

Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or Matter?

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 Decide: control the door from away, or only up close?
- 2 Away needs Wi-Fi, a bridge, a hub, or Matter-over-Thread.
- 3 Match the lock to your phones and smart speakers.
- 4 At setup, use the 2.4 GHz Wi-Fi lane, not the 5.
- 5 Keep good lithium AA spares for Ohio winters.
- 6 Stuck? Call or text Bill at (330) 200-8042.

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Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or Matter — How Smart Locks Connect

Bluetooth, built-in Wi-Fi, a bridge, or Matter — what each one means for your lock.

————— An Extended Guide · No. 1878 · SMART LOCKS —————

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What's Inside

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Every smart lock has a little radio inside it. That radio is how the lock and your phone talk to each other. The kind of radio decides whether you can lock the door from the grocery store in Ravenna or only from your own hallway.

- Bluetooth-only locks work when your phone is within a room or two of the door, and nowhere else.
- Wi-Fi locks, or a lock plus a small Wi-Fi bridge, let you lock and check the door from anywhere you have signal.
- Z-Wave and Zigbee are older smart-home radios that need a separate hub box to work.
- Matter-over-Thread is the newer shared standard, and it needs a Thread border router, which is often an Apple, Google, or Amazon device you may already own.

TIP

If you only want to answer the door from your couch, Bluetooth is plenty. If you want to let the dog-walker in while you are in Florida, you need Wi-Fi or a bridge. That one question settles most of the decision.

I install these all the time around Portage County. Do not let the word Matter scare you. By the end of this guide you will know exactly which type fits your house, and I am a phone call away if you want me to just handle it.

1. Why the way a lock connects matters

The radio inside decides what the lock can and cannot do.

When folks shop for a smart lock, they look at the keypad, the finish, and the price. All of that matters. But the thing that quietly decides whether you will be happy is how the lock connects. That is the radio tucked inside the part that sits on the inside of your door.

Here is why it matters so much. A lock that only speaks Bluetooth cannot reach you when you are across town. A lock with Wi-Fi can send a note to your phone the moment the door opens, even if you are in Myrtle Beach. Same keypad, same finish, completely different experience. The connection is the part nobody explains at the store, so people get home and feel let down.

There are really five ways a modern lock connects. Bluetooth only. Built-in Wi-Fi. A separate Wi-Fi bridge. An older smart-home hub using Z-Wave or Zigbee. And the newer

standard called Matter, which usually rides on a radio named Thread. I will walk you through each one in plain words, with no assumption that you know any of it.

GOOD TO KNOW

You do not need to memorize these names. You need to know which one matches how you want to use the door. Keep one question in your head as you read: do I want to control this door when I am away from home, or only when I am close to it?

That single question is the fork in the road. Everything else, including which brand, which phone, and which voice assistant, follows from it. So let us take the five connection types one at a time, starting with the simplest.

2. Bluetooth-only locks, explained

Great up close, useless from a distance.

Bluetooth is the same short-range radio your phone uses to talk to a hearing aid or a car stereo. It reaches about one to two rooms, maybe a little farther with a clear line of sight. That is its whole personality. Close up it is reliable and quick. Far away it simply is not there.

A Bluetooth-only lock pairs directly with your phone. When you walk up to the door, your phone and the lock shake hands and the lock will open, often on its own if you turn on auto-unlock. No internet is involved, no monthly fee, and nothing is sent out over the web. For a lot of people that is exactly right.

- You can lock and unlock from inside your home and from the porch.
- Family members with the app can do the same when they are home.
- You can still hand out keypad codes that work whether your phone is near or not.
- You cannot check or control the door from the store, the doctor's office, or on vacation.

The keypad is what saves a Bluetooth lock from being limited. Even with no internet, you or a guest can punch in a code and get in. So the Bluetooth part is really just for the convenience of your own phone opening the door automatically.

WATCH OUT

If the honest answer to how you will use the lock is only when I am home or walking up, a Bluetooth-only model is simpler, cheaper, and has one less thing to break. Do not pay for remote features you will never touch.

The catch is that many people think they will not want remote access, then a month later wish they could let a grandchild in from work. If there is any chance of that, read on before you decide.

3. Built-in Wi-Fi locks

The whole house becomes your reach.

A built-in Wi-Fi lock joins your home internet the same way your phone or TV does. Because it is on the internet, it can reach you anywhere you have a signal. Lock the door from the parking lot. Get a message when the kids come home from school. Buzz the caregiver in while you are three states away. That is the appeal.

No extra box is needed for a built-in Wi-Fi lock. The radio is already inside. You set it up once with the lock's app, point it at your home network, and from then on it talks to the internet on its own.

