BILL'S HOME TECH

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Smart Pool Water Monitors — A Plain-English Guide

Floating sensors, apps, and keeping your water right without the guesswork

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea, if you only have a minute.

A smart pool water monitor is a sensor you put in your pool that measures the water and sends the readings to an app on your phone. Most track pH, a chlorine or sanitizer reading, and temperature; some add salt or other numbers. The app then tells you, in plain terms, what to add and roughly how much. The goal is to replace the squint-at-the-strip guesswork with a clear picture you can see from the kitchen.

- The cost: hardware is commonly about $300 to $500, and most models have an ongoing cost too — replacement cartridges, a new sensor cap, or a small app subscription.
- The appeal: steady, automatic readings and friendly nudges before a problem gets away from you, without learning pool chemistry.
- The catch: the 'chlorine' number is often an indirect estimate, not a true lab reading, and the device needs Wi-Fi or a gateway that reaches the pool.

GOOD TO KNOW

One important late-2026 note: this is a market where brands come and go. Sutro, a well-known floating monitor, appears to have ceased operations, which can leave an owner with a device that stops working when its app service ends. Before you buy any monitor, confirm the company is still active and supporting it.

WATCH OUT

A monitor only suggests. Every pool chemical you add must be handled and dosed exactly as its own label says. The app is a helper, not a substitute for the directions on the bottle.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS

2 What a Smart Pool Monitor Actually Is

A thermometer, a chemistry reader, and a messenger in one.

Picture a sealed plastic device, a little bigger than a hockey puck or a small flashlight, that lives in your pool water. Inside are tiny electronic sensors that react to the water around them, plus a small radio that sends what it finds to your phone. Some float on the surface like a toy; some tuck into your skimmer basket; a few are plumbed into the pipes by a pro. Whatever the shape, the job is the same: read the water often, and report back.

Instead of you testing once or twice a week, the device checks on its own schedule, often every fifteen minutes to once an hour, around the clock. The app keeps a running history, so you see not just today's number but which way it is drifting, and it can ping you before a problem becomes a green pool.

The two main ways they read chlorine

This is the single most important thing to understand, so it is worth slowing down on. Monitors read your sanitizer in one of two ways. Some use a tiny chemical test, with a cartridge or cassette of reagent that reacts with a water sample, much like the drops in a test kit.

Others use an all-electronic sensor that measures the water's oxidizing strength, called ORP or redox, and estimate chlorine from that. The chemical kind tends to be closer to a true reading but needs refills; the electronic kind needs no refills but gives an indirect number.

> *Folks think they are buying a chlorine meter. Most of the time they are buying something cleverer and fuzzier than that, and knowing which one you have changes how much you trust it.*

WHAT THEY MEASURE

3 What They Measure and What the Numbers Mean

The handful of readings that keep water safe and clear.

Pool water chemistry sounds intimidating, but day to day it comes down to a few numbers. Here is what a monitor typically watches and why each one matters.

Reading	What it tells you	Why it matters
pH	How acidic or basic the water is	Off pH stings eyes and makes chlorine work poorly
Chlorine / sanitizer	How much germ-killing power is in the water	Too little and water goes cloudy or green; too much irritates
ORP / redox	The water's overall oxidizing strength	An electronic stand-in for sanitizer level, in millivolts
Temperature	How warm the water is	Affects comfort and how fast chemistry changes
Salt	Salt level, on salt-system pools	Your salt chlorine generator needs it in a set range

Most monitors always show pH and temperature, plus either a direct chlorine reading or an ORP number that stands in for it. Salt is only on models made with salt pools in mind. A few also estimate stabilizer, total alkalinity, or hardness, though those are usually rougher figures.

GOOD TO KNOW

Stabilizer, also called cyanuric acid or CYA, is the hidden character in this story. It protects chlorine from the sun, but in high amounts it throws off the electronic ORP reading, which is why an all-electronic monitor can look wrong on a well-stabilized pool even when the chlorine is fine.

CHLORINE VERSUS ORP

4 Why the App's 'Chlorine' Isn't Always Chlorine

The quirk that explains most confused owners.

