BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Which Smart Lock Is Right for Your Door?

A calm decision guide — replace or retrofit, keypad or app, and what to measure first

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Start with the big choice: replace the whole deadbolt, or retrofit a smart piece over your existing one. A retrofit keeps your current keys and outside hardware and is ideal for renters; a full replacement gives you a keypad so you can punch in a code and skip keys entirely. Decide how you want in — keypad, phone app, or key backup.

Nearly all run on batteries, so heed the low-battery warning and keep a backup way in. To control the door while away or by voice, the lock needs built-in Wi-Fi or a small bridge, so check the box, since some are Bluetooth-only. Match it to your phone world — Apple Home, Google Home, or Alexa.

Measure your door and deadbolt before buying. Prices run roughly $130–$300 plus any bridge; always confirm the current price.

1 The Short Version

A smart lock lets you unlock your door with a code, your phone, or your voice — and lets you check from your chair whether you locked up at all. But there are a lot of them, they work in different ways, and the wrong choice can mean a lock that does not fit your door or needs a gadget you do not have.

This guide is a calm decision-maker, not a sales pitch: by the end you will know exactly which kind suits your door, your phone, and the way you live.

We will sort out the big choice first — replace the whole lock, or add a smart piece to the one you already have — then keypad versus app versus key, battery life, whether you need a little bridge or hub, what works with your phone, and what to measure before you buy. Prices here are ballparks to set expectations; always confirm the current price before you purchase.

- Biggest choice: replace the deadbolt entirely, or keep it and add a smart piece inside (a retrofit).
- A retrofit keeps your existing keys and outside hardware; a replacement gives you a keypad.
- Check battery life, and whether it needs Wi-Fi directly or a small bridge/hub to reach your phone from away.
- Make sure it fits your phone world — Apple, Google, or Alexa — and your actual door.
- Renters especially should lean toward a retrofit that changes nothing permanent.

> **TIP**
>
> Before you fall for any particular lock, answer two questions: do you want to keep your current keys and outside hardware (then look at a retrofit), and do you want a keypad on the outside (then look at a full replacement). Those two answers narrow the whole field to a short list.

2 What a Smart Lock Does — and Doesn't

It is worth being clear about what you are actually getting, because the name promises a lot. A smart lock is a deadbolt you can lock and unlock without a physical key — by tapping a code into a keypad, by a tap in a phone app, by voice, or by your phone simply being near. Most will also tell you whether the door is locked right now, and many lock themselves automatically after a short while.

- It lets you unlock without digging for keys, and lock up from anywhere.
- It can tell you if you left the door unlocked, and auto-lock after a set time.
- You can give a code to a visitor, a cleaner, or family — and remove it later.
- It does NOT make a flimsy door strong; it is only as secure as the door and frame it is in.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A smart lock is a convenience and a peace-of-mind upgrade, not a fortress. The deadbolt itself is a normal deadbolt; the "smart" part is just how you operate it. A good solid door and frame matter as much as the lock you put in them.

3 The Big Choice — Replace the Deadbolt or Retrofit Over It

This is the decision everything else hangs on, so take your time with it. There are two fundamentally different kinds of smart lock, and they suit different people.

	Full replacement	Retrofit (over existing)
What changes	The whole deadbolt, inside and out	Only the inside thumb-turn
Your keys	New keys (or no keyhole)	Keep your existing keys
Outside look	New hardware, often a keypad	Looks unchanged from outside
Good for	Wanting a keypad; a fresh lock	Renters; keeping current keys

- A full replacement swaps out the entire deadbolt. You get a new outside piece, usually with a keypad, and new keys (or none). This is the choice if you want to punch in a code at the door.
- A retrofit leaves your existing deadbolt, keyhole, and keys completely alone and only replaces the little twist-knob on the inside with a motorised one. From outside, nothing looks different, and your old keys still work.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The retrofit style — a motor that turns your existing thumb-turn from the inside — is the one most associated with the August brand. It is popular with renters and with anyone who wants to keep their current keys and not change how the door looks from the street.

4 Keypad, App, or Key — How Do You Want to Get In?

Think honestly about how you actually want to open your door day to day, because this shapes which lock makes sense. Most smart locks offer several of these at once, but some lean heavily toward one.

- Keypad: punch in a number code on the door. Wonderful if you would rather never carry keys, and easy to give a temporary code to family or a helper. Needs a full-replacement lock with a keypad.
- App on your phone: tap to unlock in the maker's app. Handy, but it leans on you having your phone and the app working.
- Automatic by phone nearby: the door can unlock as you approach with your phone in your pocket. Convenient, occasionally too eager.
- Physical key: many replacement locks keep a keyhole as a backup; some keypad-only ones do away with it entirely.

