



An Extended Guide · No. 1298

# Placement, the Pad and Clearances

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Where your standby  
generator will live

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**! Read this first — carbon monoxide is still the real danger**

A standby generator runs on an engine, and engine exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill. Your installer sets the unit outdoors and spaces it away from windows, doors, and vents to meet the maker's instructions and local code, which is a big part of what keeps you safe. Your job is to keep it that way: never let anyone box it in, build a structure around it, or let snow, leaves, or drifts pile up against it, and never move it closer to the house. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on every floor and outside the bedrooms, and test them — the safety agencies urge this for every home. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. Getting this placement right is the whole subject of this guide, and it's the single biggest thing that keeps the engine's exhaust safely away from the air you breathe indoors.

## Let's find your generator a good home

Every standby generator needs a spot to live — a level, stable base, safely spaced from your house, where it can run for years. This guide explains what makes a spot a good one, in plain English.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. In 30+ years of helping folks with the equipment around their homes, I've learned that where a generator sits matters just as much as which one you buy. Get the spot right, and everything else gets easier.

Your installer chooses the exact spot, because several safety and code rules have to be satisfied at once. My job here is to help you understand what they're balancing, so you can ask good questions and feel sure about the answer.

**★ Puzzling over where it would go?**

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and describe your lot — city or country, where your meter and panel sit — and I'll help you picture the options before the installer visits. Free, and no sales pitch.

## The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand what makes a good spot for a standby generator.

- ❑ Your generator sits outdoors on a level, stable base — a poured concrete pad or a manufactured composite pad.
- ❑ The spot has to be above flood level, on firm ground, with water draining away from it.
- ❑ It must sit at the maker's and code's required clearances from windows, doors, vents, the gas meter, and anything that can burn.
- ❑ Those clearances aren't red tape — they keep exhaust away from your home and leave room to service the unit.
- ❑ The spot also has to shrug off snow drifts, roof runoff, and downspouts, and keep the gas and electrical runs reasonable.
- ❑ Your installer chooses the exact spot to satisfy all of this at once — it isn't a guess or a do-it-yourself call.

### ✓ The one-sentence version

A good spot is level, firm, dry, and safely spaced from your home — close enough to connect sensibly, far enough to keep your air clean.

## What placement really means

Placement is simply the answer to two questions: what does the unit sit on, and exactly where does it go?

The 'what it sits on' is the pad — a firm, level base that keeps the unit stable and up off the bare ground. The 'where it goes' is about distances: how far from your windows, your gas meter, your property line, and anything combustible.

Both matter enormously, and they're tangled together. A perfect-sounding spot is no good if it's too close to a window; the safest distances are no good on ground that floods. Your installer's job is to satisfy all of it at once.

### ✓ You don't have to solve this puzzle

Balancing pad, clearances, drainage, and run lengths is exactly what a good installer does. Your part is understanding it well enough to ask good questions — which is what this guide is for.

## The pad — concrete or composite

Your generator won't sit on bare grass or dirt. It rests on a pad, and you'll usually see one of two honest options.

### A poured concrete pad

A slab of concrete, poured and cured to give a heavy, permanent, dead-level base. It's the traditional choice and a very solid one, though it takes a bit longer because the concrete has to cure before the unit goes on.

### A manufactured composite pad

A pre-made pad of tough composite material, designed to sit on properly prepared ground. It goes in faster and is engineered for the job. Which one suits your site is a call your installer makes.

#### ✓ Either can be the right answer

Both are proven. The best choice depends on your ground, your climate, and the unit — so lean on your installer's read of your particular site rather than a rule of thumb.

## A firm, level, and dry base

Whatever the pad is made of, what's underneath and around it matters just as much.

The ground has to be firm enough not to settle or shift, and the pad has to be level so the engine sits and runs the way it's designed to. Soft, uneven, or sinking ground is a problem to solve before the unit goes down, not after.

Just as important, the spot needs to sit above the flood level and shed water. You don't want the unit where rain pools or snowmelt collects. Good drainage around the base is part of a well-chosen spot.

### ✓ Dry ground is happy ground

A generator that stays high and dry, on solid, level footing, starts cleanly and lasts. It's worth getting the base right the first time rather than fixing it later.

## Clearances — what they are and why they matter

'Clearance' just means open space — the required distance between the unit and the things around it. It's the heart of safe placement.