If you take one idea from this guide, make it this one. Many popular monitors do not measure free chlorine in parts per million the way a test kit does. They measure ORP, the oxidation-reduction potential, in millivolts, and translate that into a friendly 'your sanitizer is good' message. ORP is a reasonable proxy, but it is not the same number, and several things can push it around.

- Stabilizer (CYA): higher stabilizer makes chlorine less oxidizing, so ORP reads lower even when the actual chlorine level is perfectly fine.
- pH: the ORP sensor reacts to pH as well as sanitizer, so a pH swing can nudge the reading.
- Temperature and other oxidizers in the water can shift it too.
- The upshot: a big gap between the app and a test kit usually points to chemistry like high CYA, or to a sensor that needs cleaning, not to a true chlorine problem.

Monitors that use a reagent cartridge or cassette sidestep much of this, because they run an actual chemical test for chlorine and pH, closer to what a kit does. The trade is that those need refills and have an ongoing cost, which we will get to.

WATCH OUT

Do not chase the ORP number by dumping in chlorine. If the app says sanitizer is low but your water is clear and a test kit reads normal, suspect the reading or your stabilizer first. Over-chlorinating to satisfy a gadget is how people end up with harsh, irritating water.

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WHERE IT LIVES

5 Floating, In the Skimmer, or Plumbed In

Three ways a sensor meets your water.

Monitors differ in where they sit, and that affects both how easy they are to live with and what kind of pool they suit.

Floating

A floating monitor bobs on the surface, tethered or free, reading the water as it drifts. It is the simplest to start with: no plumbing, no skimmer required, works on above-ground and in-ground pools alike. The trade is that it is out in the open, in the sun, and can wander to a corner.

In the skimmer

Some monitors drop into your skimmer basket, where water is always flowing past when the pump runs. That gives a steady sample and keeps the device tucked out of sight. The catch is that it needs a working skimmer with flow, so it is not a fit for a simple above-ground pool without one.

Plumbed in

The most permanent option is a sensor a professional installs into your equipment pad plumbing. These tend to be the most consistent and are often paired with automation, but they are an install job, not a drop-it-in-today purchase.

TIP

If your pool is above-ground or has no real skimmer flow, lean toward a floating model. If you have an in-ground pool with a skimmer that runs daily, an in-skimmer model gives you steadier readings and nothing floating around in the way.

THE MAIN PRODUCTS

6 The Main Products and What They Cost

A cross-brand look. Prices are rough ranges, last verified November 2026.

No single monitor wins for everyone, and the lineup changes from year to year. Here is an honest snapshot of the better-known names and how they differ. Treat the prices as ballpark figures to confirm, not quotes.

Product	Where it sits / how it reads	Rough hardware price	Ongoing cost
WaterGuru Sense S2	In-skimmer; chemical cassette for chlorine and pH	about $325	Cassettes every 4-8 weeks, roughly $120-$240/yr
iopool EcO	Floating; electronic pH, ORP, temperature	about $300-$350 with gateway	No refills; occasional sensor cap and calibration
Ondilo ICO	Floating; electronic pH, ORP, temperature, estimates	about $300-$430	Replaceable probe over time
Blue Connect (Fluidra)	Floating or plumbed; pH, ORP, temperature, salt options	about $400-$440	Small optional app plan; probe every ~2 years

Sutro	Floating; reagent cartridge (chemical)	was about $499	Appears to have ceased operations; verify before buying

WATCH OUT

Prices, plan names, and even which products still exist change often and vary by region and retailer. The figures above are rough ranges last verified in November 2026. Sutro in particular appears to have shut down, and pHin, an older ORP floater now under Hayward, is described in the past tense in recent listings. Always confirm a brand is alive and supported before you spend.

THE ONGOING COSTS

7 Subscriptions, Pods, and Refills

The part that is easy to miss at checkout.

The sticker price is only half the story. Many monitors have a recurring cost baked into how they work, and it is worth knowing before you buy, not after.

- Reagent cartridges or cassettes: chemical-test monitors use up a consumable that you replace on a schedule. As an example, a WaterGuru cassette runs roughly $20 and lasts about four to eight weeks, which adds up to something like $120 to $240 a year.
- Replaceable sensors or probes: electronic monitors do not use reagents, but their sensors wear out and get replaced every year or two, which is a smaller but real cost.
- App subscriptions: some brands put their nicer features, or remote access, behind a modest monthly or yearly plan. These are usually small, on the order of a few dollars a month, but check before you assume the app is fully free.
- Calibration kits: a few electronic models sell a calibration solution you use occasionally to keep readings honest.

