, your situation, and what you want out of the lock.

TIP

If you rent, or if you love your current key and hardware, lean retrofit. If you own and want a keypad on the outside, lean replacement. We will confirm with a quick look at your door.

Neither style is better in the abstract. I install both all the time across Portage County, and the right answer is simply the one that fits your door and your life. A renter in a Kent apartment and a homeowner in Atwater might both be thrilled, just with different locks.

In this guide I will walk you through how each style works, how to measure your door so you know what fits, the tools and time involved, the step-by-step for each, and the handful of things that can go wrong. By the end you will know exactly which install is yours.

2. Retrofit: keep your deadbolt and key

The smart motor mounts inside.

A retrofit lock is clever in its simplicity. Your existing deadbolt stays right where it is. On the inside of the door, where the little thumbturn knob is, the retrofit mounts a small motor that turns the bolt for you. From the street, nothing looks different. Your key still works in the same cylinder it always did.

- The outside hardware and keyway stay exactly as they are.
- A motorized unit replaces or covers the inside thumbturn.
- Your existing key keeps working, since the cylinder never changes.
- Installation is usually just a screwdriver and a few minutes.

GOOD TO KNOW

The August Smart Lock is the best-known retrofit. Reviewers commonly install it in about ten minutes with a Phillips screwdriver, and the outside of the door is untouched.

Because nothing about the outside changes, a retrofit is the gentlest way to make a door smart. There is no drilling, no new holes, and no new keys to pass around. The lock app adds the smart features, while the trusty deadbolt you already have keeps doing the actual work of holding the door.

There is a middle kind of retrofit too, like the Level Bolt, which replaces just the bolt hidden inside the door while keeping your existing handles and key on both sides. It is more work than an August but leaves the door looking completely ordinary, with all the smarts tucked out of sight.

3. Replacement: a whole new deadbolt

Off with the old, on with the new.

A full replacement does what it sounds like. You remove the old deadbolt entirely, inside and out, and install a complete new smart lock in its place. Most replacement locks put a keypad or touchscreen on the outside, so you and your family can tap in a code without any phone at all. They come with their own set of keys as a backup.

- The entire old deadbolt comes off the door.
- A new smart deadbolt goes in, usually with an outside keypad or touchscreen.
- You get a fresh set of keys, and your old keys no longer fit.
- The outside look of the door changes to the new hardware.

GOOD TO KNOW

The Schlage Encode, Yale Assure Lock 2, and Eufy locks are full-replacement deadbolts. They offer keypad entry on the outside, which many families prefer to opening an app.

A replacement gives you the fullest experience, because the keypad lets anyone with a code walk in without a smartphone. That matters for grandkids, for helpers, and for anyone who would rather punch four numbers than fish out a phone. The trade is more work to install and a permanent change to your door.

Schlage is clear that when you put in a new lock, it is best practice to install all the new parts, including the latch that comes with it, rather than reusing old pieces. That is good advice. The new lock is engineered to work with its own hardware, and mixing in old parts invites trouble down the line.

4. The quick way to tell which is yours

A few plain questions.

You can usually settle the retrofit-or-replace question with a handful of honest answers. Run through these, and the right install style tends to reveal itself without any tools at all.

- Do you rent? If yes, retrofit is almost always the answer, since it changes nothing permanent.
- Do you love your current key and hardware? Retrofit keeps both.
- Do you want a keypad on the outside for codes? That points to a replacement.
- Is your current deadbolt worn out or sticky? Replacing it is a fine excuse to upgrade.

TIP

If you are on the fence, start with a retrofit. It is reversible, so you can always move to a full replacement later if you decide you want an outside keypad.

The outside keypad is often the deciding factor. If the whole point for you is letting an aide or a grandchild in with a code and no phone, a replacement with a keypad is the natural pick. If you mostly want app control and the comfort of keeping your own key, a retrofit does the job beautifully.

When I visit, I look at your door, ask these same questions, and we land on the answer together in a couple of minutes. There is no wrong choice here, only the one that fits how you actually live and come and go from your home.

5. Renters: why retrofit usually wins

Change nothing you cannot undo.