- Remote lock and unlock from anywhere.
- Alerts on your phone when the door is opened, left unlocked, or jammed.
- Easy to add to Alexa or Google for voice control, often without buying anything extra.
- Uses more battery than Bluetooth, because keeping a Wi-Fi radio awake takes energy.

WATCH OUT

Wi-Fi is the thirstiest radio for batteries. A Wi-Fi lock may need fresh batteries two or three times as often as a Bluetooth one. That is not a dealbreaker, but plan to keep a pack of batteries in a drawer and do not be surprised by it.

There is one setup gotcha I will cover in its own chapter, because it trips up almost everyone: most of these locks will only join the 2.4 gigahertz part of your Wi-Fi, not the 5 gigahertz part. If that sentence means nothing to you, do not worry. I will make it simple later, and it is a five-minute fix.

For most people who want the full smart-lock experience in one tidy package, a built-in Wi-Fi lock is the honest sweet spot. It just works, from anywhere, with no hub to buy.

4. The separate Wi-Fi bridge

A little plug-in box that gives a Bluetooth lock long legs.

Some locks are Bluetooth at the door but come with, or can add, a small plug-in box called a bridge. You plug the bridge into an outlet somewhere inside the house, near the door. The bridge stays on your Wi-Fi all the time and relays messages between the lock and the internet.

Why would a maker do it this way instead of just putting Wi-Fi in the lock? Battery life. The thirsty Wi-Fi radio lives in the plugged-in bridge, which never runs out of power, while the lock itself sips battery over gentle Bluetooth. You get remote access and longer battery life at the same time. The trade is one more gadget on a shelf and one more thing to set up.

- The lock runs on quiet, battery-friendly Bluetooth.
- The plugged-in bridge handles the internet and never needs batteries.
- You get remote control and alerts, same as a built-in Wi-Fi lock.
- If the bridge loses power or is too far from the lock, remote features stop until it reconnects.

GOOD TO KNOW

Placement is everything with a bridge. It needs to be close enough to the lock to hear it over Bluetooth and close enough to your router to hold a solid Wi-Fi signal. In an older Atwater farmhouse with thick walls, that middle spot can take a little hunting. This is a common thing I sort out on a first visit.

The bridge style was very popular with one well-known brand for years. It is a sensible design. Just know that the bridge is a required part, not an accessory, if you want to use the door from away. Lose the bridge, and you are back to a Bluetooth-only lock.

5. Z-Wave and Zigbee hubs

Older smart-home radios that need a brain box.

Before Wi-Fi locks and Matter came along, serious smart homes ran on two radios with odd names: Z-Wave and Zigbee. These are low-power radios built for smart-home gadgets. They do not talk to your phone or the internet directly. Instead they talk to a central hub, a small box that acts as the brain for all your devices and connects them to the internet.

If you already own a smart-home hub, a security panel, or a system that mentions Z-Wave or Zigbee, a lock that uses the same radio can join right in and play nicely with your lights, sensors, and alarm. If you do not own one of those systems, buying a hub just to run one lock is usually more than it is worth.

- Very light on batteries, because these radios are sleepy by design.
- They need a compatible hub, bought separately, to reach the internet.
- They shine when you already have a whole-home system to plug into.
- For a single door and no existing system, there are simpler choices.

WATCH OUT

My honest take: if a salesperson is steering a first-time buyer toward Z-Wave or Zigbee for one door, pump the brakes. These are wonderful inside a larger system you already run. On their own, they add cost and complication most folks do not need.

The good news is that Matter, which we will get to next, was created partly to end the confusion of all these competing radios. It is meant to be the one standard they can all speak. So if you are starting fresh, you can often skip the Z-Wave and Zigbee world entirely.

Still, if you have an older alarm system in a Kent or Stow home that already uses one of these, tell me. Matching the lock to the system you have can save you money and headaches.

6. Matter and Thread, the new standard

One language more and more devices agree to speak.

Matter is not a radio. It is an agreement. The big companies, Apple, Google, Amazon, Samsung, and the lock makers, all got tired of gadgets that would not work together. So they agreed on a shared language called Matter. A lock that speaks Matter is meant to work with any of the major systems, instead of locking you into one.

Thread is the radio that most Matter locks use to actually send the signal. So you will often see the phrase Matter-over-Thread. Think of Thread as the road and Matter as the common language everyone on that road agrees to speak. Thread is low-power, like Z-Wave, which is kind to batteries, and it is designed so devices quietly pass messages along for each other.

- Works across Apple, Google, and Amazon rather than just one of them.

- Gentle on batteries, because Thread is a low-power radio.
- Needs a Thread border router, a device that connects the Thread network to the internet.
- It is the most future-proof choice as more and more devices adopt it.

GOOD TO KNOW

The word border router sounds technical, but a border router is often a gadget you already own. Many newer Apple, Google, and Amazon smart speakers and streaming boxes double as one. I will cover this in the next chapter so it is crystal clear.