None of these are huge on their own, but they change the comparison. A reagent monitor with no subscription can still cost more per year than an electronic one with a small app fee, once you add up the refills.

GOOD TO KNOW

When you compare two monitors, add roughly three years of ongoing cost to each sticker price before deciding. That is where the true difference between a refill-based model and a sensor-based one shows up, and it often flips which one looks cheaper.

ACCURACY AND CALIBRATION

8 How Accurate Are They, Really?

Good for trends and alerts, not a lab in a bottle.

Here is the honest answer: a good monitor is very useful and reasonably accurate for everyday purposes, but it is not a laboratory. Its real strength is consistency and alerts, watching the water around the clock and nudging you before a small drift becomes a big problem, rather than nailing an exact number to the decimal.

What affects accuracy

- Sensor cleanliness: a filmy or scaled sensor reads poorly. A gentle wipe on the schedule the maker suggests is the single biggest accuracy helper.
- Water chemistry: as covered, stabilizer and pH swings can skew an ORP reading even when the device is healthy.
- Calibration: some electronic monitors ask you to calibrate occasionally against a known solution or against test-kit results. Others claim to be self-referencing. Either way, an occasional check against a test keeps you honest.
- Placement: a sensor stuck in a dead corner with no water movement reads differently from one in gentle flow.

1. Clean the sensor exactly as the maker says, on their schedule.
2. Calibrate it if the model calls for it, using the recommended solution or kit.
3. Once in a while, run a parallel test with a drop kit or fresh strips.
4. If the app and the kit disagree by a lot, trust the kit, clean the sensor, and check your stabilizer before changing anything.

> *A monitor that is a little off but always watching beats a perfect test you only remember to do once the water has already turned.*

POWER AND SOLAR

9 Battery, Charging, and Solar

What keeps the little sensor alive.

A monitor is only useful if it stays powered, and brands handle this differently. Knowing the approach saves you a dead device mid-summer.

- Sealed long-life battery: some models are built with a battery meant to last the sensor's whole life, with no charging and no door to open. When it dies, you replace the unit or sensor.
- Rechargeable: others you pull out and charge on a cradle or cable every so often, a bit like a phone.
- Replaceable batteries: a few take standard cells you swap when they run low.
- Solar-assisted: some floating models top up from daylight, stretching the time between charges.

For an older owner or anyone who would rather not fuss, a sealed long-life or solar-assisted design is the most hands-off. A rechargeable one is fine too, as long as you will remember to charge it before it quits.

TIP

Whatever the power style, the app will usually warn you when the battery is getting low. Turn those notifications on when you set it up, so a dying sensor tells you itself instead of going silent on a hot weekend.

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WI-FI AND RANGE

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Getting a Signal All the Way to the Pool

The quiet reason some monitors disappoint.

A monitor has to get its readings from the pool to your phone, and that is where backyard reality bites. Your home Wi-Fi often fades well before it reaches the far end of the yard, and some monitors only talk to your phone over short-range Bluetooth when you are standing near the water.

The two ways they connect

- Bluetooth only: the sensor talks to your phone when you are close to the pool. Fine if you walk out daily, but you will not get alerts from inside the house.
- Wi-Fi, usually through a gateway: many monitors include or sell a small gateway box that plugs in indoors near a window facing the pool. It relays readings to your home Wi-Fi so you can see them from anywhere.

For true from-the-couch monitoring and alerts, you want the Wi-Fi or gateway path, and you want the pool within reasonable range of that gateway or your router.

WATCH OUT

If your pool sits far from the house, or there are thick walls or a detached setup in between, test the signal before you count on remote alerts. A monitor that can only be read with your nose over the water is a lot less useful than the box implies.

SETTING IT UP

11 Setting It Up Without the Headache

Mostly an app-and-patience job.

Setup is not hard, but the app pairing step is where people get stuck, and it is easier with a plan. Here is the usual path.