The manufacturer's instructions and local codes set minimum distances from windows, doors, vents, the gas meter, property lines, and anything that can burn. Standards such as NFPA 37, which covers stationary engines, are part of where those distances come from. I won't quote you numbers here — the required distances depend on your unit and your local code, and your installer applies the right ones.

There are two reasons these distances exist, and both matter to you: keeping the engine's exhaust away from your home, and leaving room to service the unit safely. The next pages take each in turn.

### **! Clearances are a carbon-monoxide safeguard**

The space around your generator is what keeps carbon-monoxide-laden exhaust from drifting back into your home through a window or vent. It's not decoration — it's one of the things keeping your air safe. Our carbon-monoxide guide goes deeper on why.

## Distance from windows, doors, and vents

The most safety-critical clearances are the ones between the unit and any opening into your home.

Windows, doors, and vents are the paths exhaust could take to get indoors, so the maker's instructions and code keep the unit a safe distance from all of them. It's the same reason a portable generator must never run near the house — except here, a pro sets the permanent, correct distance for you.

That's also why you must never let the unit be moved closer to the house later, or let a new window, vent, or porch change the picture. If your home changes near the unit, the placement may need a fresh look by a pro.

### **! Never close the gap**

Once your installer sets the safe distances, keep them. Don't enclose the unit, build over it, or add anything that puts an opening nearer to it. Keeping that space clear is what keeps your air clean.

## Distance from the meter, the line, and what can burn

The house isn't the only thing the unit needs space from. A few others matter too.

- **The gas meter and fuel connections:** codes keep the unit a set distance from these, which your gas pro and installer handle.
- **The property line:** local setbacks and, sometimes, association rules govern how close to the boundary the unit can sit.
- **Anything combustible:** fences, sheds, stacked firewood, and dry brush need clearance from a running engine's heat and exhaust.

You don't have to measure any of this. But it helps to know why the unit can't simply go in the most convenient corner — several distances have to be satisfied at the same time.

### ✓ Keep the area clear over time

Even after a perfect install, it's on you not to stack firewood, store the trash cans, or grow a hedge into that cleared space. A clear zone is a permanent job, not a one-time one.

## Room to breathe and room to work

Beyond safety distances, the unit needs two practical things: air and access.

An engine needs to draw in air and shed heat, so it can't be crowded on all sides. Blocking its airflow makes it run hot and work poorly, which is why the clearances protect breathing room as well as safety.

Access matters too. A technician has to be able to open the unit and reach its parts to service it. A spot that's safe but wedged into an impossible corner makes every future maintenance visit harder than it needs to be. Our maintenance guide covers what that servicing involves.

### ✓ Think about the years ahead

A spot that's easy to get to is a spot that gets serviced on time. When you picture placement, picture a technician kneeling beside it to service it — and give them room.

## Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

A good spot on a tight suburban lot and a good spot on a rural acre are chosen against very different backdrops.

### If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, the challenge is usually fitting all the required clearances onto a smaller lot with close neighbors — and keeping the peace while you're at it. Natural gas is common, so the meter is often part of the picture.

- Smaller lots make the clearances and property-line setbacks the tightest part of the puzzle.
- Close neighbors mean the unit's spot and its weekly-test noise deserve extra thought.
- The gas meter's location often shapes where the unit can sensibly go.
- An association may have its own rules about placement and screening.

### If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country there's usually more room, which makes the clearances easier — but the runs get longer, winter weather is fiercer, and the whole point is often keeping the well pump alive. If you're on propane, the tank needs a good spot too.

- More room makes the safe distances easier, though the gas and electrical runs grow longer.
- On propane, the tank's placement and its own clearances join the plan.
- Open, exposed sites mean snow drifting and winter access deserve real thought.
- Placement should keep the runs to the well pump and panel sensible, since water is the priority.

#### ★ Not sure where yours should go?

Tell me about your lot — city or country, gas or propane, and where your meter and panel sit — and I'll help you picture the options before the installer visits. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Snow, ice, and winter drifting

In our Ohio winters, where the unit sits has to account for snow and ice long after install day.

A good spot keeps the unit up out of where snow drifts and plow piles collect, and away from spots where roof snow slides down onto it. After a storm, part of your job is simply keeping snow and ice clear of the unit and its vents so it can run and breathe.

Extreme cold also affects a propane supply's performance, which is one more reason tank sizing and placement are a gas pro's call. Our cold-weather guide covers keeping the whole system winter-ready.