New Matter-over-Thread locks keep arriving from brands you will recognize and some you will not. Some pair Matter-over-Thread with built-in Wi-Fi as a backup path, which is a nice belt-and-suspenders design. The field is young, so I steer people toward brands with a real track record, not the cheapest listing online.

If you want the longest runway before anything feels outdated, Matter is the direction things are heading. Just go in knowing you need that border router, which we will demystify next.

7. What a Thread border router actually is

The piece that makes Matter-over-Thread reach the world.

A Thread lock, on its own, can only talk to other Thread devices nearby. To reach the internet, so you can use the door from away or add it to an app, the Thread network needs a doorway to the outside. That doorway is called a border router. It bridges the little Thread network and your home internet.

Here is the part that makes it easy. You usually do not buy a border router as a separate thing. Many devices people already own do the job. Newer Apple HomePod and Apple TV models can act as a Thread border router. Several newer Google Nest speakers and displays can too. Some newer Amazon Echo devices can as well. If you own one of those, you may already have what you need sitting on a shelf.

- A border router connects the Thread devices to your home internet.
- It is often built into a smart speaker or streaming box you already own.
- Without one, a Thread lock works only up close, like a Bluetooth lock.
- You generally want it powered on and staying put, near the middle of the home.

WATCH OUT

If you buy a Matter-over-Thread lock and have no border router anywhere in the house, you will be puzzled when remote control does not work. The lock is fine. It simply has no doorway to the internet yet. Check for a compatible device before you buy, or plan to add one.

This is exactly the kind of thing I check on a first visit. I will look at what you already own, tell you honestly whether it can serve as a border router, and only suggest buying one if you truly need it. No upselling. Where a feature is more trouble than it is worth for your situation, I will say so.

8. Remote unlock, feature by feature

What each connection lets you do from away.

Let us line up the five connection types against the one thing most people care about: can I control the door when I am not home. This is the heart of the whole decision, so it is worth seeing side by side.

- Bluetooth only: no remote control. You must be within a room or two.
- Built-in Wi-Fi: full remote control from anywhere with a signal.
- Wi-Fi bridge: full remote control, as long as the bridge is powered and in range.
- Z-Wave or Zigbee: remote control, but only through a hub that reaches the internet.
- Matter-over-Thread: remote control through a Thread border router.

Notice the pattern. Only pure Bluetooth leaves you with no reach at all. Every other type gives you remote access, but each needs a different helper to get online: built-in Wi-Fi needs nothing extra, a bridge needs the bridge, the older radios need a hub, and Thread needs a border router.

TIP

When a product page promises you can control your lock from anywhere, read the fine print for the words bridge, hub, or border router required. If one of those appears, that part is not optional. It is the piece that makes anywhere actually mean anywhere.

For most Portage County homes where someone wants true remote access with the least fuss, I usually land on either a built-in Wi-Fi lock or a well-supported Matter-over-Thread lock paired with a border router the family already owns. Both are solid. The choice often comes down to which phone and which smart speakers you already live with, which is where we are headed next.

9. Notifications and alerts

The quiet feature people end up loving most.

Remote unlocking gets all the attention, but the feature folks tell me they treasure is the little alert on their phone. The door was unlocked at the time the aide usually arrives. The door is still unlocked and it is bedtime. Someone just came in. For peace of mind, that is gold.

Alerts need the same internet connection that remote control needs. A Bluetooth-only lock cannot send you a note when you are away, because it has no way to reach you. Any lock with Wi-Fi, a bridge, a hub, or a Thread border router can. If getting a heads-up matters to you, that rules out pure Bluetooth.

- Get a message when the door is opened or closed.
- Get reminded if the door was left unlocked.
- See a running history of who came and went, by code or by name.
- Set it so certain codes, like a grandchild's, always ping your phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

For families keeping a gentle eye on an older parent, alerts can be set so a check-in visit quietly confirms someone arrived, without any camera and without anyone feeling watched. It is a kind way to use the technology.

You control which alerts you get. Some people want every single open and close. Others want only the exceptions, like a door left unlocked too long. In the app you can usually turn each kind of notice on or off until it feels helpful rather than noisy.

If the stack of alerts ever feels like too much, that is an easy thing to tune. On a remote screen-share I can walk you through trimming them down in a few minutes so your phone only speaks up when it truly should.

10. Battery life and the radio

The type of radio quietly sets how often you change batteries.

Most smart locks run on regular batteries, often four AA cells, that live in the part on the inside of your door. How long they last has a lot to do with which radio the lock uses, because some radios are far hungrier than others.

- Bluetooth: easiest on batteries, because it only wakes up when your phone is near.
- Z-Wave, Zigbee, and Thread: also gentle, because they are low-power by design.
- Built-in Wi-Fi: the hungriest, since it keeps an internet connection awake.
- A Wi-Fi bridge setup: easy on the lock, because the hungry part is plugged into the wall.