If you rent your home, a retrofit is nearly always the right call, and the reason is simple: it changes nothing permanent. Your landlord's deadbolt stays in place, your landlord's key still works, and when you move you unscrew the retrofit and take it with you. The door is left exactly as you found it.

- Nothing permanent changes, so you stay on the right side of your lease.
- The landlord's key still works, which many leases require.
- You take the lock with you when you move and reinstall it elsewhere.
- No drilling, no new holes, no handyman bill at move-out.

WATCH OUT

Read your lease before changing anything, even on a retrofit. Many leases forbid altering the locks, and some even cover the inside hardware. A quick ask of your landlord avoids any trouble.

The August is the classic renter's lock for exactly this reason. It sits on the inside thumbturn, so the landlord's key and outside hardware are completely untouched. When you move, it pops off and comes along to your next place, ready to go back on another door.

I help renters all over Portage County add a little smart convenience without risking their deposit. We pick a retrofit, confirm the lease allows it, and mount it in a way that leaves zero trace when you eventually move on. That is smart living without the worry.

6. Owners: when replacement makes sense

You own the door, so you have options.

When you own your home, both doors are open to you, and a full replacement often makes the most sense if you want the complete experience. There is no lease to worry about, and if your existing deadbolt is old or stiff, swapping it for a fresh smart one solves two problems at once: a better lock and a smarter one.

- You can choose a replacement for an outside keypad and a fresh, solid new lock.
- An aging or sticky deadbolt is a good reason to replace rather than retrofit.
- A matching new lock can spruce up the look of your entry.
- You still get keys as a backup, now on a new keyway you control.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you own and the deadbolt is already fine, a retrofit is still a perfectly good choice. Owning does not oblige you to replace; it just gives you the option.

Homeowners who want helpers, family, and deliveries to come and go with codes usually land on a replacement, because the outside keypad makes code entry effortless for everyone. No app, no phone, just four numbers at the door. For a busy household that convenience adds up fast.

The one thing I counsel owners on is matching the new lock to the door and the home system they use, so it fits the hole and talks to their Alexa or iPhone. We measure first, pick second, and install third, so there are no surprises when the box is opened.

7. Keeping your existing key

A quiet comfort for many.

For a lot of folks, keeping the key they already have is a real comfort, and it is one of the clearest differences between the two install styles. A retrofit keeps your exact key, because the outside cylinder never changes. A full replacement gives you brand-new keys, and your old ones stop fitting that door.

- Retrofit: your current key keeps working, unchanged.
- Replacement: new keys come with the lock, and old keys no longer fit.
- A spare key matters when batteries die or the app acts up.
- Either way, keep a physical key somewhere safe as a backup.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some replacement locks can be re-keyed to match a key you already carry, so you do not add another key to your ring. Ask about this if carrying one house key matters to you.

Why does the key matter so much? Because a smart lock still runs on batteries and software, and now and then those falter. A real metal key in your pocket, or tucked with a trusted neighbor, is the backup that always works no matter what. I never set up a lock without making sure there is a physical key plan in place.

If you have a whole set of matched keys for several doors and you treasure not fumbling among them, that alone can tip you toward a retrofit. Keeping one key for everything is a small daily pleasure that a replacement would quietly take away unless you have it re-keyed to match.

8. Meet the retrofit locks

August and Level Bolt.

Two retrofit locks come up again and again, and they take slightly different approaches. Both keep your key and leave the outside of your door alone, but one is quicker to install and one hides itself more completely. Knowing the difference helps you pick.

- August Smart Lock: mounts over the inside thumbturn, installs in about ten minutes with a screwdriver.
- Level Bolt: replaces just the hidden bolt inside the door, so the door looks totally ordinary.
- Both keep your existing key and outside hardware.
- August is the easier do-it-yourself job; Level Bolt takes a bit more care.

GOOD TO KNOW

The Level Bolt tucks all its smarts inside the door and reuses your existing handles, so from either side the door looks like any other. It picks from a few adapters to match your old lock.

The August is the one I reach for when someone wants the fastest, most reversible path. You remove the inside thumbturn cover, clip the August motor over the existing turn, and you are done. It is hard to get wrong, and it comes right back off when you move.