### ✓ Picture it in February

When you look at a proposed spot in mild weather, imagine it under a deep blanket of snow with a drift on the north side. A spot that still works then is a well-chosen one.

## Roof runoff, downspouts, and staying dry

Water is a quieter threat than snow, but a well-chosen spot keeps the unit clear of it year-round.

Rain sheeting off a roofline, a downspout emptying nearby, or a low patch where water pools can all put the unit somewhere it shouldn't be — wet and prone to trouble. Placement takes these into account, sometimes by moving the spot and sometimes by directing the water elsewhere.

This is part of why the base has to sit above flood level with good drainage. A unit that stays dry through storms and thaws is a unit that keeps working when you need it most.

### ✓ Follow the water

On the day the installer visits, it's fair to walk the yard and notice where water goes in a hard rain. That five-minute observation can save a soggy surprise later.

## The length of the runs — gas and electrical

Where the unit sits also decides how far its two lifelines — fuel and wiring — have to travel.

The unit connects to your fuel supply and to your electrical panel, and the distance of those runs affects both the work and the cost. A spot that's ideal in every other way but very far from the meter and panel can add materials and labor.

So placement balances safety and practicality: the safe distances come first, then keeping the gas and electrical runs as sensible as possible. Your installer weighs both. Our gas-line guide covers the fuel side, and our cost-and-value guide explains how run length feeds into a quote.

### ✓ Ask how run length affects your quote

When you compare quotes, longer runs are one honest reason numbers can differ. Ask each installer how the proposed spot affects the price — it's a fair question.

## Noise, neighbors, and the spot you choose

A generator lives outdoors and runs an engine, so where it sits shapes how much you and your neighbors hear it.

Modern units are relatively quiet, especially during their brief weekly self-test, but they're still engines. Placing the unit thoughtfully — away from bedroom windows, yours and the neighbors', and mindful of property lines — keeps the peace.

Screening and landscaping can soften both the look and the sound, as long as they never crowd the required clearances. Our noise-and-neighbors guide digs into timing the self-test and being a good neighbor.

### ✓ A considerate spot is a lasting spot

A little thought about noise at placement time saves friction later. The best spot is one that's safe, serviceable, and easy on everyone's ears.

## Why the installer picks the exact spot

By now you can see why placement isn't a do-it-yourself decision — too many rules have to be satisfied at once.

Your installer weighs the clearances, the drainage and flood level, the ground, the run lengths, the meter and panel locations, the snow, and any local or association rules, and finds the one spot that satisfies them all. It's genuinely a professional judgment.

That doesn't mean you have no say — your preferences about looks, noise, and convenience are part of the conversation. But the final spot has to clear every safety and code requirement, and that's the pro's call to make.

### ★ Bring your wishes to the walkthrough

Tell the installer where you'd love it to go and what you'd rather not look at or hear. A good pro honors what they safely can and explains any spot they can't use. I'm glad to be there for that walk — reach me at (330) 200-8042.

## Keeping the spot safe for good

Once the perfect spot is chosen and the unit is in, a few lifelong habits keep it safe — and they're all on you, not the installer.

The single most important one: never undo the clearances. Don't enclose the unit, build a deck or structure over or around it, move it closer to the house, or add a window, vent, or porch that shrinks the safe distance. Those distances are what keep exhaust out of your home.

### **! The rules that never change**

Keep the unit clear of snow, leaves, and clutter; never box it in or run it in an enclosed space; and keep tested carbon-monoxide alarms inside your home. Our carbon-monoxide guide covers the why in full. If an alarm ever sounds, get everyone to fresh air first, then call for help.

If your home ever changes — a new addition, deck, or window near the unit — have a pro confirm the clearances still hold. Placement isn't quite finished forever; it's worth a fresh look when things change.

## Landscaping and screening, done right

Plenty of folks want to soften how the unit looks. That's fine — with one firm rule.

Shrubs, a decorative fence panel, or a screen can all help the unit blend in, and there's nothing wrong with wanting your yard to look nice. The firm rule is that nothing you add may crowd the required clearances or block the unit's airflow and service access.

That means keeping plantings back, choosing things that won't grow into the clear zone, and never wrapping the unit on all sides. When in doubt, ask your installer what's safe before you plant or build.

### **! Pretty must never beat safe**

A screen that looks lovely but chokes the unit's air or traps its exhaust is dangerous, not just against code. If you have to choose, safe wins every time — and a good installer can show you how to have both.

