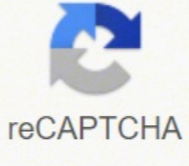




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How to choose a portable generator for home use

Whether you're preparing for emergency power, looking to run a job site, or have recreational use in mind, there's a lot to consider when buying a portable generator. To help you sort it out among the plethora of options out there, we've put together a list of things our Pro team looks for when they're in the market for a new one. Buying a Portable Generator? Here's What to Look For! Power and Outlets When choosing the best generator for your needs, the first thing you need to know is what size generator you want to buy. That means you need to understand how much power you need. Your refrigerator may only need 700 watts to run, but what happens when it needs 2100 watts of startup power? Pay attention to the startup watts required to run the equipment you intend to connect to the generator as well as the "running watts" you require once everything is going. The other side of the conversation is what type of outlets you need. Smaller inverter generators will usually have a couple of 120V AC outlets and maybe a couple of USB ports. Once you get up to 4000 watts, you'll start seeing 240V plugs show up along with more 120V outlets. If you're thinking about having an electrician wire your generator directly into your panel, you'll need a 240V plug. Since you're using your generator outside, look for one that has GFCI protected outlets. If you expect to run electronic equipment such as laptops or lab equipment, the waveform is significant. In general, you need a total harmonic distortion of less than 6% to avoid damaging electrical circuits. Often referred to as "clean power" or "pure sine wave", it's a more stable and predictable level of voltage. Pure sine wave generators tend to be more expensive and are found on lower-watt units. By the way, battery inverters are not all low THD models. Some put out square waves. Check the specs if you know you need clean power. Occasional or Consistent Use? Most generators include a consumer warranty covering you for several years. For emergency power or recreational use, any reputable brand is going to work. However, if you're running a crew that needs a generator just about every day, you're going to be better off looking for a model with a legitimate commercial engine. Not only will it be a better fit, but you'll also likely get a warranty that lasts for more than a year instead of just 90 days or 6 months. The obvious downside is that these are typically more expensive. Fuel Type Gas generators are by far the most common. Fuel is easy to come by except during the panic leading up to and the days following major hurricane preparation. Pro Tip: Whether you're storing fuel in the tank or fuel containers, be sure to use fuel stabilizer to negate the effects of ethanol. Diesel generators give you better fuel efficiency if you're willing to pay for the upgrade. You also get to lose the carburetor that always seems to be clogged at the least convenient time. If you're thinking about a whole-house generator, you'll be looking at diesel. Just keep in mind that diesel may not be as easy to find as gasoline. Another option is to look for a propane generator or a gas generator that can be converted to propane use. If you want to go for a more environmentally-friendly fuel source and don't mind that it's a bit more complex, it's another way to go. Battery-powered inverters like the EGO Nexus Power Station and the Ryobi Power Station have the advantage of being able to recharge via solar panels, run silently, and have no emissions. The downside is that they're expensive, recharge very slowly, and typically won't give you more than 2000 watts or so. Outside of camping and tailgating, they're not a very practical option currently. The bigger the fuel tank, the longer you can go between refueling. That's a given. Most generators have a fuel tank that will give you 7 - 9 hours of runtime at a 50% load. You'll run longer if you use a lower percentage of the available power and shorter if you use more. Given the choice between a smaller and larger tank, I'll go larger. Just keep in mind it will be heavier with a full tank of fuel. There are also plastic and gas fuel tanks. There are pros and cons of both and we have both types. Generally, I like plastic since there aren't corrosion issues with it (thanks again, ethanol). However, it's not a make-or-break feature for me. Startling! You really like pulling a recoil cord on an engine, by all means, skip the electric start. Seriously, though, electric start engines are fantastic if you can swing the extra cost. When you're buying a portable generator, you'll find most still use lead-acid batteries like a car. There are some lithium-ion ones running around, though. Be sure to charge your battery up before use. Most generators will be fine leaving the charger plugged in to maintain the charge between uses. Noise Level Smaller generators have the option of a quiet design. Some are quieter than normal conversation levels. If you're tailgating or camping in an area that allows generators, your neighbors will appreciate the consideration. By the time you move into the 4000-watt class and higher, there isn't much available in the "quiet" class. One consideration boils down to fuel source. Diesel typically makes more noise than a comparable gas model. EFI Electronic Fuel Injection (EFI) is a great feature to have. It eliminates the need for a carburetor. Clogged carburetors are one of the biggest headaches for most who stay up on maintenance as well as they should. There are still plenty of things that can go wrong without maintenance, of course, but a clogged carburetor isn't one of them. Additionally, your generator will be easier to start up in cold weather. Several manufacturers include carbon monoxide (CO) detectors in their generators. Honda announced an initiative to bring it to their entire lineup. These simply measure the level of carbon monoxide near the engine and shut it down if levels get too high. They typically work faster than the ones you can install in your home and do a better job of preventing illness or death due to CO. Some consider these "nuisance" components, however, the industry seems to have indicated a shift towards including this with most newer models. Realize that CO detectors can be tricked. Make sure you point the generator exhaust downwind from the sensor and don't place it in a corner to avoid false readings. Wheel Kit Generators are heavy, but not all come with a wheel kit. Some require you to purchase it separately, so make sure you know before swiping your credit card at the register! You can find generators with dual wheels or even four. You can also purchase aftermarket generator dolly kits to add wheels to a model that doesn't have them. We found it fairly simple to install wheel kits with basic tools. You can put a set of wheels on a generator in just a few minutes. You may want a friend to help you out or you can set the generator on the edge of your truck's tailgate to give you access to the installation area. Lift Hook Bar If you're buying a portable generator for commercial or industrial work, there's a good chance you'll need to lift it to a higher floor at some point. A generator that includes a lift hook bar gives you a big advantage that