WATCH OUT

Ohio winters make this worse. Cold batteries give up their charge faster, and the inside of an exterior door gets chilly. A Wi-Fi lock that lasts several months in summer may want fresh batteries sooner in a Mogadore January. Keep spares on hand through the cold months.

The lock will warn you well before it dies. You will see a low-battery message in the app and often a blinking light or a tone at the keypad. Smart locks are designed to nag you for days or weeks first, so you are very unlikely to get stranded if you pay attention to the warning.

If you ever are worried about being locked out, nearly every smart lock still has a real keyhole, or a spot to touch a backup battery, so a dead lock is not a crisis. I always make sure my customers know where that backup is before I leave.

My rule of thumb: if the thought of changing batteries a few times a year bothers you, lean toward Bluetooth, Thread, or a bridge-style lock, and keep the thirsty built-in Wi-Fi for folks who do not mind the trade for all-in-one simplicity.

11. The 2.4 gigahertz Wi-Fi requirement

The setup snag that stumps almost everyone.

Here is the single most common hiccup I fix with Wi-Fi locks, so let me make it plain. Your home Wi-Fi usually has two lanes, called 2.4 gigahertz and 5 gigahertz. The 5 lane is faster for things like streaming. The 2.4 lane is slower but reaches farther and is better for small gadgets. Most smart locks will only join the 2.4 lane.

The trouble is that many modern routers hide both lanes under one network name and decide for you which to use. Your phone might be happily on the 5 lane while the lock sits by the door needing the 2.4 lane, and the setup just fails with a vague error. People try again and again, sure they typed the password wrong. They did not.

- Smart locks almost always need the 2.4 gigahertz lane, not the 5.
- Many routers combine both lanes under one name, which confuses setup.

- During setup, your phone may need to be on the 2.4 lane too, for a moment.
- The fix is usually a small change in the router settings, not a new router.

TIP

If a Wi-Fi lock refuses to connect no matter what you do, the 2.4 versus 5 lane is the first thing to suspect. This is not your fault and it does not mean the lock is broken. It is just how these radios and routers were built.

Sorting this out can mean separating the two lanes, giving the 2.4 lane its own name for a minute, or standing closer to the router during setup. It varies by router brand, which is why it frustrates people doing it alone.

This is a textbook job for a flat ninety-nine-dollar first visit or a forty-nine-dollar remote screen-share. I have seen nearly every router out there, and getting a lock onto the right lane is usually a quick fix once you know where to look.

12. Working with Apple Home

For families who live on iPhones and iPads.

If your household runs on iPhones, you may want the lock to show up in Apple's own Home app, so Siri can lock the door and the lock sits alongside your other Apple gear. Apple calls its smart-home system HomeKit, and the app is simply named Home.

To use a lock from away through Apple's Home app, Apple needs a home hub in the house. A home hub is an Apple device that stays home and relays your commands: a HomePod, a HomePod mini, or an Apple TV. Many of these newer models can also serve as the Thread border router a Matter lock needs, which is a tidy two-birds situation.

- Look for Works with Apple Home, HomeKit, or Matter on the box.
- You will need a HomePod or Apple TV at home to control the lock while away.
- Newer Apple HomePod and Apple TV models can also be the Thread border router.
- Not every lock offers tap-your-phone-to-the-door unlocking, so confirm that separately if you want it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Matter was a real gift to iPhone households, because a Matter lock plus a newer Apple speaker or Apple TV often covers both the Apple Home connection and the Thread border router in one shot. Fewer pieces, less to go wrong.

One honest caution: a given lock may work with Apple Home for locking and alerts but not offer the tap-to-unlock trick some Apple fans want. Those are two different features. If tapping your phone or watch to the door is important to you, ask me and I will confirm which specific models truly do it before you spend a dime.

For a committed iPhone family, I usually look first at locks that clearly list Apple Home or Matter support, then make sure the right Apple device is in place to act as the hub.

13. Working with Google Home

For households built around Android and Nest.

If your phones are Android and you have Google or Nest speakers around the house, you will likely want the lock in Google's Home app so you can say, Hey Google, is the front door locked. Google's smart-home system lives in that one app, which keeps things simple.

As with Apple, voice control and away-from-home control lean on a Google device staying in the house. Several newer Google Nest speakers and displays can also act as the Thread border router for a Matter lock, so again you may already own the piece you need.

- Look for Works with Google Home or Matter on the packaging.
- An Android phone is all you need to set it up and carry it with you.
- Newer Google Nest speakers and displays can serve as the Thread border router.
- Voice commands let you check and lock the door hands-free.