1. Charge the sensor fully if it is a rechargeable model, before you do anything else.
2. Download the maker's app on your phone and create an account.
3. If there is a gateway box, plug it in indoors near a window that faces the pool, and connect it to your home Wi-Fi first.
4. Pair the sensor to the app, following the prompts. Keep the phone close to the sensor during this step.
5. Enter your pool details: size in gallons, whether it is chlorine or salt, and the sanitizer type, so the app's advice fits your pool.
6. Place the sensor in the water, give it time to settle, then compare its first readings against a test kit.

TIP

Do the pairing step near your router with the sensor in hand, not out at the pool. Get it talking first, enter your pool size carefully since the dosing advice depends on it, and only then carry it out to the water.

GOOD TO KNOW

Entering the right pool volume matters more than people expect. If the app thinks your pool is half its real size, every 'add this much' suggestion will be off by the same amount.

LIMITS AND TEST KITS

12

What It Still Can't Do, and Why to Keep a Kit

The monitor is a partner to a test kit, not a replacement.

Smart monitors are genuinely helpful, but they do not make a test kit obsolete, and anyone who tells you otherwise is overselling. Here is where they fall short.

- They usually read only a few things. A good drop kit also measures stabilizer, alkalinity, and hardness directly, which a monitor often estimates roughly or skips.
- ORP-based chlorine is an estimate, so it can mislead on a well-stabilized pool.
- They can drift, get dirty, or lose signal, and a quiet failure is easy to miss if you have stopped testing entirely.
- After a big event, a storm, a party, opening the pool, or adding a lot of chemicals, a direct test tells you more, faster, than waiting on the sensor to catch up.

Task	Monitor	Test kit or strips
Daily watching and alerts	Excellent	Not practical
Catching a slow drift early	Excellent	Only if you test often
Exact chlorine after a shock	Rough	Reliable
Stabilizer, alkalinity, hardness	Rough or skipped	Direct
Confirming a surprising reading	Limited	The tiebreaker

The sensible setup is both: let the monitor do the daily watching and the nagging, and keep a decent drop kit or fresh strips on the shelf to confirm anything surprising and to check the numbers the monitor does not cover.

> *I tell people the monitor is the smoke alarm and the test kit is the flashlight. You want the alarm going all the time, but when it goes off you still pick up the flashlight and look.*

COMMON QUESTIONS

13

Common Questions

The things pool owners ask me most.

Will it dose the chemicals for me?

No. A monitor reads the water and tells you what to add and roughly how much. You still add it by hand, following the product label. Automatic dosing is a separate, plumbed-in system, a bigger and more expensive thing entirely.

Does it work with a hot tub or spa?

Some models support spas and some do not, and the ones that do often need a spa setting because the water is small, hot, and changes fast. Check the maker's list before assuming your spa is covered.

What happens if the company goes out of business?

This is a real risk with these gadgets, because they depend on the maker's app and cloud service. If that service shuts down, the sensor can become a paperweight even if the hardware is fine. It is the main reason to buy from a brand that is clearly still active and supported, and to keep your trusty test kit either way.

Will it survive winter?

Most are not meant to stay in a freezing pool. Plan to remove and store the sensor when you close the pool, following the maker's guidance, and bring any gateway box indoors.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you are weighing a monitor, favor an established brand, confirm it is still being sold and updated, and read a recent owner review or two for how the app and service are holding up. In this corner of the market, 'still supported' matters as much as 'accurate.'

IS IT FOR YOU

14

Is a Smart Monitor Right for Your Pool?

A simple way to decide.

Here is the short version of how I help folks decide. It usually comes down to a few honest questions about your pool and your patience.

- Does pool chemistry stress you out, and would a daily readout and alerts ease that? If yes, a monitor earns its keep.
- Will you keep up with refills, charging, or an app plan? If not, lean toward a sealed, low-maintenance electronic model.
- Is your pool within good Wi-Fi or gateway range of the house? If not, sort out the signal first, or accept that you will read it at the water.
- Will you keep a test kit for the things it does not cover and for confirming surprises? You should either way.

