BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Key Fobs, Remote Start & Digital Keys

Fob batteries, remote start, phone-as-key and theft protection — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for drivers and families

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For key fobs, smart keys, Apple Wallet & Google Wallet car keys · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to the keys that open and start today's cars: the remote on your key ring, the smart key that stays in your pocket, remote start, and the newer "digital keys" that live on a phone or watch. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Every car is a little different, so this guide teaches the common patterns and always points you back to your own owner's manual for the exact steps.

Part 1 — Getting Started

1 A Note from Bill
2 The Kinds of Car Keys Today
3 Get to Know the Keys You Own

Part 2 — Fob Batteries & Dead Fobs

4 Signs Your Fob Battery Is Getting Low
5 Changing the Fob Battery Yourself
6 Getting In When the Fob Is Dead
7 Starting the Car with a Dead Fob
8 When It's the Car Battery, Not the Fob

Part 3 — Remote Start

9 Remote Start from the Key Fob
10 Remote Start from a Phone App
11 Remote Start Safety: Garages, Carbon Monoxide & Ohio Law

Part 4 — Your Phone or Watch as a Car Key

12 What a Digital Key Is (and Whether Your Car Has One)
13 Apple Wallet Car Keys on iPhone & Apple Watch
14 Google Wallet & Samsung Wallet Digital Car Keys
15 Car Makers' Own Phone Keys: Tesla, Hyundai, GM & Others

Part 5 — Sharing Keys & Keeping Them Safe

16 Sharing a Car Key with Family
17 New Phone, Lost Phone, Sold Car

Part 6 — Protecting Your Car from Theft

18 How Keyless Cars Get Stolen: Relay Attacks
19 Protecting Your Fob at Home & Away
20 More Ways to Make Your Car Harder to Steal
21 If Your Car Is Stolen

Part 7 — Lost Keys, New Keys & Locksmiths

22 Lost a Key? What to Do First
23 Getting a Replacement or Spare Fob
24 Spotting Locksmith & Key Scams

Part 8 — When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

25 When to Call Bill
26 Your Car Keys Cheat-Sheet

PART 1

Getting Started

The different kinds of car keys, what each one does, and a quick look at the keys you already own. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Car keys used to be simple: a piece of metal you turned in the door and the ignition. Today the "key" might be a plastic remote with buttons, a smart key that never leaves your purse, a card you tap on the door, or an app on your phone. If you've ever stood in a cold parking lot pressing a button that did nothing, or wondered whether thieves really can steal a car from the driveway without touching the key, this guide is for **you**.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help folks here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything. When I use a word like "proximity key" or "relay attack," I'll stop and explain it right then.

What this guide will do for you

- Help you tell which kind of key you have, and what it can and can't do.
- Show you how to change the little battery inside a key fob yourself, in about five minutes.
- Teach you how to get in and start the car when the fob battery has died — there's almost always a way.
- Explain remote start, from the fob and from a phone app, and how to use it safely.
- Walk you through using your phone or watch as a car key, and sharing a key with family.
- Explain how keyless cars get stolen, and the simple, inexpensive habits that help prevent it.
- Prepare you for a lost key — what it may cost and how to avoid locksmith scams.

The big promise: you can't break it by learning

Pressing buttons on a key fob won't hurt the car. Opening the fob to change its battery is a job most people can do at the kitchen table with a coin or a small screwdriver. Adding a car key to your phone can be undone with a few taps. The one thing I'll ask you to treat seriously is **remote start near a garage**, because car exhaust is dangerous indoors (Chapter 11). I'll mark it clearly.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A dead fob or a lost key can strand you at the grocery store. A few minutes with this guide means you'll know where the hidden key is, how to start the car anyway, and what to do next — calmly, without a tow truck or a rushed call to the first locksmith in a search result.

I'm only a phone call away

If anything in this guide leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question about car keys — they're more complicated than they used to be, and that's not your fault.

Let's start by sorting out which kind of key you have.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

The Kinds of Car Keys Today

Car makers use a lot of different names, but nearly every key falls into one of a handful of types. Knowing which one you have tells you how it works, what happens when its battery dies, and how much a replacement might cost.

The main types, in plain words

Type	How it works
Plain metal key	Older cars. You turn it in the door and the ignition. Many still have a small chip inside the head of the key that the car must recognize before the engine will run.
Remote keyless entry	A key with buttons — **Lock**, **Unlock**, often **Trunk** and a red **Panic** button. You still put the key in the ignition and turn it to start.
Smart key (proximity key)	Stays in your pocket or purse. The car senses it nearby, so you can touch the door handle to unlock and press a **Start/Stop** button to start. Makers call this things like "keyless entry," "keyless go," "Intelligent Key" or "Comfort Access."
Push-button start	Not a key itself, but the button on the dashboard that goes with a smart key. Foot on the brake, press the button, and the car starts if it senses the key inside.
Key card	A thin card, like a credit card, that you tap on a spot on the car. Common with Tesla and some other electric cars, usually as a backup to the phone.
Digital key (phone as key)	Your phone or smartwatch acts as the key, through Apple Wallet, Google Wallet, Samsung Wallet or the car maker's own app. Part 4 covers these.

Fob, remote, transmitter — the same thing

A **key fob** is simply the plastic remote on your key ring. Owner's manuals sometimes call it a **transmitter**, a **remote** or a **smart key**. In this guide, "fob" means any of them.

How a smart key knows you're there

A smart key and the car are always quietly listening for each other. When you touch the door handle or press the Start button, the car sends out a short-range radio signal, and the fob answers with a coded reply. If the code is right and the fob seems close by, the door unlocks or the engine starts. That convenience is wonderful on a rainy day with your arms full of groceries — and it's also the reason thieves have found ways to fool it, which Part 6 explains.

GOOD TO KNOW

Most cars still hide a real key

Almost every smart key has a small metal key blade tucked inside it. Chapter 6 shows you how to find it. That little blade is your way in when the fob's battery dies.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once you know which kind of key you have, you know which chapters matter for you, and you'll understand what the dealer or locksmith is talking about if you ever need a new one.

CHAPTER 3

Get to Know the Keys You Own

Ten quiet minutes in the driveway now can save you a stressful hour later. Here's a simple once-over of the keys for each car in the household.