The Level Bolt is for folks who want the smarts to be invisible. Because it replaces only the bolt and keeps your handles, there is no new gadget showing on the inside at all. It is a touch more involved to install, since you are working inside the door, but the clean look wins people over.

9. Meet the replacement locks

Schlage, Yale, and Eufy.

On the replacement side, three brands come up most, and each has its own strengths. All three swap the whole deadbolt and give you an outside keypad or touchscreen, so codes work without a phone. The differences are in the home systems they favor and the feel of the hardware.

- Schlage Encode: built-in internet, strong keypad, works well with Alexa and Google, with the Plus adding Apple.
- Yale Assure Lock 2: clean touchscreen, strong with Apple Home, with modules for Alexa, Google, and Matter.
- Eufy: often adds a fingerprint reader alongside the keypad, with its own capable app.
- All three come with backup keys and solid, well-built hardware.

GOOD TO KNOW

The Schlage Encode has its own Wi-Fi built in, so it does not need a separate hub for the basics. That keeps the setup simpler for a lot of homes.

I install plenty of Schlage Encode locks because they are sturdy, the keypad is easy for older hands to read and press, and the built-in internet keeps things simple. The Encode Plus is the one to choose if you want Apple Home and the tap-to-open Home Key feature.

Yale is a close cousin to August, since they are made by the same company, and it leans toward Apple homes with a clean touchscreen face. Eufy appeals to folks who want a fingerprint reader, so family can touch a finger instead of tapping a code. We match the brand to your door and your phones.

10. Measuring your door: three numbers

The measurements that decide fit.

If you go the replacement route, three measurements decide whether a lock will fit your door. They sound technical, but each is just a tape measure and a minute. Getting them right before you buy saves you from a lock that does not fit and a return trip to the store. Retrofits mostly skip this, since they use your existing bolt.

- Backset: the distance from the edge of the door to the center of the bolt hole.
- Door thickness: how thick the door itself is, measured at the edge.

- Bore hole: the big round hole through the face of the door where the lock sits.
- Write each number down before you shop.

TIP

Measure before you buy, not after. Most locks fit standard doors, but a few are picky, and a five-minute measurement spares you a lot of hassle.

The good news is that American doors are mostly standardized, so a well-chosen lock fits the great majority of homes without any fuss. The three numbers are really a confirmation that your door is standard, and a heads-up on the rare occasion that it is not, which happens most in older houses.

I will walk through each of the three numbers in the next chapters, in plain terms, with exactly where to put the tape measure. If measuring is not your idea of a good afternoon, this is a natural thing for me to handle on a visit, and I always double-check the fit before any lock is ordered.

11. Backset: edge to the bolt center

The first number to get right.

Backset is the distance from the edge of your door to the center of the hole where the deadbolt sits. It is the number people most often get wrong, and it matters because a lock has to reach from the face of the door to the bolt. Thankfully there are only two common backsets in American homes, so you just need to tell which one you have.

- 1 Open the door and look at the edge where the bolt sticks out.
- 2 Measure from the edge of the door to the center of the big bore hole on the face.
- 3 It will be close to one of two numbers: two and three-eighths inches, or two and three-quarters inches.
- 4 Write down whichever it is nearest.

GOOD TO KNOW

The two standard backsets in North America are two and three-eighths inches and two and three-quarters inches. Many smart locks adjust to fit either, but confirm before you buy.

Most replacement locks include an adjustable bracket that handles both common backsets, so you set it to match your door during install. A few locks must be ordered for a specific backset, which is exactly why you measure first. Guessing here is how people end up with a lock that will not seat properly.

If your tape reads something odd, well off both standard numbers, your door may be nonstandard, which turns up now and then in older Portage County homes. That is a good moment to call me before ordering anything, so we find a lock that truly fits rather than forcing one that does not.

12. Door thickness and the bore hole

The other two numbers.

The other two measurements are door thickness and the bore hole. Door thickness is simply how thick the door is, measured at its edge. The bore hole is the big round opening through the face of the door where the lock body sits. Both have standard sizes that most locks expect.

- Door thickness: measure at the edge; most doors run between one and three-eighths and one and three-quarters inches.
- Bore hole: the large hole on the face, commonly two and one-eighth inches across.
- A smaller latch hole runs through the edge, usually one inch.
- Older homes sometimes have thinner doors that only certain locks fit.