TIP

Matter locks tend to be the most comfortable fit for Google households, because Google helped build the Matter standard and leaned into it. A Matter lock with a newer Nest speaker is often a clean, well-supported pairing.

Do take a moment to confirm that your particular Nest device can be a Thread border router, since not every older model can. The newer the device, the more likely it qualifies. If you are unsure which generation you own, that is a two-minute thing I can check for you on a screen-share.

For most Android and Nest homes around Streetsboro and Aurora, a Matter-over-Thread lock is where I start the conversation, with a built-in Wi-Fi lock as the simple fallback if there is no suitable Google device in the house.

14. Working with Amazon Alexa

For the Echo households.

If you have Amazon Echo speakers around the house, you probably want the lock to answer to Alexa. That lets you ask Alexa to lock the door, or add the door to routines, like locking up automatically when you say good night.

Alexa works with locks in two ways. Many Wi-Fi locks connect to Alexa directly through their own app, no extra gear needed. For Matter locks, some newer Amazon Echo devices can serve as both the smart-home hub and the Thread border router, the same all-in-one idea we saw with Apple and Google.

- Look for Works with Alexa or Matter on the box.
- Many built-in Wi-Fi locks join Alexa directly, with nothing extra to buy.
- Some newer Amazon Echo models can act as the Thread border router for a Matter lock.
- You can fold the door into Alexa routines, like locking up at bedtime.

WATCH OUT

For safety, Alexa will usually let you lock a door by voice freely but will ask for a spoken PIN before it will unlock one. That is on purpose, so nobody outside a window can just shout your door open. Do not be surprised when it asks.

Which Echo you own matters for the Thread question. The ability to act as a border router showed up in newer models, so an older Echo may do voice control just fine but not serve as the Thread doorway. If you are mixing an Echo with a Matter lock, confirm the model first.

For an Echo household that just wants simple voice control and alerts, a good built-in Wi-Fi lock is often the path of least resistance. We can always add Matter later if you grow into it.

15. Choosing by the phone and speakers you already own

Start with your life, not the lock.

Here is how I actually guide people through this, and it is simpler than the brochures make it sound. Do not start by picking a lock. Start by looking at what is already in your pocket and on your shelves. The right lock falls out of that almost by itself.

- 1 Look at your phone. Is the family on iPhones or on Android? That points you toward Apple Home or Google Home.

- 2 Look at your speakers. Do you have HomePod, Nest, or Echo devices, and are any of them newer models?
- 3 Decide if you need away-from-home control. If yes, you need Wi-Fi, a bridge, or a Thread border router.
- 4 Match the lock to those answers, favoring Matter if you want the longest future runway.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your home is a mix, some iPhones and some Android, Matter is the peacemaker. Because it works across all the major systems, nobody in the family gets left out, and you are not betting the house on one company.

Notice what I did not tell you to do: obsess over the lock's brand first. The connection and your existing gear matter far more than the logo. A beautiful lock that does not fit your phone and speakers will disappoint you every single day.

When people bring me this puzzle, we usually solve it in one short conversation. You tell me your phones and speakers, I tell you two or three locks that fit, and you pick the finish you like best. That is the whole decision, made calm instead of confusing.

If you would rather not sort it yourself, that is exactly what the first visit is for. I will look at what you own and hand you a straight recommendation.

16. Future-proofing and swappable modules

How to avoid feeling outdated next year.

Nobody wants to spend good money on a lock and feel behind in a year. The good news is that the industry has made future-proofing easier than it used to be, mostly through Matter and through clever locks you can upgrade without replacing.

Matter is the big one. Because it is a shared standard the major companies agreed to, a Matter lock is less likely to be stranded by any single company changing its mind. As more devices adopt Matter, a Matter lock tends to gain friends rather than lose them.

- A Matter lock works across systems, so you are not locked to one brand's fate.
- Some locks use a swappable module, letting you add Wi-Fi or Matter later.
- Starting on Bluetooth and upgrading the module can spread out the cost.
- Buying from a brand with a track record means better odds of lasting updates.

TIP

The swappable-module idea is smart for cautious buyers. You can buy the lock in its simple Bluetooth form now, live with it, and snap in a Wi-Fi or Matter module later if you decide you want remote access. One brand built its whole modern line around this.

The flip side of chasing the newest standard is that the very newest locks can have early-days quirks. I tend to steer first-time buyers toward models that have been out long enough to prove themselves, rather than the shiniest brand-new listing. New is not always better the first season.

If future-proofing is on your mind, tell me how long you hope to keep the lock. For a decade of service I lean Matter. For a simple door you may change in a few years, I may save you money with something plainer. Honest fit over hype, always.

17. Ohio winters and your front door

Cold weather is a real part of the decision here.

We are in Portage County, so I would be doing you a disservice if I did not talk about winter. Cold affects smart locks in a few real ways, and knowing them ahead of time saves a lot of grief in January.

