



An Extended Guide · No. 1955

Trackballs & Vertical Mice

Easier pointing for
arthritic or shaky hands

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

★ Read this first — you really can't break anything

Before we start, a promise: you cannot break anything just by reading, looking, or trying a setting. Screens, keyboards, and cables are made to be plugged and unplugged, and almost anything you change can be changed right back. Go at your own pace, skip to the page you need, and if you ever feel stuck, that is exactly what I am here for — there is no such thing as a silly question. With a trackball or a vertical mouse, the goal is easier, more comfortable pointing — less gripping, less twisting, steadier control. This guide helps you decide which, if either, might suit your hands.

Easier pointing for hands that ache or shake

If moving the mouse has become a chore — if your hand cramps, your wrist aches, or a shaky hand sends the pointer skittering — there are two kinds of device made to help. This guide explains both, in plain words, so you can choose.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks get comfortable with the gear in their homes, patiently and at their own pace. Think of this as me at your kitchen table, trying a couple of things with you.

The two devices are a trackball and a vertical mouse. A trackball stays put while you roll a ball with your fingers or thumb. A vertical mouse stands on its side so your hand holds it like a gentle handshake. Each cuts down on a different kind of strain. We'll look at who each one suits.

★ A comfort question, not a medical one

This guide is about everyday comfort, not treatment. If your hands have real pain, stiffness, numbness, or you're managing arthritis, please work with your doctor — a different mouse can help comfort but isn't care. For the comfort side, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 anytime.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll know whether one of these devices is worth trying for your hands.

- ❑ A trackball stays still while you roll a ball — no sliding the whole device around, which helps shaky hands and small desks.
- ❑ A vertical mouse stands on its side so your hand rests in a relaxed handshake grip, easing the wrist twist of a flat mouse.
- ❑ Trackballs shine for shaky hands and limited arm movement; vertical mice shine for wrist and forearm comfort. Some folks like both ideas.
- ❑ Both take a short while to get used to — usually days, not weeks.
- ❑ You can make pointing easier in settings too: slow the pointer down, steady the double-click, and make the pointer bigger.
- ❑ Try one you can return, give it a fair few days, and judge it by how your hand feels — not by the first five minutes.

✓ One idea to hold onto

A trackball keeps the device still; a vertical mouse keeps your wrist relaxed. Match the one that fits your main trouble, then fine-tune the pointer in settings.

Why an ordinary mouse gets hard to use

It usually isn't you. A flat mouse asks for a few things that get harder with age or sore joints.

To use a flat mouse you grip it, twist your wrist so your palm faces down, and slide the whole thing across the desk — then lift and reset it when you run out of room. For a hand that aches or grips weakly, that constant holding and sliding is tiring. For a wrist that's stiff or sore, the palm-down twist adds its own strain.

And if your hand shakes even a little, sliding the whole mouse magnifies the shake — the pointer jitters and overshoots, and clicking on a small button becomes a frustrating game of chase. None of this means you've done anything wrong. It means the tool is asking for movements your hands would rather not make.

✓ The tool can change to fit your hand

You don't have to force your hand to suit the mouse. The whole point of a trackball or a vertical mouse is to change the tool so it suits your hand instead. That's a much easier fix.

The trackball: roll the ball, not the mouse

The simplest way to picture it: the device sits still on the desk, and you move the pointer by rolling a ball with your fingers or thumb.

Because the body of a trackball never moves, you don't grip and slide anything. Your hand and arm can rest comfortably in one spot while just a finger or thumb does the rolling. That means far less arm movement, no lifting and resetting, and no need for a big clear patch of desk.

This is a real gift for a couple of situations. If your hand shakes, rolling a ball is far steadier than sliding a whole device — small, settled movements instead of big jittery ones. And if reaching or moving your arm is tiring or painful, the trackball lets you point with almost no arm movement at all.

- **Thumb-operated trackballs:** a ball on the side you roll with your thumb; your hand rests much as it would on a normal mouse.
- **Finger-operated trackballs:** a larger ball on top you roll with your fingers; often favored for precision and for shaky hands.