> **TIP**
>
> For most seniors, a keypad is the sweet spot: no key to fumble, no phone required, and you can give the mail-order helper or a visiting grandchild their own code and remove it afterward. A code you can tap in without glasses, in the dark, beats hunting for keys or a phone every time.

5 Battery Life — Don't Get Caught Locked Out

Nearly every smart lock runs on batteries, because running power to a door is impractical. This is not a problem — battery life is generally good — but it is worth understanding so you are never surprised.

- Most smart locks run several months to about a year on ordinary batteries (often AA cells or a rechargeable pack).
- The lock warns you well in advance, in the app and often with a beep or a light, long before it dies.

- A replacement lock with a keyhole lets you use a key if the battery ever did run flat; a keypad-only lock may have an emergency power contact or a backup key.
- Features like auto-unlock-as-you-approach and constant Wi-Fi use more battery than a plain keypad.

WATCH OUT

Do not ignore the low-battery warning. The lock gives you plenty of notice, but a flat battery on a keypad-only lock with no key backup is exactly how people get locked out. When it says the battery is low, change it that week, and keep a spare set of batteries in a drawer near the door.

6 Wi-Fi Built In, or Needs a Bridge?

Here is a point that genuinely trips people up, so it is worth getting clear before you buy. To control your lock from away from home — or to have it talk to Alexa, Google, or Apple — it needs to reach the internet. Locks do this in one of two ways, and the difference affects both cost and simplicity.

- Built-in Wi-Fi: the lock connects to your home Wi-Fi directly, all by itself. Simplest to set up; nothing extra to buy. Uses a bit more battery.
- Needs a bridge or hub: the lock uses short-range Bluetooth, and a small plug-in box (a "bridge") near the door passes its signal on to your Wi-Fi. That box is sometimes an extra purchase.
- Bluetooth-only, no bridge: works only when your phone is right at the door; you cannot check or control it from away. Cheapest, most limited.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you want to lock the door from your armchair or check it while you are out, you need either built-in Wi-Fi or the bridge. Read the box carefully: a lock advertised cheaply is sometimes Bluetooth-only, with the bridge sold separately, so the real price to get the features you pictured is higher than the sticker.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Does It Fit Your Phone World — Apple, Google, or Alexa?

A smart lock is happiest when it matches the world your phone and speakers already live in. You do not strictly need any of these — every good lock works through its own app — but matching them unlocks voice control and tidier everyday use.

- Apple (iPhone) household: look for a lock that works with Apple Home. The fanciest can even use "home key," where you tap your iPhone or Apple Watch to the lock to open it.
- Google (Android, Nest speakers): look for "works with Google Home" so you can check and control it by voice.
- Alexa (Amazon Echo): look for "works with Alexa" to lock up or check the door by voice.
- Most of the well-known locks support all three to some degree, but double-check the one you want does the one you care about.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some Apple features, like tapping your phone to the lock, may need a HomePod or Apple TV in the house acting as a go-between, and a few locks need an extra module for it. If a specific feature like that is the reason you are buying, confirm exactly what it requires before you order, because the requirements vary by model and change over time.

8 Renting? Choose Something You Can Undo

If you rent your home, the rules are a little different, and a retrofit lock is almost always the right answer. You want something that changes nothing permanent and can be returned to exactly as it was when you leave.

- A retrofit lock only replaces the inside thumb-turn and leaves the landlord's deadbolt, keyhole, and keys untouched — easy to remove and take with you.
- It keeps the existing keys working, which landlords usually require.
- Check your lease before changing any lock, even a retrofit, and keep the original parts to put back.
- Avoid full replacements in a rental unless your landlord agrees in writing.

> **TIP**
>
> The retrofit style is tailor-made for renters: you keep the landlord's lock and keys exactly as they are, add the smart part on the inside, and simply unscrew it and take it to your next home when you move. Nothing to explain, nothing to repair.

9 Measure Your Door Before You Buy

A smart lock that does not fit your door is a frustrating return, and a few minutes of measuring first avoids it entirely. You do not need to be handy — just note a few things and have them ready when you shop.

1. Note the kind of lock you have now: a separate deadbolt above the handle is what most smart locks replace. (A lock built into the handle itself is a different animal — mention it when you ask for help.)
2. Measure the thickness of your door; most locks fit standard doors but very thick or very thin doors need checking.
3. For a retrofit, look at your inside thumb-turn and the deadbolt brand — the retrofit lock lists which ones it fits.
4. Check how far the deadbolt sits from the edge of the door (the "backset"); the lock's box lists the sizes it handles.

