

Generator Buying Guide for Caribbean Homes

Sizes, fuel types, safety, and what an electrician wants you to know.

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When the power goes out for days, a generator is the difference between roughing it and living normally. Here is how to buy the right one.

Sizing

What size do you need?

Generators are sized in watts. Bigger number, more stuff it can run at once. Match the size to what you actually need:

- Small (2,000–3,000 watts): runs a fridge, a few lights, phone chargers, and a fan. Good for a small apartment. This is enough for most people.
- Medium (5,000–7,500 watts): adds a window AC unit or two, a TV, and a washing machine (one big thing at a time). Good for a family house.
- Large (10,000+ watts): can run central air and almost the whole house. Costs a lot more and drinks a lot more fuel.

Tip: add up the watts of what you must run. Fridge (700), lights (300), fans (200), phone chargers (50). Most families land in the small-to-medium range. Bigger is not better — it just burns more fuel.

Fuel

Gas, diesel, or propane?

- Gas (petrol): cheapest to buy, fuel is easy to find. Downside: gas goes bad in a few months, so you cannot store it long. Most home generators are gas.
- Diesel: costs more up front, but the engine lasts longer and sips fuel. Good if you expect long outages. Diesel stores better than gas.
- Propane: cleanest and the fuel never goes bad — a tank can sit for years. Downside: less power per tank, and refills can be harder to find on small islands.

For most Caribbean homes: a gas generator is the simple, affordable pick. If outages hit you every season, diesel earns its price.

Safety

Safety: read this twice

- NEVER run a generator inside the house, garage, or near open windows. The exhaust has carbon monoxide — a gas you cannot see or smell that can kill in minutes.
- Keep it at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointing away.
- Let it cool before refueling. Hot engine plus spilled gas equals fire.
- Use heavy-duty outdoor extension cords. Thin indoor cords can melt.
- Never plug a generator straight into a wall outlet ("backfeeding"). It can kill the line workers fixing the power. An electrician can install a proper transfer switch — see below.

Installation

What an electrician wants you to know

- A transfer switch is the right way to connect a generator to your house wiring. It keeps generator power and grid power separate. It costs money up front but it is the safe, legal way.
- Without a transfer switch, run extension cords directly from the generator to each appliance. Never into a wall socket.
- Have an electrician check your panel once a season if you use a generator often. Loose connections plus heavy load equals trouble.
- Ask about a whole-house surge protector too. When grid power comes back, the surge can fry electronics.

Maintenance

Taking care of it

- Run it for 20 minutes every month, even with no storm. Engines that sit too long do not start when you need them.
- Change the oil after the first 25 hours of use, then per the manual. Keep spare oil and a spare spark plug on hand.

- Store fuel safely: in approved cans, away from the house, out of the sun. Add fuel stabilizer if the manual says so.
- Keep it covered but ventilated. Rain on a running generator is bad; a tarp trapping heat is also bad. A simple open-sided shelter is ideal.

Bottom line: buy the smallest generator that covers your must-haves, run it outside and far from windows, and have an electrician set up the connection right. Do that and the next outage is an inconvenience, not a crisis.

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