BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Windows Running Out of Space — The No-Risk Cleanup

Reclaim gigabytes on a Windows PC using only Microsoft's own safe tools

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

A nearly full Windows PC is not broken — it is clogged with temporary files, update leftovers, a full Recycle Bin, and old downloads. Use Windows' own safe tools: open Settings, System, Storage and turn on Storage Sense, then run Disk Cleanup and use "Clean up system files" to remove old Windows update files. Empty the Recycle Bin, clear old installers from Downloads, and uninstall programs you no longer use.

Never delete the Windows folder, Program Files, or System32, and skip third-party "cleaner" apps. Restart and leave Storage Sense on so it stays clear.

1 The Short Version

A nearly full Windows PC is not broken — it has filled up with temporary files, update leftovers, a stuffed Recycle Bin, and years of downloads. Windows has built-in tools that clear all of that safely, and you never need a third-party "cleaner" program to do it.

We will use Storage Sense and Disk Cleanup — both made by Microsoft — then clear the usual hiding spots, and finish by telling you what not to touch. Stop as soon as the warning clears.

- Windows includes safe cleanup tools; you do not need to buy or install anything.
- The biggest wins are temporary files, update leftovers, the Recycle Bin, and Downloads.
- "Storage Sense" can keep the drive clear automatically from now on.
- Some files are Windows itself — leave those alone.

> **TIP**
>
> Start by seeing where the space went: open Settings (the gear icon in the Start menu), click "System," then "Storage." Windows shows a breakdown by category — apps, temporary files, documents, pictures — so you fix the real culprit instead of guessing.

2 What "Low Disk Space" Means

Your PC stores Windows itself, your programs, and all your files on one main drive, usually called the C: drive. When that drive runs low, Windows warns you, because it needs free room to install updates, run programs, and work smoothly. A drive running right at the edge makes the whole PC feel slow.

Nothing is damaged — it is simply a full drive. The cure is to clear the temporary clutter Windows and your programs leave behind, empty the bins, and move big personal files somewhere roomier if needed.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Try to leave a healthy amount of free space — ideally 10 to 20 gigabytes or more. Windows updates in particular need several gigabytes of working room, which is why a full drive so often blocks updates.

3 Turn On Storage Sense — the Easy Button

Storage Sense is Windows' own automatic housekeeper. It clears temporary files, empties the Recycle Bin on a schedule, and removes update leftovers — all safely, and all on its own once switched on.

The real value of Storage Sense is that it keeps working after you close the settings. Rather than cleaning up once and filling back up in a few months, the PC quietly tidies itself from now on. It is the single switch most worth turning on, and it is the first thing a professional would set for you.

1. Open Settings, click System, then Storage.
2. Find "Storage Sense" and turn it on.
3. Click into it and run it once now to clear the current clutter.
4. Leave it on so it keeps the drive clear going forward.

GOOD TO KNOW

Storage Sense only ever clears safe, temporary files and the Recycle Bin — it never touches your documents, photos, or programs. That is why it is safe to leave running all the time.

4 Run Disk Cleanup for the Deeper Clutter

Disk Cleanup is the classic Windows tool that clears the deeper leftovers — including old Windows update files that can be surprisingly large. It has been part of Windows for decades and is completely safe.

Where Storage Sense handles the everyday clutter, Disk Cleanup reaches the bigger, occasional leftovers — especially the files left behind after a major Windows update, which can run to several gigabytes. Running it once after you set up Storage Sense clears that backlog in a single pass.

1. Click the Start button and type "Disk Cleanup," then open it.
2. Choose the C: drive if asked, and let it calculate.
3. Tick the boxes for Temporary files, Recycle Bin, and similar safe items.
4. For the biggest win, click "Clean up system files," let it recalculate, and tick "Windows Update Cleanup" and "Previous Windows installation(s)" if they appear.
5. Click OK and let it run.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Previous Windows installation(s)" and the Windows.old folder appear after a big Windows update and can be several gigabytes. They let you roll back the update for a short window; once you are happy with how the PC is running, they are safe to clear and often the single biggest reclaim.

5 Empty the Recycle Bin

Deleting a file in Windows only moves it to the Recycle Bin, where it keeps taking up space until the bin is emptied. This is the most common reason a PC does not free up after someone has deleted plenty of files.

1. Find the Recycle Bin icon on the Desktop and open it to see what is inside.
2. Glance through to be sure nothing important is there.
3. Right-click the Recycle Bin and choose "Empty Recycle Bin."

> **WATCH OUT**
> Once the Recycle Bin is emptied, those files are gone without easy recovery. A quick look before emptying is all it takes to avoid losing something you meant to keep.

6 Clear Out the Downloads Folder

The Downloads folder collects everything you save from the web and email — installers, PDFs, photos, zip files — and grows into one of the biggest space users without anyone noticing.

Most people are surprised at what has gathered there over the years, because saving a file and forgetting it is so easy to do. Old receipts, email attachments, program installers, and pictures all pile into one folder you rarely open. Sorting it by size and clearing the big, obvious items is a quick and safe win.

1. Open File Explorer (the folder icon on the taskbar) and click "Downloads."
2. Switch to Details view and sort by Size to see the biggest items first.
3. Delete old installers (files ending in.exe or.msi), zip files, and documents you no longer need.
4. Empty the Recycle Bin afterward to reclaim the space.