A ten-minute key check

1. Gather every key and fob for the car — including the spare in the kitchen drawer. Count them. Many cars come with two.
2. Find your **owner's manual**. It may be in the glove box, on the car's touchscreen, in the car maker's app, or on the maker's website (search for the make, model, year and "owner's manual").
3. Look up the section on keys. It may be called **Keys**, **Smart Key**, **Keyless Entry** or **Locks**. Note which battery your fob uses.
4. Find the hidden metal key blade in your fob and practice sliding it out and back in (Chapter 6).
5. Find where the door keyhole is. On many newer cars it's hidden under a small cap on the driver's door handle.
6. Look up what to do if the fob battery is dead — the manual usually has a short section on starting the car that way (Chapter 7).
7. Write what you've learned on the Cheat-Sheet in Chapter 26.

Why two keys matter

If you only have one key and you lose it, replacing it is usually harder and more expensive than adding a spare while you still have a working one. Some cars even need two working keys to program a new one yourself (Chapter 23). If you're down to one, it's worth thinking about a spare before there's an emergency.

> **TIP**
>
> **Keep the spare at home — not in the car**
>
> A spare fob in the glove box or a magnetic box under the bumper is handy for a thief, too. Keep the spare somewhere safe at home, and away from the front door (Chapter 19 explains why).

HEADS UP

Don't leave a smart key in the car

With a smart key inside, anyone can open the door and start the car. Some cars won't even lock if the key is left inside. Make it a habit to take the fob with you every time.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll know exactly how many keys you have, where the hidden key is, and what battery to buy — before the day you need any of it.

PART 2

Fob Batteries & Dead Fobs

How to tell the fob's battery is running low, how to change it yourself, and how to get in and start the car when it has died.

CHAPTER 4

Signs Your Fob Battery Is Getting Low

The battery in a key fob is a small, flat, round cell about the size of a nickel or smaller — often called a **coin battery** or **button battery**. It usually lasts a few years, then fades slowly. The car often gives you a warning before it quits completely.

What you might notice

- You have to stand closer to the car than you used to before the doors unlock.
- You have to press the button more than once.
- The small light on the fob is dim or doesn't blink at all.
- A message on the dashboard says something like **Key battery low** or **Key not detected**.
- The car beeps or shows a key symbol when you press the Start button.
- Remote start from the fob works only up close, or not at all.

Is it the fob, or something else?

If one fob acts up but the spare works fine, the first fob's battery is almost certainly the problem. If *both* fobs suddenly stop working, the trouble is more likely the car itself — often its own battery (Chapter 8). Strong radio signals nearby, such as near a broadcast tower, can occasionally interfere too; if the fob works fine once you're somewhere else, that was probably it.

TIP

Change it before winter

Coin batteries tend to struggle in the cold. If your fob has been getting weak, replacing the battery in the fall can save you a frustrating January morning.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Catching a weak battery early turns a roadside problem into a two-dollar errand on your own schedule.

CHAPTER 5

Changing the Fob Battery Yourself

On most fobs, changing the battery takes about five minutes and no special tools. You don't need the dealer, and on most cars you don't need to re-program anything afterward. Your owner's manual has the exact steps and pictures for your fob, so have it open as you go.

Step 1: find out which battery it takes

Coin batteries are named with letters and four numbers. The first two numbers are the width in millimeters and the last two are the thickness in tenths of a millimeter, so a CR2032 is 20 millimeters across and 3.2 millimeters thick. **CR2032** is very common in key fobs, but many fobs use a **CR2025**, **CR2016**, **CR2450** or another size. They look similar but aren't interchangeable, so **check your owner's manual**, or open the fob and read the number printed on the old battery.

Step 2: change it

1. Work at a table, on a towel, so tiny parts can't roll away.
2. Slide out the metal key blade if your fob has one. On many fobs this reveals a small slot.
3. Gently pry the case apart at the slot with a coin or a small flat screwdriver. Some fobs have a single screw instead. Go slowly — the plastic clips can be snug.
4. Notice which way the old battery faces — usually the side with the **+** and the writing faces you or faces up. Taking a quick phone photo helps.
5. Pop the old battery out with a fingernail or a plastic tool. Try not to bend the metal contacts.
6. Slide in the new battery the same way the old one faced. Try not to touch its flat sides with greasy fingers; holding it by the edges is best.
7. Snap the case back together all the way around, and slide the key blade back in.
8. Test it: lock and unlock the car, and start it. If the car asks you to, follow the manual's steps.

TIP

Buy fresh batteries from a store you trust

Coin batteries are sold at grocery stores, pharmacies and hardware stores. Check the expiration date on the package. A battery that's been sitting in a hot glove box for years may already be weak.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some cars ask you to re-sync

Most fobs pick up right where they left off with a new battery. A few older ones need a short re-synchronizing step, such as pressing a button a few times near the car. If your fob doesn't work after a battery change, check the manual before assuming it's broken.

Coin batteries and children or pets — please read

A swallowed coin battery can badly burn a child's throat or stomach within hours. Car key fobs are one of the common places these batteries come from. Keep new and old batteries out of reach, put the old one straight into a closed container, and make sure the fob case is fully snapped shut.

STAY SAFE

If you think a child swallowed a battery

Treat it as an emergency even if you're not sure. Go to the nearest emergency room right away — don't wait for symptoms. On the way, call the National Battery Ingestion Hotline at **800-498-8666** or Poison Help at **1-800-222-1222**. Don't try to make the child vomit.

Recycling the old battery

Lithium coin batteries shouldn't go in household trash or recycling bins. Tape over both sides with clear tape and take them to a battery drop-off — many hardware and electronics stores have one — or a household hazardous waste day. Our **Batteries** guide covers recycling in more detail.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Doing it yourself costs a few dollars and five minutes, instead of a trip to the dealer. And you'll know how the next time, too.

CHAPTER 6

Getting In When the Fob Is Dead

When the fob battery dies completely, the buttons stop working and the car may not sense the key. Don't worry — nearly every car with a fob still has an old-fashioned way in.

Step 1: find the hidden key blade

1. Look along the edge or back of the fob for a small button, slider or latch.
2. Press or slide it and pull. A short metal key slides out of the fob.
3. If you don't see a latch, check the owner's manual under **mechanical key**, **emergency key** or **key blade**.

Step 2: find the keyhole

On many newer cars, the driver's door keyhole is hidden behind a small plastic cap at the end of the door handle, so the car looks smooth. The manual will show you how to remove the cap — often by pulling the handle and gently prying the cap off from underneath with the tip of the key blade. Practice once on a nice day so you're not learning it in the rain.

Step 3: unlock the door

Turn the key in the lock. The driver's door opens. The other doors may stay locked until you press the unlock switch inside.