can save you time and trouble. Having a direct connection from your generator to your home is a very convenient way to have emergency power. The best way to go is with a whole-house standby generator specifically designed for that purpose. These whole-home generators kick on or off automatically with the power. They're more expensive than portable generators, of course, but they've become more affordable recently. You can also connect many portable generators to your home. However, neither they nor whole-house generators are a DIY job. You'll need to install a transfer switch and have the work done by a qualified electrician. There are other considerations as well. Number one is making sure the generator you choose has enough power. If you don't have enough power to run the entire house plus startup surge, you may need to flip some breakers to prioritize. If you're going with a portable generator, you need to make sure you know where it's going to sit while it's running and that you have a long enough cable to reach your transfer switch. Need more specific suggestions on buying a portable generator? Check out some of our favorite generators! Now that buying a portable generator can be checked off your list, be sure you also know how to maintain your generator so it's ready to work when you need it! Photo Courtesy: skynesher/Getty Images If you're overwhelmed with how to start choosing a mover, you've come to the right place. From where to start looking to what questions to ask, we'll go over everything you need to know about hiring movers. So, let's get the moving process started so you can kick off life in your new place without a ton of added stress. Where to Start Looking for Home Movers When you're getting ready to move, the very thought of looking for movers can be stressful. A good place to start is by asking your friends and family for referrals. If you know of a friend who just moved, ask them how they liked their service and who they used. Your realtor can also give you recommendations for a moving company. Once you have a couple of options, check out their websites and read online reviews. Photo Courtesy: Tomml/Getty Images Taking the time to read reviews from other customers will save you a lot of hassle later. Reviews from real people will give you insight into how these movers conduct themselves and more. Once you've narrowed down your list, you can start to give them a call or fill out information forms online. In most cases, movers will ask you a few basic questions about where you're moving to and the size of your home. Important Questions to Ask When you're interviewing movers, there are a few key questions to keep in mind. To start, you'll want to get a quote or estimate for your move. At this point, they will likely give you a time estimate as well as how many movers they'll be bringing. It's also helpful to know if they take credit cards or cash so you'll have a payment with you on moving day. If you feel they aren't bringing enough movers with them, ask for more. Having three or even four movers will help the process go a lot smoother. You may pay more for the extra set of hands, but this will save you time and money later on during the move. Photo Courtesy: zoranm/Getty Images If a moving company gives you a time estimate, you'll want to ask what happens if they go over. If you'll be paying by the hour for additional time, you'll want to budget for this. Some movers may also charge extra for supplies and distance. Ask your movers if they will provide wrapping and packing supplies or if you'll need to do this ahead of time. Ask the moving company if they'll be giving you wraps and blankets for televisions and other precious cargo. Some movers will assemble and disassemble furniture while others don't. If you aren't comfortable doing this yourself, make sure to confirm this is a service they offer. With the real estate market busier than ever, it's important to lock down your movers as soon as you can to avoid a last-minute scramble. Moving Prep to Save Money and Time Before your move, there are a few things you can do to speed up the process. The most important thing is to have everything packed and organized before the movers arrive. If there's anything loose or unpacked, the movers will need to pack this for you or leave it behind. This will slow things down considerably. Make sure you're getting the most use of their time by having the movers help with the heavy lifting you can't do alone. If you're doing a local move, it's also helpful to take small trips yourself before the movers arrive. Loose or fragile items that are easy for you to carry will be good to get out ahead of time. Things such as lamps and pictures are lightweight and easy to put in your car. This will save time wrapping and also help to make sure they don't get damaged in the move. Photo Courtesy: AleksandarNakic/Getty Images Houseplants, artwork, and cleaning supplies are also handy to move beforehand. Keep your cleaning supplies within reach so you can do some clean-up after the move is over. It's also helpful to keep a couple of bags and boxes with essentials labeled. Pack a night's worth of clothes for everyone in your family along with medications, toiletries, and snacks so you won't have to go digging through boxes for important items. If you have a pet, you'll also want to prepare them for the big day. Ask your movers if they are comfortable with pets in the house during your move. It may be easier to leave the family pet with a friend or family member for everyone's safety on move day. Keep their food, water bowls, and other supplies close by for the first night in your new place. Ask About Additional Services Before you hire your movers, you may also want to ask what additional services they offer. Some movers provide packing and unpacking help at an additional cost. If this is a service you'll need, use their help as much as you can. Some movers also specialize in moving large and fragile items such as pianos. Make sure your movers are equipped to handle any precious cargo you may have. Other moving services often include off-site storage, overnight truck usage, reusable storage crates, and packing materials. If you think you'll need a few extra boxes on moving day, ask how they charge for any materials you use. Photo Courtesy: SDI Productions/Getty Images If you have carpeting or floors you're worried about damaging, ask the moving company about their policies. Some movers come prepared with protective wrap or tarps for the floors. If this isn't provided, you can do this yourself before moving day to save time. Many movers also provide protective wrapping for loose or soft items. You can also purchase this yourself to help make the process go smoother. The more you have wrapped and ready ahead of time, the faster the move will go. Get Ready for Move Day Before your moving day, it's also helpful to cover the logistics. Depending on where you live, you may need to reserve an elevator or find a parking space. Speak with your movers about where they can park their trucks and where they can load and unload. Photo Courtesy: sturti/Getty Images Moving day is an exciting time. Whether you're moving down the block or across the country, remember these easy tips to help ensure your move goes quickly and smoothly. MORE FROM ASKMONEY.COM

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