TIP

Program installers ending in.exe or.msi are safe to delete once you have installed the program — the program itself lives elsewhere and does not need the installer. These are often the easiest big win in Downloads.

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 Uninstall Programs You No Longer Use

Old programs you never open still take up room, and some run quietly in the background and slow the PC too. Removing them through Windows' own tool is safe and tidy.

1. Open Settings, click "Apps," then "Installed apps."
2. Sort by size to see the biggest programs.
3. For any you genuinely no longer use, click the three dots and choose Uninstall.
4. Leave anything you do not recognize — some entries are needed by Windows or your PC's maker.

WATCH OUT

Do not uninstall things with names like "Microsoft Visual C++," "Realtek," "Intel," or your PC maker's name — these support Windows or your hardware, and other programs need them. Remove only the programs you recognize as ones you installed and no longer want.

8 Move Big Personal Files to Roomier Storage

If photos, videos, or documents are filling the drive, moving them to a cloud service or an external drive frees the main drive while keeping everything. This is better than deleting, because you keep the files.

- OneDrive (built into Windows) can hold files online and free space on the PC, keeping them a click away.
- An external USB drive is a cheap way to park large video or photo collections.
- Keep at least one extra copy of anything irreplaceable — a single drive can fail.

WATCH OUT

Setting up OneDrive or an external drive so your files are both freed from the PC and safely backed up — not just moved to one place that could fail — is worth doing right. I am glad to set this up and show you how it works on a visit.

9 Where the Space Usually Hides on a PC

If you are not sure where to start, it helps to know the usual suspects. On most home PCs, the same handful of places account for nearly all the wasted room, and all of them are safe to clear with the tools above.

Hiding spot	Why it fills up — and the fix
Temporary files	Programs and Windows leave scratch files behind — Storage Sense and Disk Cleanup clear them.
Windows update leftovers	Old versions kept after an update — Disk Cleanup's "system files" option removes them.
Recycle Bin	Deleted files waiting to be truly removed — empty it.

Downloads folder	Years of installers and attachments — sort by size and clear the big ones.
Unused programs	Things installed once and forgotten — uninstall via Settings, Apps.

Working through this short list, top to bottom, recovers the great majority of space on a typical PC. There is rarely any need to go hunting in obscure folders, which is also where people get into trouble by deleting the wrong thing.

10 If the PC Is Still Slow After Cleaning

Freeing space often makes a crowded PC feel noticeably quicker, because Windows finally has room to work. But if the PC is still sluggish once there is healthy free space, slowness and storage are two different problems, and a few other things are usually behind it.

- Too many programs launching at startup — covered in our startup-programs guide.
- A web browser with dozens of tabs and add-ons open at once.
- Pending Windows updates that need a restart to finish.
- An older PC with a traditional hard drive that would benefit from a solid-state upgrade.

WATCH OUT

If the PC is clean and up to date but still crawling, the most common real fix on an older machine is swapping its slow hard drive for a modern solid-state one — it can make a tired PC feel new. That is a job I do often, and I will tell you honestly whether it is worth it for your particular machine.

11 What You Should Never Delete

Staying safe is mostly about knowing what to leave alone. A few folders are Windows itself, and removing them can break the PC.

- The Windows folder and the Program Files folders — these are the operating system and your programs.
- Files whose names you do not recognize, especially on the C: drive outside your own folders.
- Anything in System32 — despite rumors online, you must never delete this.
- "Hidden" or system files; leave these as Windows set them.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Ignore any pop-up or website promising to "speed up your PC" or "remove junk" with a download. Many are scams that install unwanted programs or worse. Windows' own Storage Sense and Disk Cleanup do everything safely and cost nothing — you never need a third-party cleaner.

12 Restart and Re-Check

After clearing things out, restart the PC so Windows can finish removing update leftovers and recount the free space. Updates in particular often need a restart to finish their own cleanup.

1. Save any open work and restart the PC fully (Start, Power, Restart).
2. After it comes back, open Settings, System, Storage and check the free space.
3. If the warning is gone and the PC feels quicker, you are done.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Leave Storage Sense switched on so the drive stays clear automatically. With it running, the temporary clutter that caused this never piles up again, and you should not see the warning return.

13 When to Call Bill

The built-in tools here reclaim plenty of room safely for most people, and you can stop whenever the warning clears. But if the drive fills right back up, if updates still will not install after a cleanup, or if you are unsure what is safe to remove, you do not have to risk it.

I come to you, clear the space using only Windows' own safe tools, set Storage Sense to keep it clear, make sure your important files are backed up, and get stalled updates installing again. You get a faster PC and the confidence that nothing important was touched.

- The drive fills up again soon after you clear it.
- Windows updates still will not install after cleaning up.
- You are unsure what is safe to delete and want a steady hand.
- A "PC cleaner" or "speed up" pop-up is nagging you and you want it gone.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the PC. Use only Windows' own tools; stop when the warning clears.

I want to...	Do this...
See where space went	Settings System Storage
Automatic safe cleanup	Turn on Storage Sense and run it once
Deeper safe cleanup	Start "Disk Cleanup" "Clean up system files"
Reclaim obvious room	Empty the Recycle Bin; clear old installers from Downloads
Remove unused programs	Settings Apps Installed apps Uninstall
Never delete	The Windows folder, Program Files, System32, unknown files
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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