The vertical mouse: a gentle handshake

A vertical mouse does its job by turning your hand sideways into a more natural, relaxed position.

A flat mouse makes you rotate your forearm so your palm faces down. A vertical mouse stands up on its side, so instead you hold it the way you'd shake someone's hand — thumb up, palm facing inward. For many people that handshake angle feels noticeably more relaxed through the wrist and forearm.

You still slide a vertical mouse across the desk much like a normal one, so it doesn't help a shaky hand the way a trackball does, and it still wants a bit of clear desk. What it changes is the twist. If your trouble is an achy wrist or forearm from the palm-down position, this is the device aimed squarely at that.

✓ Try the handshake in the air first

Hold your hand out as if to shake hands, thumb on top, and notice how relaxed the wrist feels compared with turning the palm flat down. That relaxed angle is exactly what a vertical mouse is after.

Which one suits your hands?

They solve different troubles. Naming your main difficulty points you straight at the better choice.

- **Shaky hands:** a trackball, usually a finger-operated one — rolling a ball is far steadier than sliding a device.
- **Limited arm reach or movement:** a trackball, since it points with almost no arm motion and stays in one place.
- **Achy or stiff wrist from the palm-down twist:** a vertical mouse and its relaxed handshake grip.
- **A small or cluttered desk:** a trackball, because it doesn't need room to slide around.
- **Weak grip or finger strain:** either can help; a trackball asks for less holding, a vertical mouse for less twisting.

Some people even keep both and switch depending on the day or the task. There's no rule that says you must pick only one, though most folks settle happily on a single favorite.

✓ Name the trouble, find the tool

If the biggest problem is the pointer jumping around, lean trackball. If it's your wrist aching from the flat twist, lean vertical. If it's both, a trackball often covers the most ground.

The getting-used-to-it stretch

Both devices feel strange for a little while. Knowing that up front keeps you from giving up too soon.

With a trackball, your fingers or thumb have to learn to steer the pointer by rolling instead of sliding. It feels awkward for the first day or two, and then it clicks — most people are comfortable within a few days. A vertical mouse is a smaller change, since you still slide it; the new grip usually feels natural almost right away.

Give yourself a little grace in the first days. Start with gentle tasks — a bit of browsing, some email — rather than fiddly work that needs pinpoint clicking. Your hand learns the new motion surprisingly fast once it stops expecting the old one.

✓ A few days, not a few weeks

Unlike a split keyboard, these devices usually feel natural within days. If you're still fighting a trackball after a week, a different ball position — thumb versus finger — may simply suit your hand better.

Make pointing easier in settings, too

The device is half the help. A few free settings on your computer make any pointer gentler on tired or shaky hands.

- **Slow the pointer speed down:** a slower pointer is far easier to aim and far more forgiving of a shaky hand. Turn it down until landing on buttons feels relaxed.
- **Ease the double-click speed:** set it slower so two separate clicks register as a double-click without a frantic, perfectly-timed tap.
- **Make the pointer bigger:** a larger, bolder pointer is much easier to find and follow on the screen.
- **Turn on click-lock or sticky dragging** if your computer offers it, so you can drag things without holding the button down the whole way.

These live in the mouse or pointer section of Windows or Mac settings. Together they can make even an ordinary mouse easier — and they make a trackball or vertical mouse better still.

★ I'll dial the settings in with you

Getting the pointer speed, the double-click timing, and the pointer size just right for your hands is exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to do — often right on your screen for \$49 without coming over. Call (330) 200-8042.

Precision, buttons, and clicking

Beyond speed, a few other touches make these devices land clicks where you mean them, every time.

Many trackballs and vertical mice have a button that switches the pointer to a slower, more precise mode on demand — handy for fiddly work like placing the cursor in a sentence. Some also offer extra buttons you can set to do common things, so you reach for the mouse less often. You don't have to use those extras, but they're there if they help.