For a lot of pool owners, a well-chosen monitor turns a weekly chore into a glance at the phone, and that peace of mind is worth real money. Just go in knowing what it measures, what it costs to own, and that it works best alongside an old-fashioned test, not instead of one.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you would like a hand, I am glad to help you pick a monitor that fits your pool, make sure the Wi-Fi or gateway reaches the water, get the app paired and your pool size entered correctly, and show you how to sanity-check it against a test kit, so the whole thing feels like a small, calm upgrade rather than another gadget to fight with.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this…
Understand what it is	A floating or in-skimmer sensor that reads your water and sends it to a phone app
Know what it measures	Usually pH, a chlorine or sanitizer reading, temperature, and sometimes salt
See the real cost	Hardware often $300-$500, plus refills, cartridges, or a small subscription
Judge accuracy	Good for trends and alerts; cross-check now and then with a test kit
Check your setup	You need Wi-Fi that reaches the pool, or a gateway box near a window
Add chemicals safely	The app suggests; the product label is the rule — always follow it
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

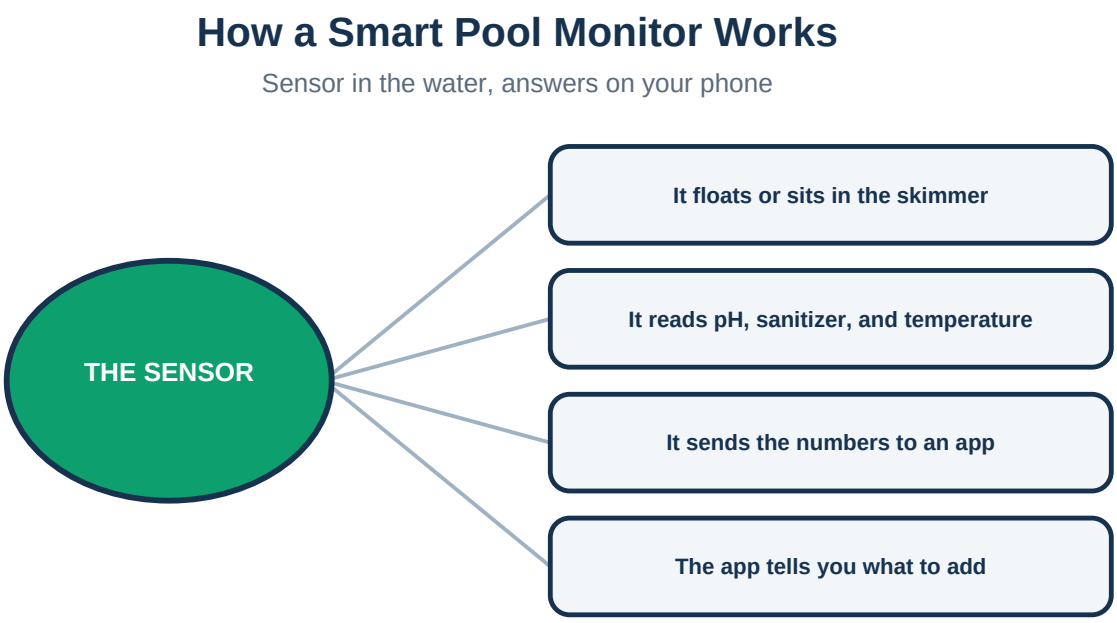


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

From Cloudy Guessing to a Clear Number

The everyday rhythm of owning one

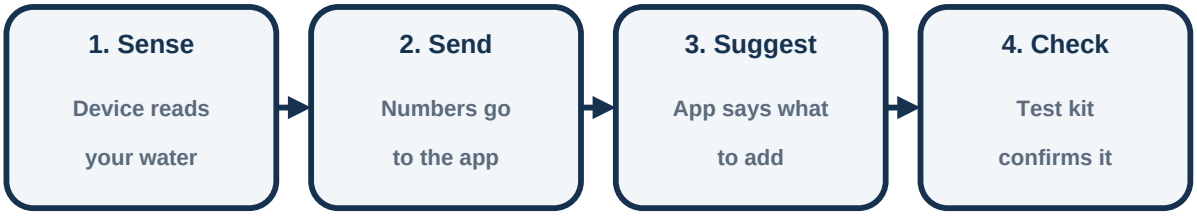


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

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

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

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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.

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