WATCH OUT

If your door is thinner or thicker than a lock's range, it will not seat right and may not lock properly. Schlage's own prep sheet warns about exactly this. Thickness is worth checking twice.

If your door already has a deadbolt, the bore hole is in place and you only need to confirm its size matches the new lock, which it usually does at two and one-eighth inches. A brand-new door with no hole means drilling, which is a bigger job best left to someone comfortable with a hole saw.

Older houses around here sometimes have thinner doors or odd dimensions, a legacy of their age. If your numbers come out unusual, do not force it. That is precisely the sort of thing I sort out on a visit, choosing a lock that fits the door you have rather than the door a lock wishes you had.

13. Tools you will need

A short, honest list.

The tools depend on which install you are doing. A retrofit asks for almost nothing. A replacement onto an existing deadbolt hole asks for a little more. Drilling a brand-new hole asks for the most, and is the point where many folks decide to call for help.

- Retrofit: usually just a Phillips screwdriver, sometimes nothing but your hands.
- Replacement into an existing hole: a Phillips screwdriver and the hardware in the box.
- New hole from scratch: a drill, a two and one-eighth inch hole saw, a one inch bit, a chisel, and a hammer.
- Always handy: a tape measure, a pencil, and a bit of patience.

TIP

If the words hole saw and chisel make you uneasy, you are not alone, and there is no shame in it. Drilling a door is the one step where a pro really earns their keep.

For the common case, swapping a replacement lock into a door that already has a deadbolt, a screwdriver is truly all most people need. The hole is already there, the hardware comes in the box, and it is a tidy afternoon job for anyone reasonably comfortable with a screwdriver.

Drilling a fresh hole in a door is a different animal. Get it crooked or off-center and the lock will bind or never line up with the frame. If your door has no deadbolt hole at all, that is my strong recommendation to let me or another pro handle the drilling, and keep your lovely door unmarred.

14. How long it really takes

Honest time estimates.

People always want to know how long this takes, and the honest answer depends on the install style and your comfort with tools. I would rather give you realistic numbers than rosy ones, so you can plan your afternoon without frustration creeping in.

- August retrofit: often about ten to fifteen minutes with a screwdriver.
- Level Bolt retrofit: a bit longer, since you work inside the door, maybe half an hour.
- Replacement into an existing hole: typically thirty to sixty minutes.
- New hole drilled from scratch: longer, and the step most worth handing to a pro.

GOOD TO KNOW

The time in the box includes setting up the app, pairing the lock, and testing it. The physical mounting is often the quickest part of the whole job.

A good chunk of the time is not the screwdriver work at all, but the app: creating an account, connecting the lock to your home internet, setting the first codes, and testing that everything opens and locks as it should. That setup is where most of the fiddly minutes go, and where I save folks the most time.

If you are handy and have an existing deadbolt hole, budget an hour and you will likely finish with time to spare. If you are new to this or need a hole drilled, budget more, and do not rush. A lock installed carefully and tested properly is worth every minute, because it is the thing standing between your home and the outside.

15. Installing a retrofit, step by step

The gentle, reversible path.

A retrofit is the friendliest install there is, and I will walk through the August style since it is the most common. The whole idea is to put a motor over your existing inside thumbturn so it can turn the bolt for you. Nothing on the outside changes at all.

- 1 Remove the cover or mounting plate from the inside thumbturn, usually a couple of screws.
- 2 Attach the lock's mounting plate in its place, leaving the bolt and outside alone.
- 3 Fit the adapter that matches your thumbturn shape, choosing from the ones in the box.
- 4 Clip the motor unit onto the plate until it clicks.
- 5 Put in the batteries, open the app, and follow the pairing steps.
- 6 Calibrate it so the lock learns the fully locked and unlocked positions, then test several times.

WATCH OUT

Do not skip the calibration step. The lock needs to learn where locked and unlocked are, or it may strain or stop short. Let it run through the full turn a few times.

The beauty of this install is that you can undo it in minutes. If you move, or decide you want something different, you unscrew the unit, pop the original thumbturn cover back on, and the door is exactly as it was. That reversibility is why renters and cautious folks love it.