If clicking itself is hard — weak fingers, or a tremor that turns one click into two — look for a device with large, easy buttons, and lean on the computer's settings for double-click timing and click-lock. The goal is for a gentle press to do the job without a struggle.

✓ Precision is a setting, not just a steady hand

If small targets are the problem, slow the pointer right down and turn on any precision button the device has. You'll be surprised how much steadier the pointer feels without your hand doing anything different.

Two ways people come to this

An easier pointing device gets chosen two ways: by the person whose hand struggles with the mouse, and by an adult child wanting to make a parent's computer kinder to use. The goal is the same; the approach differs.

If you're setting this up for yourself

You can feel exactly what's hard — the grip, the twist, the shake, the chase after small buttons. Trust that. Your job is to match the device to your trouble and give it a fair few days.

- Name your main difficulty — shaky hand, achy wrist, tiring reach — and let it point you to a trackball or a vertical mouse.
- Slow the pointer down and make it bigger in settings; it helps as much as the device for some folks.
- Pick one you can return, and give it several real days before judging.
- If your hands truly hurt, bring it up with your doctor — a mouse eases comfort, not the condition.

If you're setting it up for a parent or loved one

You want to spare Mom or Dad the daily fight with the mouse, and you may be setting it up on a visit or from afar. Aim for 'easier and steadier,' and be ready to sit with them through the first unfamiliar day.

- Lean toward a trackball if shaky hands or a small desk are the trouble; a vertical mouse if it's wrist ache from the flat twist.
- Set a slow pointer speed and a big pointer before handing it over — gentler than you'd pick for yourself.
- Walk through it together the first time; rolling a ball feels odd for a day, then clicks.
- Let it be their choice and their comfort. A device they didn't want ends up back in the box.

★ Setting one up for a parent?

This is a common call from adult kids. Tell me how your parent struggles with the mouse — grip, twist, or shake — and I'll help you choose between a trackball and a vertical mouse and set the pointer so it's easy from the first day. Call (330) 200-8042.

How to try one without spending much

You don't need to spend a lot to find out whether one of these suits your hands. A thrifty, low-risk try is easy to arrange.

A modest trackball or vertical mouse is plenty to test the idea — the comfort comes from the shape and the way it works, not from a high price. Buy from somewhere with an easy return policy, keep the packaging, and note the return window before you start.

If you can, try the type before the brand. A hands-on moment at a store, or borrowing a friend's for an afternoon, tells you more than any description about whether rolling a ball or holding a handshake grip feels right to you. Then buy the specific one knowing the type suits you.

★ Borrow my judgment before you buy

If you're not sure which type to try, describe how your hand struggles and I'll help you pick the one most likely to help — so your first purchase is probably your last. Often I can talk it through right on your screen for \$49. Call (330) 200-8042.

Giving it a fair trial

The most common mistake is judging a new device in the first five minutes. A little patience gives it a real chance.

Use the new device for your ordinary computer time for several days — not switching back to the old mouse the moment it feels awkward, which only drags out the adjustment. Spend the first day on easy tasks, let your hand learn the motion, and notice how it feels after an hour rather than after a minute.

By a few days in, you'll usually know. If your hand feels less tired and the pointer behaves, it's working — adjust the settings to taste and enjoy it. If it still feels wrong, try the other ball position or the other type, or send it back. You'll have learned what your hand likes for the price of a little patience.

✓ Judge it by your hand, not the clock

The real question isn't how fast you pointed on day one — it's how your hand and wrist feel at the end of a session a few days in. Comfort is the whole point, so comfort is the test.

A simple shopping checklist

Keep this open while you shop, in a store or online. Check each box before you buy.

- ☐ I've named my main trouble — shake, wrist twist, reach, or grip.
- ☐ I've picked the type that matches it (trackball or vertical mouse).
- ☐ For a trackball, I've chosen a ball position — thumb or finger — that suits my hand.
- ☐ It has large, easy buttons I can press without a struggle.
- ☐ It connects the way I want — wired, or wireless (see the wireless guide).
- ☐ It can be returned if my hand doesn't take to it after a fair trial.