## What I do, and what I leave to the pros

Worth saying plainly, since placement decisions can feel weighty.

- **What I help with:** understanding what makes a spot good, walking your yard with you, gathering your preferences, and making sense of what the installer proposes.
- **What the installer does:** chooses the exact code-compliant spot, prepares the base, and sets the unit safely.
- **What I never do:** the pad work, the connections, or overriding a pro's safety call on distances — that's not my role, and your safety comes first.

### ★ Call before the pad is poured

Placement is far easier to talk through before anything is set in concrete. If you'd like a friendly second opinion on a proposed spot, reach me at (330) 200-8042.

## Questions to ask about placement

These questions get you to a spot you understand and feel good about, not just one that appears on a diagram.

### **Q: Why did you choose this particular spot?**

A good installer can explain how the spot satisfies the clearances, drainage, and run lengths all at once. The reasoning should make sense to you when they walk you through it.

### **Q: How far is it from my windows, doors, and vents?**

You don't need the exact figures memorized, but you should hear that it meets the maker's and code's required distances — the ones that keep exhaust away from your home.

### **Q: Will snow, roof runoff, or pooling water be a problem here?**

Ask how the spot handles winter and heavy rain. A thoughtful answer tells you they've pictured the site in bad weather, not just on a sunny visit.

### **Q: Can I screen or landscape around it, and how?**

Ask what you can safely plant or build without crowding the clearances. A good pro will show you how to soften the look without choking the unit.

#### **✓ There's no silly question**

A good installer welcomes questions about placement — it's one of the most important calls in the whole project. If yours brushes them off, keep asking.

## Common Questions

The questions I hear most about where a standby generator goes, answered plainly.

### **Q: Can I choose where it goes?**

You have real input on looks, noise, and convenience — but the final spot has to meet the required clearances and drainage, and that's the installer's call. The best spots honor both.

### **Q: How far from the house does it have to sit?**

Far enough to meet the maker's instructions and local code, which set the safe distances from windows, doors, and vents. I won't quote a number, because it depends on your unit and your code — your installer applies the right ones.

### **Q: Can it go on gravel or bare dirt?**

No — it needs a proper base, usually a poured concrete pad or a manufactured composite pad on prepared ground, so it stays level, stable, and dry.

### **Q: Can I build a little roof or enclosure to hide it?**

Never enclose it or build over it in a way that traps exhaust or blocks airflow. You can screen it thoughtfully within the required clearances — but boxing it in is a carbon-monoxide danger.

### **Q: What if my only good-looking spot is too close to a window?**

Then it's not the right spot, and a good installer will say so. Safety and code come before looks — but there's almost always a workable spot, and screening can help it blend in.

#### **★ Still puzzling over the spot?**

Send me a photo of your yard and where your meter and panel are, and I'll help you think through the options before the installer visits. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

## Your placement peace-of-mind checklist

As you settle on a spot with your installer, this short list helps you feel sure it's a good one.

- ☐ It sits on a firm, level base — a concrete or composite pad — above flood level.
- ☐ It meets the required clearances from windows, doors, vents, the meter, and combustibles.
- ☐ Water drains away from it, and roof runoff and downspouts won't soak it.
- ☐ It'll stay clear of snow drifts and plow piles, with room to clear it after storms.
- ☐ There's room for air to flow and for a technician to service it.
- ☐ Any screening you add respects the clearances and airflow.

### ★ Want a second opinion on the spot?

If you can't check every box, or a proposed spot just feels off, that's worth a conversation. Reach me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll talk it through.

## You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made placing your standby generator feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