The one spot people stumble is the calibration and app pairing, not the screws. If the lock turns but will not fully throw the bolt, run calibration again and make sure the deadbolt itself slides smoothly by hand. A sticky old bolt gives even a good motor trouble.

16. Installing a replacement, step by step

Out with the old deadbolt.

Swapping in a replacement lock on a door that already has a deadbolt hole is a tidy job with a screwdriver. The sequence is remove the old, fit the new, and test thoroughly. Here is the shape of it, keeping in mind each brand's manual has the exact details.

- 1 Unscrew and remove the old deadbolt: the inside plate, the outside cylinder, and the bolt in the door edge.
- 2 Slide the new bolt into the edge hole and screw its faceplate to the door edge.
- 3 Set the new bolt to your backset if it is adjustable.
- 4 Fit the outside keypad unit, feeding its cable or post through the bolt.
- 5 Attach the inside unit and tighten the mounting screws evenly.
- 6 Add batteries, pair the app, and test locking and unlocking many times, by key and by code.

GOOD TO KNOW

Schlage recommends using all the new parts that come with the lock, including the new bolt, rather than reusing the old latch. The lock is built to work with its own hardware.

Tighten the inside screws evenly, a little on each side in turn, rather than cranking one all the way first. Even tightening keeps the lock square so the bolt throws smoothly. Over-tightening one side is a common cause of a lock that binds or feels stiff afterward.

Before you call it done, test the lock dozens of times with the door open, then with it closed. The open test proves the lock works; the closed test proves it lines up with the frame. If it locks fine open but struggles closed, that is the strike plate, which is next.

17. The strike plate and alignment

Where most trouble hides.

If a newly installed lock feels fine with the door open but strains or jams when the door is closed, the culprit is almost always alignment: the bolt is not lining up cleanly with the hole in the door frame. That hole sits behind the strike plate, the metal plate on the frame. This is the single most common install headache, and usually the easiest to fix.

- With the door open, throw the bolt and watch where it points.
- Close the door slowly and see if the bolt meets the hole in the frame cleanly.
- If the bolt catches the plate's edge, the hole needs to shift or widen a touch.
- A motorized lock strains and drains its batteries fast when it fights a misaligned strike.

WATCH OUT

A smart lock that has to force a misaligned bolt will wear out its motor and eat batteries. Do not ignore a lock that groans when it locks. Fix the alignment and it will run smoothly for years.

Often the fix is small: enlarge the hole in the frame slightly, or move the strike plate a hair, so the bolt glides in without touching the sides. Ohio's seasons make this worse, because doors swell in humid summers and shrink in dry winters, so a door that lined up perfectly in July can bind come January.

This is exactly the sort of thing I check and correct on an install, because a motorized lock is far less forgiving of a tight fit than a hand-turned one. Your old deadbolt could muscle through a little misalignment; a small motor cannot. Getting the strike right is what makes a smart lock feel effortless.

18. What can go wrong

The usual pitfalls, named.

Most installs go smoothly, but I want you to know the handful of things that trip people up, so you can spot them early or avoid them entirely. None are disasters, and all have fixes, but knowing them ahead of time saves a lot of head-scratching.

- Wrong backset: the lock will not seat because the bolt center does not match. Measure first.
- Door too thin or thick: the lock does not clamp right. Check thickness against the lock's range.

- Strike misalignment: the bolt binds when the door is closed. Adjust the frame hole.
- Sticky old bolt on a retrofit: the motor struggles to turn a deadbolt that is stiff by hand.
- Skipped calibration: the lock does not know where locked and unlocked are, so it stops short.

TIP

Before mounting any smart lock, make sure the plain deadbolt turns smoothly by hand. If it is stiff for your fingers, it will be stiff for a small motor too.

The theme running through all of these is that a motor is less forgiving than a human hand. We can force a slightly stiff or misaligned lock with our fingers without noticing, but a small battery-powered motor cannot, and it will complain by straining or dying early. Smooth and square is the goal every time.

If you hit any of these and are not sure how to fix it, do not force the lock, which only makes things worse. Set it aside and give me a call. Most of these I can talk you through on a remote screen-share, or set right in a few minutes on a visit.