- Cold batteries drain faster, so expect more frequent changes in deep winter.
- Ice can build up around the deadbolt and make the motor work harder.
- A touchscreen keypad can be slower to respond to cold, gloved fingers.
- Condensation and freeze-thaw can stress a lock that is not rated for the outdoors.

WATCH OUT

Most of a smart lock sits inside the door, which is good, but the deadbolt and sometimes the keypad face the weather. If the bolt area ices up, the little motor may strain or jam. A squirt of the right dry lubricant in fall, not oil, keeps it moving smoothly all winter.

This is one more reason I like locks with a simple physical backup, a keyhole or a touch point for a backup battery. On the coldest morning, when a phone is slow and fingers are stiff, it is a comfort to know a real key or a quick battery touch still works.

Battery choice helps too. Good-quality lithium AA batteries hold up better in the cold than cheap alkaline ones, which is worth the small extra cost for an exterior door through an Ohio winter. I keep a brand I trust in the truck and can point you to it.

When I install a lock for a local family, I set it up with winter in mind from day one: the right batteries, the bolt lined up so it is not straining, and a reminder of where the backup is. That way the first cold snap is a non-event.

18. Guest codes across connection types

Letting people in without handing out a phone.

A lovely thing about smart locks is that you can let people in with a keypad code instead of a key, and that works no matter which radio the lock uses. The code is entered right at the door, so it does not depend on the internet at all.

Where the connection type comes in is how you create and manage those codes. With a Bluetooth lock, you generally have to be near the lock to add or change a code. With a Wi-Fi, bridge, hub, or Thread lock, you can create or cancel a code from anywhere, which is far handier.

- The code itself works at the keypad with no internet, on any lock.
- On a Bluetooth lock, you usually must be nearby to add or remove codes.
- On a connected lock, you can add or cancel codes from the store or from away.
- Connected locks can also tell you which code was used and when.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is where remote access quietly earns its keep. Picture the weekday aide who visits a parent in Tallmadge. With a connected lock you can give that aide a code, see on your phone when they arrive, and cancel the code the day their help ends, all without driving over.

You can also set codes that only work on certain days or hours, so the house-cleaner's code works on their day and no other. That kind of control simply is not possible with a brass key, which works for anyone, anytime, until you change the whole lock.

If managing codes feels fiddly, it is one of the easiest things to learn on a screen-share. In twenty minutes I can have you comfortably adding, naming, and canceling codes for the people in your life.

19. Setup day, what to expect

A calm walk through getting connected.

Let me take the mystery out of setup day, because dread of the setup is what keeps a lot of people from enjoying a smart lock they would love. Here is the honest shape of it, in order.

- 1 Install the physical lock on the door, making sure the deadbolt slides freely.
- 2 Download the lock maker's app and create an account with an email and password.
- 3 Let the app find the lock over Bluetooth and give it a name, like Front Door.
- 4 For a connected lock, join it to the 2.4 gigahertz Wi-Fi, or set up the bridge or border router.
- 5 Add your voice assistant, Apple Home, Google, or Alexa, if you want it.
- 6 Create your keypad codes and set which alerts you want.

TIP

The physical install is often the easy part. Most smart locks replace a standard deadbolt with a screwdriver. The connecting and account steps are where people get stuck, especially the Wi-Fi lane issue. If any step stalls, stop and ask rather than forcing it.

Budget a little patience for the account step. You will create a login, and the app will likely send a code to your email or phone to confirm it is really you. Have your email open and ready so you are not hunting for that code mid-setup.

If the door itself is a little off, an old frame that has shifted, a deadbolt that catches, it is worth fixing that before or during install. A smart lock's motor is not as strong as your wrist, so a sticky bolt that you muscle through today will fight the motor tomorrow.

If you would rather skip the whole adventure, this is precisely what I do. A flat ninety-nine-dollar first visit covers install, connection, your codes, and a sit-down to make sure you are comfortable using it before I leave.

20. Common connection problems and fixes

The handful of snags I see again and again.

Smart locks are reliable once they are set up right, but a few problems come up often enough that it is worth knowing the usual cures. Most are quick, and most are not the lock's fault.

- Will not connect to Wi-Fi: almost always the 2.4 versus 5 gigahertz lane. Separate the lanes or move closer to the router.
- Remote control stopped working: check that the bridge or border router still has power and is in range.
- Lock is slow or jams: the deadbolt may be binding, or batteries may be low and cold.
- App cannot find the lock: Bluetooth may be off on your phone, or you drifted out of range.
- Keypad not responding: wake it with a palm or a tap, and check for a low-battery warning.

GOOD TO KNOW

The humble restart fixes a surprising share of glitches. Pulling the batteries for about ten seconds and putting them back, or power-cycling the bridge, clears up many temporary hiccups, just like restarting a balky phone.