### ★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

## Concrete Pad vs. Composite Pad

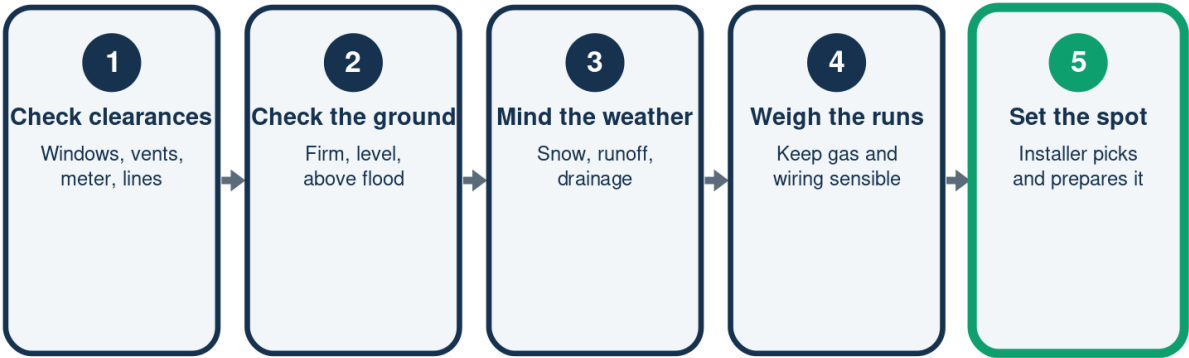
Two proven ways to give it a base

|            | Concrete         | Composite         |
|------------|------------------|-------------------|
| What it is | Poured slab      | Pre-made pad      |
| Install    | Needs curing     | Goes in faster    |
| Feel       | Heavy, permanent | Engineered, light |
| Best for   | Installer's call | Installer's call  |

Both are proven — the right one depends on your ground and unit.

# How Your Spot Gets Chosen

Several rules, satisfied at once



The installer balances all of it — safety and code come first.

## A Good Spot vs. a Poor Spot

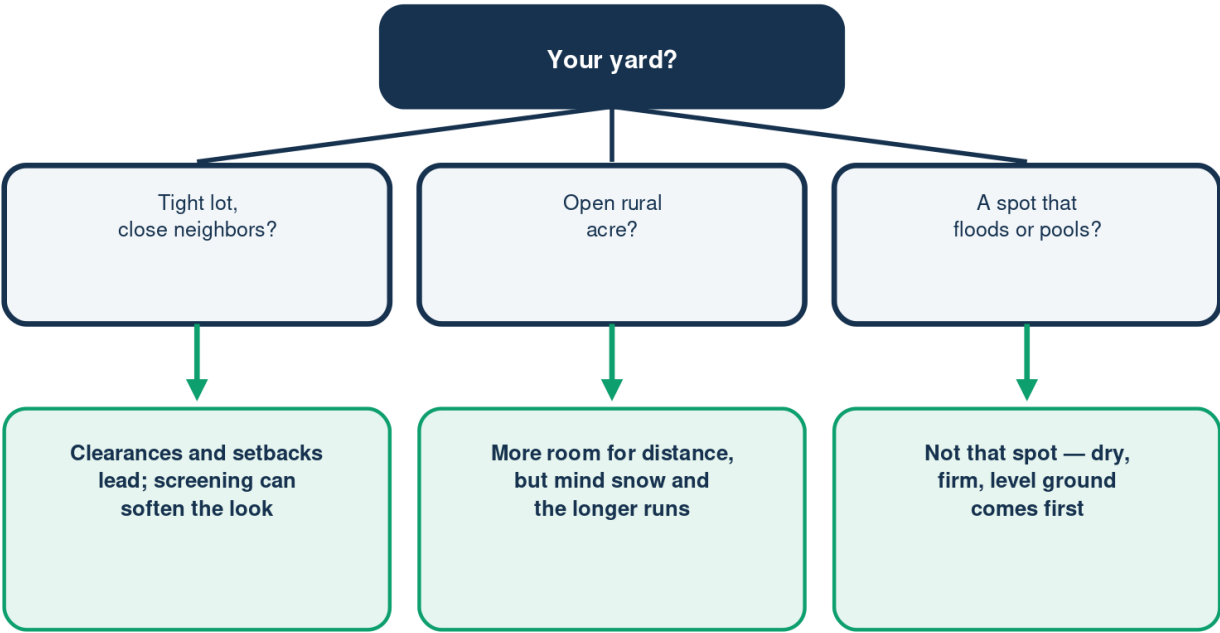
What to look for, and what to avoid

|          | A good spot      | A poor spot     |
|----------|------------------|-----------------|
| Base     | Level and dry    | Soft or sinking |
| Distance | Meets clearances | Crowds a window |
| Water    | Drains away      | Pools or floods |
| Winter   | Sheds snow       | Under a drift   |
| Access   | Room to service  | Wedged in tight |

Your installer aims for every 'good spot' row at once.

# Where Will Yours Live?

Let the site point the way



Never enclose the unit or move it closer to the house — the clearances keep exhaust out of your air.

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



## Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.  
You just have to remember you can call.  
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

### BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will  
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,  
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

**(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com**

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

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### Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



## A Note From Bill

### A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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