19. Ohio winters and your door

The cold is a real factor.

Our Ohio seasons are not just small talk when it comes to door locks. Cold weather affects both the door and the lock, and planning for it keeps your smart lock happy through a Portage County winter. Doors move with the weather, and batteries behave differently in the cold.

- Wood doors swell and shrink with humidity, so alignment can shift between seasons.
- Batteries drain faster in deep cold, so a winter is the hardest test for them.
- A misaligned lock strains hardest in winter, when the door has shrunk or stuck.
- A physical key backup matters most on the coldest, iciest nights.

GOOD TO KNOW

Lithium batteries hold up far better than ordinary alkaline ones in the cold. For an outdoor lock through an Ohio winter, lithium is the sensible choice.

Because doors move with the seasons, I tell folks to re-check the strike alignment once a year, ideally heading into winter. A door that glided shut all summer may bind a bit once the cold dries it out, and a two-minute check keeps the lock from straining when you need it most.

Keep that physical key accessible for winter, too. If a battery gives out on a frigid night, or your fingers are too cold for the keypad, the key is your sure way in. A smart lock should make your life easier in every season, and a little winter planning is how it delivers.

20. Finishing up and the first codes

The install is not done until it is tested.

Mounting the lock is only two-thirds of the job. The last third is setting it up so your household can actually use it, and testing until you trust it. I treat this part as seriously as the screws, because a lock nobody can work is no better than a locked-out door.

- 1 Create your account in the lock's app and connect it to your home internet.
- 2 Set your own main code first, and avoid obvious numbers like the house number or a birth year.
- 3 Add a code for each regular person: family, a helper, a neighbor who checks in.
- 4 Turn on auto-lock so the door relocks itself after you come and go.
- 5 Test every code at the door, and test the backup key, before you walk away.

TIP

Label each code with a plain name in the app, like Daughter or Aide, not just a number. Later it tells you at a glance whose code opened the door.

Auto-lock is the setting I turn on for nearly everyone, because it closes the gap that a door left ajar creates. You set it to relock a short time after the bolt is drawn, and then you never have to remember. For someone who worries about whether they locked up, it is a quiet relief.

Do not skip testing the physical key at the very end. A brand-new replacement comes with keys, and you want to confirm they turn smoothly before you ever need them in a pinch. A retrofit keeps your old key, but it is still worth a test turn to be sure nothing shifted during the install.

21. When to DIY and when to call a pro

An honest dividing line.

I believe in people doing what they can themselves, and I will happily tell you when a job is well within reach. I will also tell you plainly when a pro is the smart call, because forcing a job you are not set up for can ruin a good door. Here is my honest dividing line.

- Fine to DIY: a retrofit like the August, or a replacement into an existing deadbolt hole.
- Lean on a pro: drilling a brand-new hole in a door from scratch.
- Call for help: a nonstandard door, an odd backset, or a door that will not align.
- Worth a visit: when you want it all set up, tested, and explained in one sitting.

TIP

The physical mounting is often the easy part. If you want help, it is usually the app setup, the codes, and the testing where a visit saves you the most time and worry.

If you are comfortable with a screwdriver and your door already has a deadbolt, a retrofit or a straightforward replacement is a satisfying afternoon project, and I cheer you on. Measure, go slow, test thoroughly, and keep that key handy. There is real pleasure in doing it yourself.

But if you are facing a door with no hole, an odd measurement, or a bolt that will not line up, please do not force it. A drilled-crooked or jammed lock is far more expensive to put right than it would have been to do once, carefully. That is exactly where a thirty-plus-year pro earns their keep.

22. Older and nonstandard doors

When your door is not textbook.

Plenty of homes around Portage County were built decades ago, and older doors do not always match the tidy standard sizes a smart lock expects. A thinner door, an odd backset, a worn or out-of-square frame: any of these can turn a simple install into a puzzle. Knowing this ahead of time saves you from buying a lock that will not fit.

- Older doors are sometimes thinner than modern locks are built for.
- A backset well off the two standard numbers signals a nonstandard door.
- A frame that has shifted over the years can make any bolt bind.
- A beautiful old wood door is worth protecting from a careless install.