HEADS UP

The alarm may go off

Opening a car with the metal key can set off the alarm on some cars, because the car hasn't recognized the fob yet. Don't panic — it usually stops once you start the car with the fob (Chapter 7), or after a short while. Have the manual handy.

GOOD TO KNOW

Phone and card keys have backups too

If your phone is your key and its battery is dead, the backup is usually a key card or a regular fob. Apple iPhones may also have a short "power reserve" for car keys (Chapter 13). Keep the backup handy — not at home in a drawer when the car is at the store.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing where the hidden key and keyhole are means a dead fob is an inconvenience, not an emergency.

CHAPTER 7

Starting the Car with a Dead Fob

Getting in is half the job. With a smart key and push-button start, the car also has to recognize the fob before the engine will run. Car makers build in a backup for exactly this: a way for the car to read the fob's chip up close, even when its battery is empty.

The common methods

Method	How it usually works
Touch the fob to the Start button	On many cars, you hold the fob right against the Start/Stop button (sometimes with the back or the logo side touching), keep your foot on the brake, and press the button with the fob. Some cars want you to press the button once first, and then touch it with the fob.
A marked spot or pocket	Some cars have a marked spot on the steering column, center console or cup holder where you set the fob; others have a slot or pocket for it.
A slot for the fob	A few cars have a slot under the dashboard or near the Start button that the fob slides into.

HEADS UP

Every car does this a little differently

Where to hold the fob, which side faces the button, and whether to press the button first all vary by brand and model. Look in your owner's manual for a section with a name like **If the key battery is dead** or **Starting the engine when the remote is not working**. Write the steps on your Cheat-Sheet in Chapter 26.

Step by step, in general

1. Get in using the hidden key blade (Chapter 6).
2. Press and hold the brake pedal.
3. Follow your manual: usually, hold the fob against the Start button or set it in the marked spot.
4. Press the Start/Stop button. The engine should start, and any alarm should stop.
5. Drive home or to a store, and replace the fob battery soon (Chapter 5).

TIP

Try it before you need it

On a calm afternoon, take the battery out of your spare fob and practice this once in the driveway. Then put the battery back. You'll know exactly what to do when it matters.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Instead of calling for a tow or waiting for a family member to bring the spare, you can usually start the car and be on your way in a minute.

CHAPTER 8

When It's the Car Battery, Not the Fob

Sometimes the fob is fine and the car's own big battery is the problem. The two can look alike at first, so here's how to tell them apart.

Clues it's the car battery

- **Both** fobs stop working at the same time.
- The dashboard lights are dim, flicker or don't come on at all when you open the door.
- You hear clicking, or nothing at all, when you try to start.
- The car sat unused for a long time, or a light was left on.
- The car is several years old and it's a cold morning.

What to do

1. Get in with the hidden key blade (Chapter 6). The metal key works even when the car battery is flat.
2. If the dashboard stays dark, the car battery needs a jump start or a replacement. Call your roadside assistance plan, your auto insurer, or a trusted repair shop.
3. After a jump, many cars need a short drive to recharge. Have the battery tested at a parts store or shop.

GOOD TO KNOW

Roadside help you may already have

Many auto insurance policies, auto clubs, new-car warranties and some credit cards include roadside assistance for jump starts and lockouts. Check yours now, and write the number on the Cheat-Sheet.

TIP

Don't sleep with the fob in the car

Leaving a smart key inside a parked car can keep the car and the fob talking to each other, which may drain both batteries faster. It's also a theft risk. Bring the fob inside.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the difference saves you buying a fob battery you didn't need — or waiting for a fob fix when the car really needed a jump.

PART 3

Remote Start

Warming up or cooling down the car before you get in — from the key fob or from a phone app — and the safety rules that come with it.

CHAPTER 9

Remote Start from the Key Fob

Remote start lets you start the engine from inside the house or the store, so the heat or air conditioning can get going before you climb in. On a January morning in Northeast Ohio, that's a real comfort. Many cars have it built in; others have an aftermarket system added by a dealer or an installer.

How to tell whether your car has it

- Look for a button on the fob with a curved or circular arrow, sometimes with the word **REMOTE** or a small car symbol.
- Some fobs hide extra buttons under a sliding cover, or on the back.
- Check the owner's manual index for **Remote start** or **Remote engine start**.
- Aftermarket systems often have their own, separate fob with their own instructions.

The usual pattern

1. Make sure the car is parked **outdoors**, in a place with open air — never in a garage (Chapter 11).
2. From within range, press **Lock** on the fob.
3. Then press the remote-start button — on many cars, press it twice or press and hold it for a few seconds. Your manual gives the exact pattern.
4. Watch for a sign it worked: the parking lights flash, the horn chirps, or a light on the fob changes.
5. When you get to the car, unlock it and get in with the fob. On most cars you then press the brake and the Start button (or turn the key) before you can drive.

GOOD TO KNOW

What remote start usually does — and doesn't

On most cars, the doors stay locked while the engine runs, the engine shuts itself off after a set number of minutes if you don't come out, and the car can't be driven away without the key inside. Many cars turn the climate system and heated seats on to their last settings. Your manual lists the details for your car.

TIP

Range is shorter than you'd think

Fob remote start often works only within a few hundred feet, less through walls. If it doesn't respond from the kitchen, try from a window that faces the car, or step outside.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A warm car with clear windows on a cold morning — and less time standing in the wind scraping ice.

CHAPTER 10

Remote Start from a Phone App

Many newer cars can also be started from the car maker's phone app — the FordPass app, the myChevrolet app, Toyota's app, Hyundai's app and others. The app works from almost any distance, because it talks to the car over the cell network instead of a short-range radio signal.

What the app adds

- Start the car from anywhere, not just within fob range.
- See whether the doors are locked, and lock them if you forgot.
- On some cars, set the cabin temperature or turn on seat and window heaters before you get in.
- See the fuel level, battery charge (for electric cars) or tire pressures.
- Find the car in a big parking lot.

Setting it up, in general

1. Install the car maker's official app from the App Store or Google Play. Check that the developer name is the car company.
2. Create an account or sign in, and add your car — often by typing or scanning the **VIN** (the 17-character vehicle identification number on your registration or at the bottom of the windshield).
3. Follow the app's steps to confirm you own the car; some ask you to press a button in the car or accept a message on the car's screen.
4. Set a PIN for remote commands if the app offers one.
5. Try a remote start once with the car parked outdoors, so you know how it looks.