If remote features vanish all at once, the culprit is usually your internet, not the lock. A router that rebooted after a Portage County storm can drop the lock until it reconnects. Make sure your home Wi-Fi is up before blaming the door.

When a lock jams or strains, resist the urge to force it over and over, which can wear the motor. Check the bolt alignment and the batteries first. A lock that has to fight the door every time will not last, and the fix is usually a small adjustment to the strike plate.

Anything you cannot clear in a few minutes is a fine reason to call. A forty-nine-dollar remote screen-share solves most connection puzzles without my needing to drive out, and I can usually see the problem faster than describing it over the phone.

21. Privacy and the security of the connection

What goes over the internet, and what does not.

It is fair to wonder what a connected lock is sending out over the internet, and whether that is safe. Let me give you the honest picture without the scare tactics some articles lean on.

A connected lock sends things like lock and unlock events, battery level, and your commands to the maker's service, which relays them to your phone. It is not broadcasting a live view of your home. A Bluetooth-only lock sends nothing to the internet at all, which is the most private option if that is your priority.

- Connected locks share lock status and your commands with the maker's service.
- Reputable brands scramble, or encrypt, that information so others cannot read it.

- Protect the account with a strong, unique password and, where offered, a second login step.
- A Bluetooth-only lock keeps everything local and sends nothing to the internet.

WATCH OUT

The weakest point is almost never the lock's radio. It is a reused password. If the email and password on your lock account are the same ones from a website that was breached years ago, that is the real risk. Use a password you do not use anywhere else.

Choosing a brand with a reputation to protect matters here. Established lock makers put real effort into security and keep issuing updates. A bargain lock from a no-name seller may save a few dollars and cost you peace of mind. This is one place I do not recommend the cheapest option.

If privacy is a top concern for you, say so and I will weigh it in my recommendation, maybe leaning toward a Bluetooth or local setup. And I am always glad to help you set a strong password and turn on the extra login step so the account itself is locked down tight.

22. A plain buying checklist and my honest take

What to settle before you spend a dime.

Let me gather everything into a short checklist you can carry to the store or to an online cart. Answer these and you will not buy the wrong lock.

- 1 Do I want to control the door from away, or only up close? Away means Wi-Fi, a bridge, a hub, or Thread.
- 2 What phones does my family carry, iPhone or Android?
- 3 What smart speakers do I own, and are any of them newer Apple, Google, or Amazon models?
- 4 Do I already have a Thread border router hiding in one of those speakers?
- 5 How much do I care about battery changes and about lasting many years?
- 6 Do I have a physical backup I am comfortable with for emergencies?

GOOD TO KNOW

If you can answer only the first question, you are already most of the way there. Away or up close decides more than everything else combined. Everything else just fine-tunes the choice.

My honest take, after installing these all over the area: most people are happiest with either a solid built-in Wi-Fi lock for all-in-one simplicity, or a well-supported Matter-over-Thread

lock if they already own a newer smart speaker and want the longest future. Pure Bluetooth is a fine, cheaper choice for folks who truly only need the door up close.

I steer away from recommending the absolute cheapest locks and the brand-new-this-season models for first-time buyers. The middle ground, a proven brand with a real track record, is where the happy customers live.

And if all of this still feels like a lot, that is completely normal. You do not have to become an expert. You can tell me how you live, and I will hand you the one or two locks that fit, then put it on the door for you.

23. When to Call Bill

Your support plan, warranty help, and a standing offer.

You do not have to sort any of this out alone. Picking the right connection type, getting a lock onto the stubborn 2.4 gigahertz lane, pairing it with your phone and speakers, setting up codes for the people in your life, this is exactly the work I do every week for neighbors across Portage County.

- A flat ninety-nine-dollar first visit: I come to your home, install the lock, get it connected, set your codes, and make sure you are comfortable before I go.
- A forty-nine-dollar remote screen-share: perfect for connection snags, code questions, or adding a voice assistant without a house call.
- The Support Plan at thirty-nine dollars a month: ongoing help so you always have someone to call when something acts up or you buy a new phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

When you buy a lock on my recommendation, I help you with the warranty too. If a lock fails under its maker's warranty, I will help you handle the claim and the swap, so you are not stuck on hold alone trying to explain the problem.

I have more than thirty years of professional experience with this kind of technology, and I explain things in plain English, at your pace, as many times as it takes. There is no such thing as a silly question here. If a feature is more trouble than it is worth for your situation, I will tell you so, even if it means a smaller sale.

To set up a visit, call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or email bill@billshometech.com. My assistant Sophie helps with scheduling and will get you on the calendar at a time that works for you.

And if I have helped you feel confident about your door, I would be grateful for a quick review at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. It helps other folks in the area find honest, patient help. Thank you for trusting me with your home.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this near your door. It is the short version of everything that matters day to day.