WATCH OUT

Do not force a standard lock onto a nonstandard door. Forcing it can crack hardware or damage a door that may be hard or costly to replace. Measure first, always.

For these doors, a retrofit is often the kinder path, because it works with the deadbolt and hole you already have rather than demanding a standard fit. If your existing deadbolt turns smoothly and the door is sound, a retrofit adds the smarts without asking the old door to accommodate new hardware it was never cut for.

When a replacement really is wanted on an older door, that is a good moment for a professional eye. I can tell quickly whether a standard lock will seat, whether an adjustable model will bridge an odd backset, or whether a bit of careful work on the frame will set things right. The goal is always a lock that fits the door, with the door left none the worse.

23. When to Call Bill

Measured, mounted, and tested right.

You can absolutely install a smart lock yourself, and I hope this guide gives you the confidence to try where it fits. Where I help is getting the choice and the fit right the first time: measuring your door, picking retrofit or replacement, mounting it square, aligning the strike, and setting up the app so it all just works. I have been doing hands-on tech work for more than thirty years.

- Not sure whether to retrofit or replace: I will measure and recommend the right style for your door.
- A door with no hole or an odd backset: I handle the tricky fit so your door stays beautiful.
- A lock that binds or drains batteries: usually a strike alignment I can set right quickly.
- Want it mounted, set up, and explained in one visit: that is exactly what I do.

GOOD TO KNOW

My first visit is a flat ninety-nine dollars, and that typically covers measuring, installing, and setting up a smart lock on a standard door. A remote screen-share for app help is forty-nine dollars, and my Support Plan is thirty-nine dollars a month.

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. If I am on a job, my booking assistant Sophie can get you scheduled.

If I have helped you get a lock on your door that you can count on, 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 take care.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

The quick reference for choosing and fitting your install style. Keep it handy.

- Rent? Choose a retrofit that keeps the landlord's key and hardware.
 - Want an outside keypad? Choose a full replacement.
 - Measure three numbers: backset, door thickness, and bore hole.
 - Retrofit: screwdriver, about fifteen minutes, fully reversible.
 - Replacement into an existing hole: screwdriver, about an hour.
- 1 Decide retrofit or replacement from your situation.
 - 2 Measure the door before buying a replacement.
 - 3 Mount the lock, tightening screws evenly.
 - 4 Calibrate and test with the door open, then closed.
 - 5 Fix any strike misalignment before you rely on it.

TIP

Make sure the plain deadbolt turns smoothly by hand before adding a motor. Smooth and square is the whole secret.

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Retrofit lock — A smart lock that mounts on the inside and keeps your existing deadbolt, outside hardware, and key.

Full replacement — A smart lock that swaps the entire old deadbolt for a new one, usually with an outside keypad and new keys.

Deadbolt — The strong bolt that slides into the door frame to lock the door; the part a smart lock controls.

Thumbturn — The little knob on the inside of a deadbolt that you twist to lock; a retrofit motor mounts over it.

Backset — The distance from the edge of the door to the center of the bolt hole; usually two and three-eighths or two and three-quarters inches.

Door thickness — How thick the door is at its edge; most run between one and three-eighths and one and three-quarters inches.

Bore hole — The large round hole through the face of the door where the lock body sits, commonly two and one-eighth inches.

Strike plate — The metal plate on the door frame with a hole the bolt slides into; alignment here is a common source of trouble.

Calibration — Teaching a smart lock where the fully locked and unlocked positions are, so the motor turns the bolt correctly.

Level Bolt — A retrofit lock that replaces only the hidden bolt inside the door, keeping your handles and key so the door looks ordinary.

August — A popular retrofit lock that clips over the inside thumbturn and installs in minutes with a screwdriver.

Re-key — Changing a lock's cylinder so it opens with a different key, sometimes used to match a new lock to a key you already carry.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Retrofit vs replacement

Two ways a lock goes on a door

Retrofit	Full replacement
• Keeps your key • Mounts inside only • Reversible, renter-safe • About fifteen minutes	• New keys and keypad • Whole deadbolt swapped • Permanent change • About an hour

Pick by whether you rent and whether you want an outside keypad.

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

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Measure before you buy

Three numbers for a replacement

**Confirm the door is standard before ordering a replacement lock.**

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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