HEADS UP

Many app features need a plan

Remote start from the app is often included only for a trial period on a new car, then needs a paid connected-services plan. Read what's included before you sign up. Our **Connected Car Apps** guide covers these apps, trials and subscriptions in much more depth.

SCAM ALERT

Download apps only from the official store

Look-alike apps and fake "activation" websites sometimes ask for your car login or a fee to "unlock" remote start. Get the app only from the App Store or Google Play, check that it's published by your car maker, and never give your app password or PIN to someone who calls or texts you.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can warm the car up from your desk at work or a doctor's waiting room — and double-check that you locked it, without walking back out to the parking lot.

CHAPTER 11

Remote Start Safety: Garages, Carbon Monoxide & Ohio Law

Remote start is safe when it's used outdoors. The one serious danger is using it where exhaust can build up. Car exhaust contains **carbon monoxide**, a gas you can't see or smell, and it can kill.

The rules I'd follow

- **Never** remote start a car inside a garage — even with the garage door open. Back it out or pull it out first, or don't use remote start that day.
- Be especially careful with an **attached garage**. Exhaust can seep into the house.
- Keep a **carbon monoxide alarm** on every level of the home and near bedrooms, and test it regularly.
- Don't remote start a car that's buried in snow. Clear snow from around the tailpipe first.
- Keep the fob away from little hands and from pockets where a button might be pressed by accident.

STAY SAFE

Owner's manuals agree: never in a garage

Car makers warn in their manuals never to use remote start, or let an engine run, in a garage or other enclosed area with poor ventilation, because exhaust carries carbon monoxide, which has no color or odor. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, nausea and sudden tiredness. If you feel this way and the car has been running nearby, get to fresh air and call 911.

What about Ohio law?

Ohio has a law about leaving a running vehicle unattended (Ohio Revised Code section 4511.661). It generally requires a driver who leaves a vehicle to stop the engine, lock the ignition, remove the key and set the parking brake. As it reads today, the law lists exceptions — including vehicles on **residential property**, such as your own driveway, and vehicles that are **locked**. A remote-started car normally stays locked. Cities can also have their own parking rules, so if you live in a city, it's worth a quick check of the local code.

GOOD TO KNOW

I'm a tech helper, not a lawyer

That's my plain-English summary of the law as published in November 2026, not legal advice. If you're unsure about remote-starting in a public lot or on a city street, ask your local police department's non-emergency line — they're happy to answer.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You get all the comfort of a warm car without the one risk that really matters — and without worrying that you're breaking a rule in your own driveway.

PART 4

Your Phone or Watch as a Car Key

Digital car keys in Apple Wallet, Google Wallet and Samsung Wallet, and the car makers' own phone-key apps — what they are, how to set them up, and what to keep as a backup.

CHAPTER 12

What a Digital Key Is (and Whether Your Car Has One)

A **digital key** — sometimes called a **phone key** or **phone as a key** — lets your smartphone or smartwatch do the job of the key fob. You hold the phone near the door handle to unlock, set it in a marked spot to start the car, and on some cars you can simply keep it in your pocket, just like a smart key. It's convenient, and you can share it with family over a text message instead of handing over a fob.

Two ways it's done

Where the key lives	What that means
In your phone's wallet	The key lives in **Apple Wallet** on an iPhone or Apple Watch, or in **Google Wallet** or **Samsung Wallet** on an Android phone, next to your payment cards. You usually start setup in the car maker's app or on the car's screen. Chapters 13 and 14 cover these.
In the car maker's own app	Some makers — Tesla is the best-known — use their own app as the key, working over Bluetooth. Chapter 15 covers these.

Does my car have it?

Digital keys are only on certain newer models, and even then sometimes only on certain trim levels or with a connected-services plan. The list grows every few months. The surest ways to find out:

1. Look in the owner's manual index for **Digital Key**, **Phone as a Key** or **Phone Key**.
2. Open your car maker's app and look for a **Digital Key** or **Keys** section.
3. Ask the dealer's service desk. Give them the year, model and trim, or the VIN.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your phone has to qualify too

Digital keys need a fairly recent phone. Google, for example, lists Pixel 6 and later and Samsung Galaxy S21 and later, among other Android 12 phones, and the car must also be on its supported list. Apple Wallet car keys also need a recent iPhone. If your phone is several years old, the car maker's app will tell you it can't add the key.

Always keep a backup

A phone can run out of battery, get lost, or need repair. Every car that offers a digital key also comes with a physical backup — a regular fob, a key card, or both. Keep that backup somewhere you can get to it, such as in your purse or wallet. A key card fits right next to your credit cards.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One less thing to carry, and an easy way to let a family member borrow the car — while your trusty fob or card stays as a safety net.

CHAPTER 13

Apple Wallet Car Keys on iPhone & Apple Watch

If your car supports it, an iPhone can hold your car key in the **Wallet** app, and a paired Apple Watch can carry it too. A growing number of brands offer it on some models — BMW was first, and makers such as Mercedes-Benz, Hyundai, Kia and Audi followed, with more added each year. Your dealer can tell you whether your exact car qualifies.

Adding the key to your iPhone

The steps begin on the car's side, and each maker does it a little differently. In general:

1. Make sure your iPhone is up to date (**Settings** > **General** > **Software Update**) and signed in with your Apple Account.
2. If your car maker asks, make sure the car is linked to your account in the maker's app first.
3. Start the setup from the car maker's app, from the car's touchscreen, or from an email the maker sent you — whichever your manual describes. Look for something like **Add to Apple Wallet**.
4. Follow the steps on the iPhone. You may be asked to place the iPhone on the car's key reader or phone tray while it pairs.
5. When it's done, the key appears in the **Wallet** app with a picture of your car.

Using it every day

- **To unlock or lock:** hold the top of your iPhone, or your Apple Watch, near the door handle. On cars with the newest kind of key (ultra wideband), the car can sense the phone in your pocket, just like a smart key.
- **To start:** place the iPhone in the key reader or phone tray your manual shows, then press the Start button with your foot on the brake.
- You don't need to open the Wallet app or unlock your phone. That's **Express Mode**, explained next.

Express Mode: no Face ID needed

When you add a car key, Apple turns **Express Mode** on automatically. That's why the key works without Face ID, Touch ID or your passcode — handy with your hands full. If you'd rather confirm it's you every time, you can turn Express Mode off for the key in the Wallet app. Then you'll need to authenticate each time you use the key.