✓ Buttons matter as much as shape

A comfortable shape won't help if the buttons are stiff or tiny for your fingers. Press them in your mind as you shop: would a gentle touch do the job? That's what you want.

Setting one up for an easy start

Getting going takes just a few minutes, and a little setup makes the first day far smoother.

A wired device plugs into a USB slot and works at once. A wireless one either plugs a tiny receiver into a USB slot or pairs over Bluetooth, a quick one-time step the instructions walk you through. Set it where your hand rests naturally, with your arm relaxed and supported.

Then open the mouse or pointer settings and do the three things that matter most: slow the pointer speed to a comfortable pace, ease the double-click timing, and make the pointer bigger. Spend a few minutes pointing and clicking around to find the speed that feels relaxed.

★ I'll set the device and the settings together

Plugging in, pairing, and dialing the pointer to your hand is exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to do on a visit, or often right on your screen for \$49. We'll get it comfortable from day one. Call (330) 200-8042.

Keeping it rolling smoothly

A trackball especially rewards a little care. A few easy habits keep both kinds working sweetly for years.

- **Lift out the ball now and then** and wipe it and its cradle with a dry, soft cloth; dust and skin oils are what make a ball feel sticky or jumpy.
- **Keep hands clean and dry** at the computer; lotion and crumbs are a trackball's main enemies.
- **Wipe a vertical mouse's underside** if the pointer gets erratic, and use it on a surface it can read — very shiny glass can confuse it.
- **Check the batteries** on a wireless device if the pointer gets sluggish or skippy before assuming the device has failed.

! Go easy with cleaners

Harsh household sprays can harm the surface and the ball's smooth roll. A dry or barely damp soft cloth is safest — spray any cleaner onto the cloth, never into the device, so nothing runs down inside.

Spending wisely, not the most

Comfort here comes from the shape and the settings, not from a high price. You can spend modestly and do very well.

A sensibly priced trackball or vertical mouse is plenty to ease a sore or shaky hand. The pricier models add extra buttons and finer adjustments that some folks enjoy, but they don't make the basic comfort any greater. And the pointer settings that do so much good are free.

Spend first on getting the right type for your trouble, and on a device whose buttons your fingers find easy. Those two things decide whether it helps. Save the money you might have spent on extras for a second type to try, if the first isn't quite right.

★ I don't sell these — so this is just advice

I earn no commission on anything, so my only interest is your comfort. Tell me how your hand struggles and your budget, and I'll help you spend it where it actually helps. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes people make

A few avoidable slip-ups account for most regret with these devices. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **Giving up in the first hour**, before the hand learns the new rolling or grip motion.
- **Leaving the pointer speed too fast**, so a shaky hand overshoots and clicking stays a chase.
- **Picking the wrong type for the trouble** — a vertical mouse for a shaky hand, when a trackball would have steadied it.
- **Never cleaning the ball**, then blaming the trackball when it feels sticky or jumpy.
- **Reaching for gear to fix pain** — trying devices instead of seeing a doctor when the hands genuinely hurt.

! The one that matters most

Easier pointing can make daily computer use kinder, but it isn't treatment. If your hands have real pain, stiffness, numbness, or you're managing arthritis, work with your doctor — don't let a new mouse stand in for proper care.

Wired or wireless? A quick word

As with any pointing device, the cord question is separate from the comfort question. Here's the short version.

Trackballs and vertical mice come both with cords and without, and the choice doesn't change the comfort of the shape. A trackball is a natural fit for wireless, since it never moves, so a cord has nothing to snag on. A wired device never needs batteries or charging.

Choose the comfortable type first, then decide about the cord. If wired-versus-wireless is really your question, our wireless keyboard and mouse guide covers pairing, batteries, and tiny USB receivers in plain steps.