- Control the door from away? You need Wi-Fi, a bridge, a hub, or Matter-over-Thread. Bluetooth only reaches a room or two.
 - Won't join Wi-Fi? Suspect the 2.4 gigahertz lane, not the 5. That fixes most setup failures.
 - Matter lock needs a Thread border router, often a newer Apple, Google, or Amazon speaker you may already own.
 - Wi-Fi locks eat batteries fastest. Bluetooth and Thread are gentlest. Cold Ohio winters drain them faster.
 - Low-battery warnings come days or weeks early. Keep good lithium AA spares in a drawer.
- 1 Lost remote control: check the bridge or border router has power and the internet is up.
 - 2 Lock jams or strains: check the bolt alignment and the batteries before forcing it.
 - 3 Need to add a guest: a connected lock lets you create and cancel codes from anywhere.
 - 4 Stuck on anything: call or text (330) 200-8042 for a quick screen-share.

TIP

Always know where your physical backup is, a keyhole or a backup-battery touch point, before you need it on a cold morning.

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Bluetooth — A short-range radio that reaches about a room or two. Good for opening the door when you are close, useless from away.

Wi-Fi — Your home internet signal. A lock with Wi-Fi can reach you anywhere you have a signal, but it uses more battery.

Wi-Fi bridge — A small plug-in box that relays between a Bluetooth lock and the internet, giving remote access while saving the lock's battery.

Z-Wave and Zigbee — Older low-power smart-home radios that need a separate hub box to reach the internet. Best when you already own a whole-home system.

Hub — A central box that acts as the brain for smart-home gadgets and connects them to the internet.

Matter — A shared language the major companies agreed on so smart-home devices work across Apple, Google, and Amazon instead of just one.

Thread — A low-power radio that most Matter locks use to send their signal. Easy on batteries and designed to pass messages along.

Thread border router — The device that connects a Thread network to the internet. Often built into a newer smart speaker or streaming box you already own.

2.4 and 5 gigahertz — The two lanes of home Wi-Fi. The 2.4 lane is slower but reaches farther, and most smart locks need it, not the 5 lane.

Deadbolt — The sturdy bolt that slides into the door frame. A smart lock's motor turns it, so it must slide freely without binding.

Encryption — Scrambling information so only the right devices can read it, which keeps your lock's commands private over the internet.

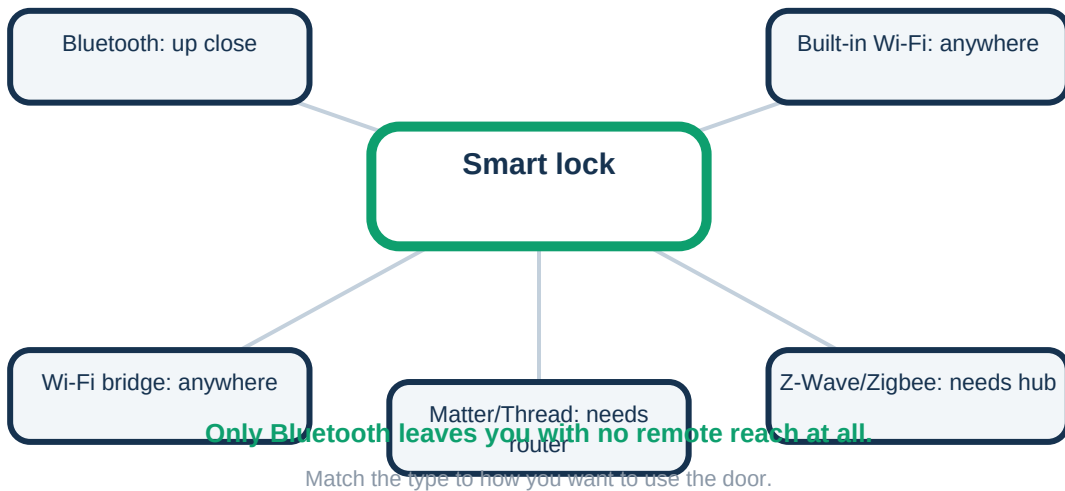
Swappable module — A part on some locks you can replace to add Wi-Fi or Matter later, so you can upgrade without buying a whole new lock.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Five ways a lock connects

The radio inside decides what the lock can do



AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Up close vs. from away

The one question that settles most of the choice

Only when I'm home

- Bluetooth is plenty
- Cheaper, fewer parts
- Gentlest on batteries
- Keypad codes still work
- No monthly fees

Also when I'm away

- Wi-Fi, bridge, or Thread
- Remote lock and unlock
- Phone alerts when door opens
- Add/cancel codes remotely
- Needs the right helper online

Away means Wi-Fi, a bridge, a hub, or Matter-over-Thread.

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

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.