When the iPhone battery runs out: power reserve

On many iPhone models, a car key in Express Mode can keep working for a while after the iPhone shuts down because its battery ran low. This is called **power reserve**. To see which keys and cards are available, press the side button on the dead iPhone. It isn't a substitute for charging — and it doesn't help if you turned the phone off yourself — so keep the backup fob or card handy.

Adding the key to your Apple Watch

1. On your iPhone, open the **Apple Watch** app.
2. Tap **Wallet & Apple Pay**.
3. Find your car key in the list and tap **Add** next to it.
4. Follow the steps. The key then works from your wrist, even if your iPhone is at home.

TIP

Charge the watch, too

If your watch is your main key on an outing, make sure it's charged — and keep the backup fob or card in your bag as well.

SCAM ALERT

Apple never texts you to "verify" your car key

Treat any text, email or call that asks for your Apple Account password, a verification code or payment to "keep your car key active" as a scam. Car keys are added and managed only in the Wallet app and your car maker's official app. If in doubt, don't tap the link — open the Wallet app yourself.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your car key is on the phone you already carry everywhere. And if you're walking or gardening with only your Apple Watch, you can still get into the car.

CHAPTER 14

Google Wallet & Samsung Wallet Digital Car Keys

On Android phones, a digital car key lives in **Google Wallet** (and on Samsung Galaxy phones, often in **Samsung Wallet**). It works the same basic way as on an iPhone: hold the phone near the door to unlock, and follow the car's steps to start.

What you need

- A supported phone. Google lists Pixel 6 and later, Samsung Galaxy S21 and later, and other select phones running Android 12 or newer.
- A supported car. Digital car keys work only with select vehicles in select markets — check your owner's manual or ask the car maker.
- An internet connection during setup, and a Google Account signed in on the phone.

Setting it up

How you start depends on the car maker. Google describes two common routes:

Route	What happens
Through the car maker's app	Open the maker's official app, choose to add a digital key, sign in with your Google Account when asked, accept the terms, and type the activation code if the app gives you one. The key is saved in Google Wallet.
Through an email	Some makers send an email with an **Add to Wallet** link. Open it on the phone and follow the steps. If the email doesn't have that link, contact the car maker.

Deleting a key from the phone

1. Open **Google Wallet** and tap your digital car key.
2. Tap **More** (it may look like three dots).
3. Tap **Delete key**, then confirm. You may be asked to unlock the phone to prove it's you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Samsung Wallet works similarly

On Galaxy phones, some car makers put the key in Samsung Wallet instead. Hyundai, for example, says its Digital Key 2 can be shared from Apple Wallet, Google Wallet or Samsung Wallet. Your car maker's app will show you which wallet it uses.

HEADS UP

Keep a screen lock on your phone

Your phone is now a car key, so protect it like one. Use a PIN, pattern, fingerprint or face unlock, and keep Find Hub (Google's service for finding a lost Android phone, formerly Find My Device) turned on. Chapter 17 explains what to do if the phone is lost.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your Android phone becomes a spare key you always have with you, and you can share access with family without making another trip to the dealer.

CHAPTER 15

Car Makers' Own Phone Keys: Tesla, Hyundai, GM & Others

Many car makers offer a phone key through their own app, either instead of the phone's wallet or as the starting point for it. The names vary — Phone Key, Digital Key, Phone as a Key — but the ideas are the same.

Tesla: the phone is the main key

Tesla cars are designed to be used mostly with a phone. The Tesla app talks to the car over Bluetooth, so once it's set up, the phone key works even without a cell signal. Tesla also provides **key cards** — thin cards you tap on the car — as a backup for when the phone's battery is dead, or the phone is lost.

1. Install the official **Tesla** app and sign in to your Tesla account.
2. Make sure Bluetooth is on and you're near the car.
3. In the app, find **Phone Key** and tap **Set Up**.
4. If the automatic setup doesn't finish, the app walks you through completing it with your key card.
5. Keep a key card in your wallet. On a Model 3 or Model Y, to drive with the card, you place it on the center console behind the cup holders.

Hyundai, Kia and Genesis: Digital Key

Hyundai's **Digital Key 2** is set up from the **Bluelink** app (look under **More** for **Vehicle Digital Key**) and then saved into Apple Wallet, Google Wallet or Samsung Wallet. Kia and Genesis offer similar keys through their own apps. Features and the number of keys you can share depend on the model and the plan.

GM, Ford and others

General Motors brands set up their digital key in the brand app — myChevrolet, myGMC, myBuick or myCadillac. Ford, Lincoln, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and others each have their own version on certain models. Because the details change from model to model, follow the owner's manual and the app's own instructions.

HEADS UP

Some phone keys need a plan

Some makers include the digital key with the car; others tie it to a connected-services plan that may need a paid subscription after a trial. Ask before you rely on it. Our **Connected Car Apps** guide covers those plans in detail.

TIP

Turn on Bluetooth and leave it on

Most phone keys need Bluetooth. If you switch Bluetooth off to save battery, the car won't sense your phone. Also allow the car maker's app to run in the background when the phone asks.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Whatever brand you drive, you'll know where the phone-key setting lives, what backup to carry, and which questions to ask the dealer.

PART 5

Sharing Keys & Keeping Them Safe

Lending the car to family with a digital key, and what to do with digital keys when you get a new phone, lose a phone or sell the car.

CHAPTER 16

Sharing a Car Key with Family

One of the nicest things about a digital key is that you can lend the car without handing over a fob. A grandchild home from college, a neighbor who's driving you to an appointment, or an adult child who helps with errands can get a key on their own phone — and you can take it back just as easily.

Sharing from an iPhone

1. Open the **Wallet** app and tap your car key.
2. Look for the option to share the key (often a **Share** button or a **+** next to the people who have keys).
3. Choose the person from your contacts and send the invitation, usually through Messages.
4. If your car asks for it, the person will need a **one-time code** to add the key. Apple recommends giving that code in person or over the phone, not in the same message.
5. Some cars let you choose how much the shared key can do — for example, unlock only, or unlock and drive.

Sharing from Google Wallet

1. Open **Google Wallet** and tap your digital car key.
2. Tap **Share car key**.
3. Choose who to send it to and give the shared key a name. Pick the name carefully — Google says it can't be changed later.
4. The other person signs in to their own wallet app and follows the steps on their screen. They may need an activation code or your physical key the first time.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> **iPhone and Android can share with each other**
>
> Depending on the car, a key shared from an Android phone can go to an iPhone, and the other way around. Hyundai and Google both describe sharing across the two kinds of phones for supported cars.