✓ A trackball loves being wireless

Because a trackball sits still, a cord is never in the way — but it's also never a nuisance, so wired is perfectly fine too. Pick whichever you find simpler to live with.

Other ways to ease the pointing

If your hands struggle with the mouse, a few other changes can take even more strain off the job of pointing and clicking.

- **Keyboard shortcuts:** some common tasks have a key combination that skips the mouse entirely, which rests the hand.
- **A comfortable keyboard:** if your wrists struggle at the mouse, they may struggle at the keys too — see the ergonomic and split keyboards guide.
- **Good desk and chair height:** a relaxed, supported arm points more steadily; we cover this in the ergonomics guide.
- **Voice typing and built-in access tools:** both Windows and Mac offer ways to do more by voice, a real help on hard-hand days.

Think of comfortable pointing as part of a whole setup. The right device does a lot, and these other touches do the rest.

✓ Rest the hand every way you can

The less any one part of your hand has to do, the better it feels at day's end. A steadier device, a few shortcuts, and a supported arm together add up to real ease.

Questions to ask before you buy

Whether you're talking to a salesperson or to me, these questions steer you to the device that fits your hand.

Q: Will this help a shaky hand, or just an achy wrist?

A trackball steadies a shaky hand because you roll a ball instead of sliding the device. A vertical mouse eases wrist twist but still slides. Match it to your trouble.

Q: Thumb ball or finger ball on a trackball?

Thumb balls keep a familiar hand position; finger balls often suit shaky hands and precise work. If you can, try both — hands differ.

Q: Are the buttons easy for my fingers to press?

Look for large, gentle buttons. A comfortable shape won't help if the clicks take a hard press you'd rather not make.

Q: Can I return it after a real trial?

Give it several days, so buy somewhere with a return window that allows that. Comfort can't be judged in the store.

✓ There's no silly question

If a salesperson rushes you toward the priciest one without asking how your hand struggles, that's a reason to pause. The right answer starts with your hand, not their shelf.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks whose hands struggle with the mouse, answered plainly.

Q: Is a trackball or a vertical mouse better for shaky hands?

A trackball, usually. Rolling a ball with a finger or thumb is far steadier than sliding a whole device, so the pointer jitters less. Slowing the pointer speed in settings helps even more.

Q: How long does it take to get used to one?

Usually just a few days, not weeks. A trackball feels odd for a day or two then clicks; a vertical mouse often feels natural almost right away since you still slide it.

Q: Will one of these cure my arthritis or wrist pain?

No — these ease everyday comfort, but they aren't treatment. If your hands hurt or you're managing arthritis, work with your doctor. A kinder mouse helps alongside proper care, not instead of it.

Q: What if the first one I try isn't right?

Try the other type, or a different ball position, or return it. Hands differ, and finding your fit sometimes takes a second try. Buy somewhere with an easy return so that costs you nothing.

★ Still weighing it up?

Helping folks point and click without pain is one of my favorite fixes. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll figure out which device is most likely to suit your hand.

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 choosing an easier mouse for your hands 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. For anything that calls for licensed electrical work, 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