5. Note whether the door is an exterior wood, metal, or glass-paned door, which can affect what fits.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> The most common fit surprise is a handle-and-deadbolt-in-one set, or an unusually thick or thin door. If your lock is anything other than a plain round deadbolt above the handle, measure carefully and ask before buying, because not every smart lock fits every door, and a wrong fit means an awkward return.

10 What It All Costs — Ballpark Only

Prices move around and vary by retailer and sale, so treat these as rough guides to set your expectations, not quotes. Always check the current price before you buy, and watch for a bridge or module that adds to the total.

Type	Rough ballpark	Notes
Retrofit (keep your keys)	about $130–$250	Confirm it fits your deadbolt
Keypad replacement deadbolt	about $130–$300	Higher end adds Wi-Fi, Apple home key
Add-on Wi-Fi bridge/module	about $30–$80 extra	Needed on some locks for away control

- A simple keypad replacement deadbolt tends to sit in the low-to-mid hundreds.
- The fanciest, with built-in Wi-Fi, a fingerprint reader, or tap-to-open, cost more.
- A bridge or special module, where needed, is an extra to budget for on top of the lock.
- These are ballparks only — please confirm the current price before you purchase.

GOOD TO KNOW

The cheapest-looking lock is not always the cheapest once you add the bridge it needs to do what you wanted. When you compare prices, compare the full kit that gives you the features you pictured — keypad, away-from-home control, voice — not just the bare lock.

11 A Quick Decision Guide

Pulling it together, here is the short path from how you live to the kind of lock that fits. Find the row that sounds most like you.

If you…	Lean toward…
Rent, or want to keep your keys	A retrofit over your existing deadbolt
Want to punch in a code, no keys	A keypad replacement deadbolt
Want to control it while away	Built-in Wi-Fi, or a lock with a bridge
Live in an all-iPhone home	A lock that works with Apple Home
Want the simplest possible	A keypad lock, no app required day to day

> *Start from how you want to open your door and whether you rent. Those two answers point at your lock far better than any feature list.*

12 Safety and Backup Sense

A smart lock is a help, but a few sensible habits keep it from ever becoming a headache.

- Keep a backup way in: a physical key hidden with someone you trust, or make sure a keypad lock has a battery-backup contact.
- Change the batteries promptly when warned, and keep spares near the door.
- Use a code you can remember but that is not obvious (not 1234 or your house number), and give visitors their own code you can remove later.
- Keep the lock's app updated, and keep your Wi-Fi password written down for setup.
- Make sure someone you trust also knows how to work it, in case you are away or unwell.

WATCH OUT

Be wary of any email or call claiming to be from your lock's maker asking for your account password or a code — treat it as a scam and do not respond. And never share your door code by text or email with anyone you have not verified. If a setup or security question worries you, that is a good moment to ask someone you trust.

13 When to Call Bill

Choosing and fitting a smart lock is very doable, and this guide is meant to let you decide with confidence. But a few parts — making sure a lock actually fits your particular door, getting the bridge and Wi-Fi talking so you can check the door from away, or tying it cleanly into your Apple, Google, or Alexa setup — are simply quicker and surer with someone beside you who does it every week and will not sell you a box you do not need.

I come to your home here in Portage County, look at your actual door, help you pick the right kind for the way you live and your phone, fit it properly, set the codes and the app, and make sure your backup way in is sorted before I leave — then I write

down the codes and steps so you are never caught out.

With 30+ years of professional experience, there is no question too small, and I would far rather help you choose well than see you return a lock that never fit.

- You are not sure which kind suits your door, or whether a lock will even fit it.
- You want to control the door from away and are unsure if you need a bridge.
- You want it tied into your iPhone, Google, or Alexa setup and voice control.
- You would like it fitted properly, with codes set and a backup way in sorted.
- You would simply rather have the right choice made and installed by someone you trust.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Start from how you live and whether you rent.

I want to…	Do this…
Keep my keys / I rent	Choose a retrofit that replaces only the inside thumb-turn
Punch in a code, no keys	Choose a keypad replacement deadbolt
Control the door from away	Make sure it has built-in Wi-Fi, or buy the bridge it needs
Use my phone to unlock	Match my phone: Apple Home, Google Home, or Alexa
Not get locked out	Change batteries when warned; keep a key or keypad backup
Make sure it fits	Measure the door; note deadbolt type, thickness, and backset
Know the rough cost	Ballpark $130–$300, plus $30–$80 if it needs a bridge — confirm current price
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

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

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

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.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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