Taking a shared key back

When the visit is over, you can remove a shared key from your own wallet app — open the key and look for the list of people you've shared with — or from the car maker's app. Some cars also let you see and remove keys from the car's touchscreen. The person you shared with can delete it from their phone too.

HEADS UP

There may be a limit

Car makers set their own limits on how many people can share a key, and the limit can depend on your plan. If sharing stops working, check the car maker's app for the number of keys in use and remove any you no longer need.

SCAM ALERT

Only share with people you know

Never share a car key with someone you've met only online, a "buyer" who wants to test-drive while you're away, or anyone who contacts you out of the blue. A shared key is as good as handing over the car.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Family can borrow the car on short notice without a drive across town to hand off the fob — and you stay in control of who can use it.

CHAPTER 17

New Phone, Lost Phone, Sold Car

Digital keys belong to a phone and to a car, so they need a little attention when either one changes hands. Here's what to do in the three situations that come up most.

Getting a new phone

1. Before you trade in or reset the old phone, make sure you have your **backup fob or key card** handy.
2. Set up the new phone and sign in with the same Apple Account or Google Account.
3. Open the Wallet app on the new phone and look for your car key. On some cars it moves over during setup; on others you'll be asked to add it again through the car maker's app.
4. Test the key on the new phone — unlock, lock and start — before you erase the old phone.
5. Then remove the key from the old phone (or erase the whole phone) before it leaves your hands.

TIP

Ask before trade-in day

If you're trading a phone in at a store, do the car-key move at home first, with the car in the driveway and the backup fob in your pocket. It's much calmer than doing it at a store counter.

If your phone is lost or stolen

A lost phone with your car key on it is worth acting on quickly, but it's not cause for panic. The phone's screen lock protects it, and you still have your backup fob or card.

Phone	What to do
iPhone	Use **Find My** on another Apple device, or at icloud.com/find, and choose **Mark As Lost**. Apple says this suspends payment cards and other services in Wallet. Find My has to have been turned on before the phone was lost.
Android	Use **Find Hub** (formerly Find My Device) to secure or erase the phone. Google says you can suspend or remove a digital car key this way, but the phone has to be on and connected to a network.

Phone	What to do
Either phone	Also remove the phone's key through the car maker's app or the car's touchscreen if they offer it, and call the dealer or the car maker if you're not sure it's gone.

HEADS UP

Use your backup key until it's sorted

Until the lost phone's key is removed, drive with your fob or key card. When you get a replacement phone, add the key again as in Chapter 13 or Chapter 14.

Selling or trading in the car

1. Remove your digital key, and every key you've shared, from your wallet app and the car maker's app.
2. Remove the car from your account in the car maker's app, so the next owner can't see or start it — and so you can't accidentally start a car you no longer own.
3. Hand over every physical fob and key card to the buyer or dealer.
4. Clear your phone and personal data from the car's touchscreen. Our **Your Car's Touchscreen & Bluetooth** guide shows how.

GOOD TO KNOW

Buying a used car? Ask for every key

When you buy a used car, ask how many fobs and cards it came with, and have the dealer or the car maker remove the previous owner's digital keys and app access. A key you don't know about is a key someone else might still have.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your keys follow you to a new phone, a lost phone can't be used to drive off in your car, and a car you've sold is really out of your hands.

PART 6

Protecting Your Car from Theft

How thieves fool keyless cars, the simple habits and inexpensive gadgets that help, and what to do if the car is ever stolen.

CHAPTER 18

How Keyless Cars Get Stolen: Relay Attacks

You may have seen news stories about cars stolen from driveways overnight, with the keys still safely inside the house. The most common way this is done is called a **relay attack**. It sounds high-tech, but the idea is simple, and so is the defense.

How a relay attack works, in plain words

Remember from Chapter 2 that a smart key and the car quietly talk to each other by radio when you touch the door handle. The car only unlocks if the fob seems close by. In a relay attack, thieves work in pairs:

1. One thief stands near your house — often by the front door or a window — holding a device that picks up the faint signal from your fob inside.
2. That device passes, or "relays," the signal to a second device held by a partner standing next to your car.
3. The car is fooled into thinking the fob is right there. The door unlocks, and the Start button works.
4. The thieves drive away. The car often keeps running until it's turned off, and they may never touch your fob.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> **It only works on keys that are "awake"**
>
> A relay attack needs the fob to be sending its signal. That's why the defenses in Chapter 19 all come down to the same thing: keep the fob's signal from reaching the street — by distance, by a signal-blocking pouch, or by putting the fob to sleep.

Which cars are at risk?

- Cars with a **smart key** (keyless entry and push-button start) are the main target.
- Cars with a fob you must press, and a key you must turn, aren't open to this particular trick.
- Phone keys that work by tapping, and key cards, have to be held right up against the car, so they're much harder to relay.
- Newer smart keys often use extra measures, such as motion sensors that put the fob to sleep when it's been still for a while. Your owner's manual may mention this.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once you understand the trick, the fixes in the next chapter make sense — and you'll know which of your family's cars actually need them.

CHAPTER 19

Protecting Your Fob at Home & Away

The good news: blocking a relay attack is inexpensive and mostly a matter of habit. Pick one or two of these and use them every night.

1. Keep the fobs away from doors and windows

The farther the fob is from the outside of the house, the harder it is for thieves to pick up its signal. Instead of a hook or bowl by the front door, keep keys in a room toward the middle or back of the house — and keep the **spare** there too. A spare fob in a drawer by the door is just as easy to relay as the one you use every day.

2. Use a signal-blocking pouch or box

A **signal-blocking pouch** — often sold as a **Faraday pouch** or Faraday box — has metal layers inside that stop the fob's radio signal. They're sold at auto-parts stores and online for modest prices. Quality varies, so test yours:

1. Put the fob in the pouch and close it completely, including any fold-over flap.
2. Walk up to the car and try to open the door by touching the handle.
3. If the car unlocks, the pouch isn't blocking the signal. Try closing it more carefully, or replace it.
4. If the car stays locked, the pouch works. Take the fob out to drive, and put it back when you get home.

HEADS UP

Kitchen tricks aren't a substitute

Some people put fobs in the freezer, the microwave or wrapped in foil. A microwave or freezer isn't designed for this and can damage the fob, and foil is hit-or-miss. A tested pouch or metal box is the reliable choice.

3. Put the fob to sleep

Some car makers give the fob a **sleep** or **battery-saving mode** that stops it from answering the car until you press a button. On many Toyota and Lexus keys, for example, you press a short button sequence and the key's light flashes to confirm; pressing any button wakes it up. Other makers let you turn off passive (hands-free) entry in the car's settings. Look in your owner's manual under **battery-saving**, **sleep** or **keyless entry** for your car's steps.

4. Everyday habits

- Lock the car every time, even in the driveway, and don't leave a fob inside the car (Chapter 3).
- Park in a locked garage if you have one — with the engine off.
- In public, keep the fob in a zipped bag or a pocket that faces away from strangers in a checkout line.
- Install software updates for your car when the dealer or the car offers them; some fix security problems.

TIP

Make it a nightly routine

Choose one spot for every fob in the house, in a pouch or a metal box, away from the front door. When it's the same spot every night, it soon becomes automatic — and you'll always know where the keys are.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

For the price of a lunch, you shut down the most common way keyless cars are stolen from driveways — and get better sleep, too.

CHAPTER 20

More Ways to Make Your Car Harder to Steal

Thieves look for easy targets. Each extra step you add makes your car a little less appealing than the one down the street.

A visible steering-wheel lock

An old-fashioned steering-wheel lock — a bright bar that clamps across the wheel — still works because it's visible from outside and takes time to defeat. It's a good extra layer for any car, and especially for models that are known theft targets. Keep its key on a different ring from the car key.

Some Hyundai and Kia models: get the free software update

Some older Hyundai and Kia models that start with a regular turn key were built without an engine **immobilizer** (the chip system that stops a car from starting without the right key), and they became frequent theft targets. In 2023 the two companies began offering a free anti-theft software update for affected models, and steering-wheel locks for models that couldn't take the update.

- Hyundai: **800-633-5151**
- Kia: **800-333-4542**
- Or ask any Hyundai or Kia dealer's service desk whether your car is eligible and whether it has had the update.

Small things that add up

- Never leave the car running unattended unless it's locked and remote-started (Chapter 11).
- Don't keep the title, a spare key, or a garage-door opener with your home address in the car.
- Park in well-lit spots, and close the garage door at night.
- Some people hide a Bluetooth tracker, such as an AirTag, in the car. It can help police — but Google, for one, says trackers shouldn't be used to locate stolen items yourself. Our **Bluetooth Trackers** guide explains what they can and can't do.

STAY SAFE

Never confront a thief

If you see someone trying to get into your car, stay inside, call 911, and let the police handle it. A car can be replaced; you can't.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A few inexpensive layers make your car more trouble than it's worth to a thief.

CHAPTER 21

If Your Car Is Stolen

It's a sickening feeling to walk out and find the driveway empty. First, make sure it wasn't towed or moved by a family member. Then work through these steps calmly.

Right away

1. Call the police. Use **911** if it's happening now; otherwise the non-emergency line. Give them the year, make, model, color, license plate and the **VIN** if you have it (it's on your registration and insurance card).
2. If the car has a connected-services app or a tracker, tell the police you have its location. Let them recover the car — don't go yourself.
3. Ask for the police report number. Your insurance company will need it.
4. Call your auto insurance company to start a claim.

Within the next day

- Remove the car's digital keys from your phone and anyone you shared them with, and tell the car maker the car was stolen.
- If a garage-door opener was in the car, change the opener's code or unplug the opener until you can.
- If your house key was on the same ring, have the locks rekeyed.
- If personal papers with your address or ID were in the car, keep an eye out for fraud. Our **Credit Freezes, Credit Reports & Identity Theft** guide has the steps.

GOOD TO KNOW

Write the VIN down today

Having the VIN, plate number and insurance policy number written on your Cheat-Sheet (Chapter 26) saves a stressful search through paperwork when you need them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A clear list keeps you focused when you're upset, and gives the police and insurer everything they need the first time.

PART 7

Lost Keys, New Keys & Locksmiths

What to do first when a key goes missing, how replacement fobs and spares work, and how to avoid the locksmith scams that target people in a hurry.

CHAPTER 22

Lost a Key? What to Do First

Losing a car key is stressful, and modern keys aren't cheap to replace. Take a breath — there's usually a calmer and less expensive path than the first one that comes to mind.

Before you call anyone

1. Retrace your steps: coat pockets, the bottom of a bag, the car seat, the store's customer service desk.
2. If you put a Bluetooth tracker on your key ring, open its app — Find My on an iPhone, Find Hub on Android, or the tracker's own app.
3. Check whether the car is locked. If the key might be inside, don't break a window — call for a lockout.
4. Find your spare. If you have one, you're not in an emergency; you can replace the lost key on your own schedule.
5. If you're stuck away from home, call the roadside assistance number from your insurer, auto club, warranty or credit card (Chapter 8).

Should I worry someone will take the car?

If the key was lost far from the car with nothing to show which car it belongs to, the risk is low. If it might have been stolen along with something showing your address, or lost near the car, it's worth having the lost key **removed from the car's memory** when you get a replacement. Dealers and many automotive locksmiths can do this, so the lost key won't start the car even if someone finds it.

TIP

Put your name on nothing — and a tracker on everything

Don't put your name or address on a key ring. A small Bluetooth tracker on the ring is a far better way to get keys back. Our **Bluetooth Trackers** guide shows how to set one up.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the order to work in saves money and worry — and very often turns up the key before you've spent a dime.

CHAPTER 23

Getting a Replacement or Spare Fob

A modern fob isn't just a remote; it has a chip that must be **programmed** to your particular car. That programming is why replacements cost more than you'd expect. You have a few options.

Your choices

Where	What to expect
The dealer	Can make a key for any model of its brand, using your VIN. Usually the most expensive choice, and for some cars the only one. If all keys are lost, the car may need to be towed there.
An automotive locksmith	Many can cut and program fobs for common models, and some come to you, which can save a tow. Often less expensive than the dealer, but not every locksmith can handle every car.
Doing it yourself	Some cars, mostly older ones, let you program an extra fob yourself by following steps in the owner's manual — often only if you already have two working keys. Many newer cars don't allow this.

What to bring

- Your driver's license and the car's registration or title, to prove the car is yours.
- The VIN (on the registration, the insurance card, or at the bottom of the windshield).
- Every key and fob you still have — they may need to be reprogrammed along with the new one.

What it may cost

Prices vary a great deal by brand, model and where you go. A plain remote for an older car may be modest; a smart key for a newer or luxury car can cost a few hundred dollars or more, with programming. I'm not quoting exact figures, because they differ so much — instead, **call the dealer and one or two automotive locksmiths with your VIN and ask each for a written, all-in price** that includes the key, cutting the metal blade and programming.

HEADS UP

Cheap online fobs can be a gamble

Fobs sold online for a fraction of the dealer price are sometimes the wrong type, used, or impossible to program to your car — and many locksmiths and dealers won't program a key you bring in. Ask the person who'll program it before you buy one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Check your coverage first

Some extended warranties, key-protection plans and insurance policies cover lost or broken keys. It's worth a look at the paperwork before you pay.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With two or three written quotes in hand, you'll pay a fair price — and getting a spare *before* you lose your last key is almost always cheaper and easier.

CHAPTER 24

Spotting Locksmith & Key Scams

Being locked out or stranded makes anyone want help *now*. Some dishonest operators count on that. The Better Business Bureau has warned for years about a pattern that targets people in exactly this spot.

How the locksmith scam usually goes

1. You search online for a locksmith and call the first listing. It looks local, but it may route to a call center in another state.
2. On the phone you're quoted a very low price — the BBB mentions quotes as low as $15.
3. Whoever arrives finds "reasons" the job is harder than expected, and the price climbs, with fees that weren't mentioned.
4. You may be pressured to pay in cash, and you may get no written receipt.

How to protect yourself

- **Pick a locksmith now**, before you need one. Ask a neighbor, your mechanic or your insurer for a trusted name, check it with the BBB, and save the number in your phone and on the Cheat-Sheet.
- Call your **roadside assistance** first; they send vetted providers.
- Ask for the business's real name and address, and an estimate of the total cost before anyone starts.
- When they arrive, compare the price to the quote before work begins. If it's suddenly much higher, you can say no and wait for someone else.
- Pay by credit card if you can, and get an itemized receipt with the business name on it.

SCAM ALERT

Fake locksmiths and "key programming" calls

Be wary of a locksmith listing with no real address, a very low phone quote, an unmarked vehicle, or a demand for cash. And be just as wary of a call, text or social-media message offering to "reprogram" or "unlock" your digital key, or asking for your car app password. Car makers don't contact you that way.

If you think you were overcharged

- File a complaint with the BBB at bbb.org.
- File a consumer complaint with the Ohio Attorney General's office.
- Report it to the Federal Trade Commission at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.
- If you paid by credit card, call the card company about disputing the charge.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A trusted number saved ahead of time means that when the day comes, you make one calm call instead of gambling on a search result.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep with your keys.

CHAPTER 25

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can handle your car keys on your own. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves time, worry or money. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Setting up a digital key** on your iPhone, Apple Watch or Android phone, and sharing it with family (Chapters 13 to 16).
- **Moving your car key to a new phone** before the old one is traded in (Chapter 17).
- **A lost or stolen phone** that had your car key on it (Chapter 17).
- **Setting up the car maker's app** for remote start and checking the locks (Chapter 10).
- **Finding the steps in your owner's manual** — for a dead fob, a sleep mode or remote start — and writing them on your Cheat-Sheet together.
- **Choosing and testing** a signal-blocking pouch or a Bluetooth tracker for your keys (Chapter 19).
- **A second opinion** on a locksmith quote or a call that doesn't feel right (Chapter 24).
- **You'd simply rather have a patient person handle it.** That's always a good enough reason.

What I don't do

I'm not a locksmith or a mechanic. I don't cut or program key fobs, and I don't install remote-start systems. For those, a dealer or a reputable automotive locksmith is the right call (Chapter 23). I'm happy to help you compare quotes and handle the phone and app side afterward.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace — no rushing, no talking down, no jargon. I explain what I'm doing in plain words, and I'll always tell you honestly when something isn't worth the money. Home visits are here in Portage County, Ohio, and I'm glad to walk out to the driveway with you; remote help reaches you wherever you are. I've been doing this work for more than 30 years.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is free to read and share with family and neighbors.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may be greeted by Sophie

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might first meet **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. The actual help always comes from me.

Thank you for taking the time to get to know your keys. A little preparation on a calm day means far fewer surprises in a cold parking lot.

— Bill

CHAPTER 26

Your Car Keys Cheat-Sheet

Keep a copy of this at home with your spare key. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Remember	
Fob battery	Usually a coin cell such as a CR2032 or CR2025. Check the manual or the old battery.
Dead fob: getting in	Slide out the hidden metal key. The keyhole may be under a cap on the door handle.
Dead fob: starting	Foot on the brake, hold the fob against the Start button or in the marked spot.
Both fobs dead at once	Probably the car's battery, not the fobs.
Remote start	Outdoors only. **Never** in a garage, even with the door open.
Phone as key	Always carry the backup fob or key card too.
Express Mode (iPhone)	Car key works without Face ID. Can be turned off in Wallet.
Lost phone	Find My: Mark As Lost. Android: Find Hub. Then remove the key in the car maker's app.
Relay theft	Fobs away from doors, in a tested signal-blocking pouch, or in sleep mode.
Lost key	Use the spare; get written quotes from the dealer and a locksmith; remove the lost key.
Locksmith	Pick one now. Beware very low phone quotes and cash-only demands.
Swallowed battery	ER right away. Hotline 800-498-8666.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Car (year, make, model)	_____
VIN	_____
License plate	_____
Number of fobs / key cards	_____ / _____
Where the spare is kept	_____
Fob battery type	_____
Dead-fob start steps (from the manual)	_____
Remote-start button pattern	_____
Fob sleep-mode steps, if any	_____
Car maker's app and account email	_____
Who has a shared digital key	_____
Roadside assistance number	_____
Auto insurer and policy number	_____
Dealer service desk	_____
Trusted locksmith	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Fob works only up close: replace its battery (Chapter 5).
2. Fob does nothing: get in with the hidden key (Chapter 6), then start with the fob against the Start button (Chapter 7).
3. Both fobs dead and the dashboard is dark: it's the car battery — call roadside assistance (Chapter 8).
4. Remote start won't work: check you're in range, the doors are closed and locked, and the hood is shut (Chapter 9).
5. Phone key won't work: turn Bluetooth on, charge the phone, use the backup fob or card (Chapter 13 to Chapter 15).
6. Lost your phone: mark it lost and remove the car key (Chapter 17).
7. Car missing: call the police with the plate and VIN, then your insurer (Chapter 21).

8. Lost your key: check the tracker, use the spare, get written quotes (Chapter 22 and Chapter 23).
9. Still stuck: call Bill at **(330) 200-8042**.