Two Ways to Point More Easily

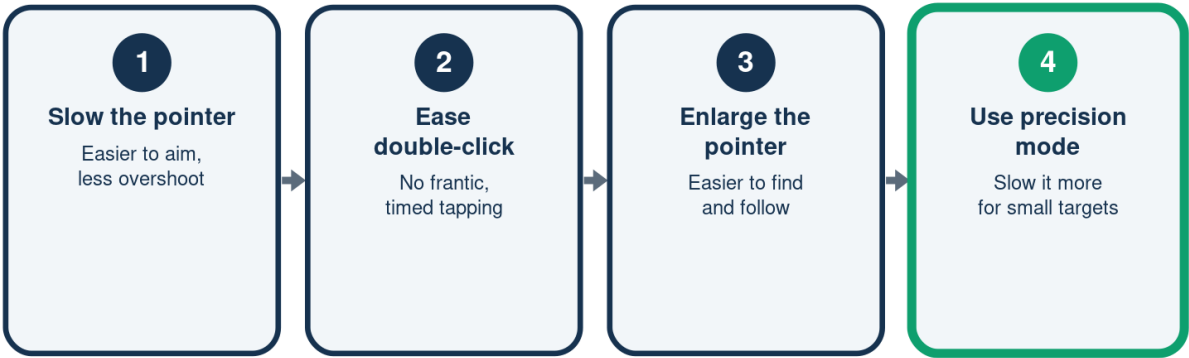
Each eases a different kind of strain

	How it works	Best for
Trackball	Roll a ball	Shaky hands
Vertical mouse	Handshake grip	Achy wrist
Thumb ball	Familiar feel	A gentle start
Finger ball	Precise roll	Steady, exact

A trackball stays still; a vertical mouse eases the palm-down twist.

Make Pointing Easier in Settings

Free changes that help any hand



These settings help even an ordinary mouse -- and these devices more.

Keeping It Working Sweetly

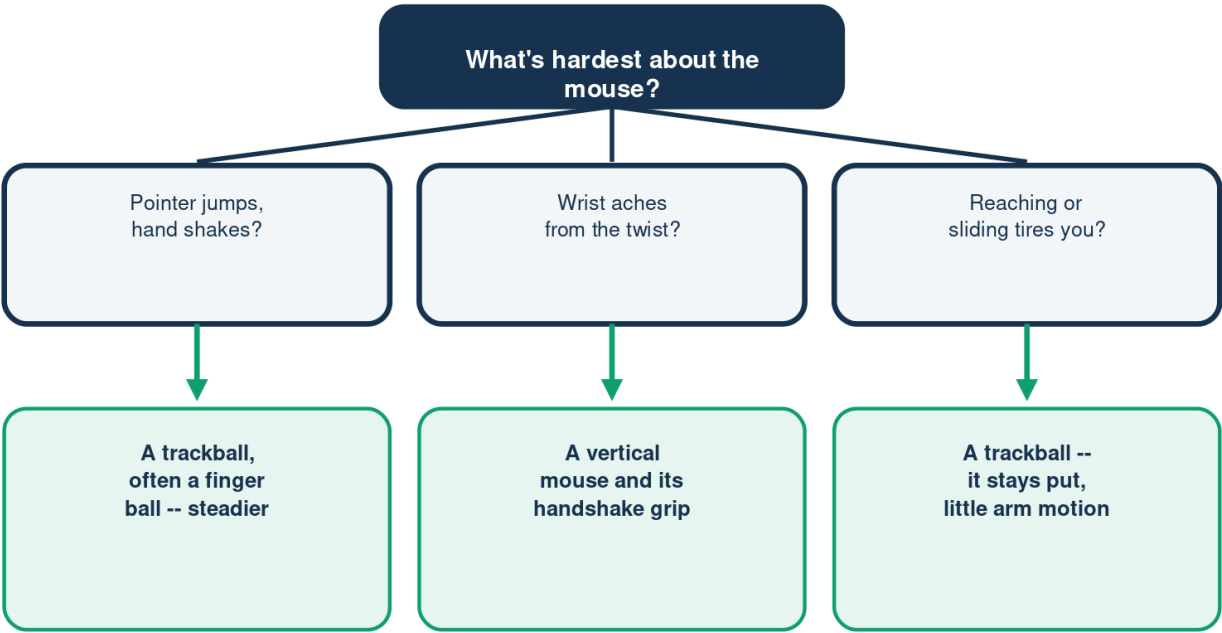
A little care goes a long way

	Do this	Why
Wipe the ball	Dry cloth	Stops sticking
Clean hands	No lotion	Keeps it smooth
Check batteries	If sluggish	Before blaming it

Dust and skin oils are what make a trackball feel jumpy.

Which Device Fits Your Hand?

Name the trouble, find the tool



Real pain or arthritis is a doctor's question -- a mouse eases comfort, not care.

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

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*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

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

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech