10 Questions To Ask Before Buying A Generator

Many Americans have to deal with the lack of electricity and various restrictions that come along.

In fact, when faced with a disaster, some folks will wait until the last minute to buy one for their household.

As we have seen in recent weeks, most of them think that power will not go out for extended periods of time, and boy they wrong! Even those that changed their mind and bought a generator made the mistake of assuming that everything will do for their needs.

Since the market is flooded with all sorts of generators, it seems that these are nowhere to be found when disaster strikes. How you ever wondered why is that happening? According to retail stores, most folks buy a generator for their home when a disaster is forecasted, not because they don’t have one already, but because they have the wrong type for their needs.

Choosing the proper generator for your home is not as easy as it may seem, and it requires a little bit of research and knowledge. I will share the questions I’ve asked and the info I gathered when buying my first generator, and I hope these suggestions will help you make the right choice.

To make sure you pick the proper generator for your home, figure out the answer to the following questions:

What size generator do you require?

To provide the proper answer to this question, you first need to figure out what appliances you will need to operate during a crisis. The problem here is making a clear distinction between need and want since these two categories can be confusing for some. There are those that would rather power all their devices to pass the time and cope with the effects of a crisis. The point here is that you can live without all the devices you own, and you need to concentrate your efforts on the basics such as heating.

Once you make a list with all the devices you NEED to power, you have to calculate how many watts it takes to run each piece of equipment. By adding up the wattage requirements for every device you will figure out what size your generator should be.

This can be done easily, and you need to pay attention to the requirements of each appliance. All of them have a silver tag on the back. Some labels will list the amp, such as 15A or 15 Amps. If that is the case you need to multiply that number by the voltage.

In the US, the voltage can vary between 110 and 120. A quick example, if you have a 110-volt service and an appliance that uses 11 amp, multiply 110 Volts by 11A. It will give you 1201 watts.

Keep in mind that if your appliance has a motor, you will need to multiply the watts by 3 to get the power needed to start and run that appliance. This brings us to the classification of appliances by loads:

- Reactive loads, such as AC, Blender, Circular saw, etc. These require three times the wattage to start
- Restive loads, such as light bulbs, TVs, electric burners, etc.

How to Choose A

GENERATOR

Do you need an inverter or a

generator?

If you settled on what type of appliances you need (and maybe want) to run and if you calculated successfully how many ways of power you will need, it is time to decide if you should pick an inverter or a generator.

In case you need to power devices to keep your kids entertained, or you want to play music on the stereo system for 2 or 3 hours, it is better if you go with an inverter/deep cycle battery system.

However, if your power needs are much bigger and you may require more than 1,000 watts to operate your appliances for more than 3 to 4 hours, you should definitely choose a generator.

What type of generator should I use for my computer?

This is a common question for most folks, and you should know that a computer requires a generator with a low harmonic distortion rating. Brushless generators are better suited for computers than brush generators.

Also, to be on the safe side, you should definitely buy a good surge protector. This should be installed in the line somewhere between the generator and your computer.

Do I need a portable or standby generator?

My answer to this question may vary from yours, and it all depends on the long-term survival plan you have. You may decide to bug-out, or you may decide to hunker down.

If you pick a standby generator, you should be aware that

these are usually permanently or semi-permanently mounted on a pad. A standby generator is designed to turn on automatically when the utility power goes off, and it supports the entire load.

If you pick a portable generator, you will need to start it manually every time the power goes down. On the other hand, you can move it from one location to another without problems.

What are the differences between gas and diesel generators?

To keep it simple, a diesel generator is much more expensive than gas generators due to having better fuel efficiency and longer engine life. One thing you may not like about diesel generators I that they smell, they make quite the noise, and they produce smoke. All these may not work in your favor if you're trying to keep a low profile.

Gasoline generators are the most commonly used ones, due to their size and cost-efficiency. In fact, most households in the US have one or two of these. Some people have a gasoline generator and propane one to make sure they don't run out of fuel.

How much fuel will my generator use?

This is a common-sense question, and the bigger the generator, the more fuel it will use. Even so, most manufacturers advertise the use of one gallon of fuel per hour (more or less). You will figure out if this is true or just marketing only after you've used the generator a couple of times.

How much will a new generator set me back?

The cost of a generator is influenced by many factors, but the size is usually the main criteria for setting the price, and of course, the type of fuel it uses (gasoline, diesel, or propane). I can tell you from experience that there are low-end models on the market that will produce the same amount of power as the high-end models. However, these low-end brands won't last as long, and they make a lot of noise.

A good generator will cost anywhere between a few hundred dollars to a few thousand. I recommend you don't cheap out here and pick a brand generator. The last thing you want is for your generator to fail you when you need it the most, just because you saved a couple of bucks. Consider this an investment and be wise about it.

When should I buy a generator?

The smart thing would be to buy one before SHTF if you don't want to buy it at a higher price. When a blizzard hits your town, people will rush to get one, and you will end up empty-handed or you may have to pay double the price to get one.

If you want to buy a generator for your home, you should make it an emergency preparedness task and treat it as such. You should check out various models and get the one that fits your budget. Also, you can take advantage of sales and make a wish list with the model you want.

What should I look for in a generator?

Here are some features that you should consider when buying a generator for your household:

- An overhead valve engine for longer life and quieter operation
- An auto-idle control to reduce noise level and fuel consumption
- A low oil shutdown feature to prevent engine damage.
- A large fuel tank. The larger the tank, the longer the power will last.
- A wheel kit. There are generators larger than 3,000 Watts that can weigh more than 100 pounds. If you need to move it around without breaking your back, a wheel kit is a must.

What other options do I have?

For some folks, fuel may become a concern in a time of crisis, and they will probably need to look into what alternatives are available.

Here are the main alternatives for the long run:

- **Solar Generators** – In the past, solar generators were used for small loads such as lights, small power tools, and computers. However, there are now companies manufacturing solar generators that can provide power for an entire household and even small army camps.
- **Biogas Generators** – These ingenious generators work by utilizing the waste from your home. They were initially designed to solve the garbage dump problems of third world countries. They become popular when certain countries from northern Europe scaled them to impressive sizes aiming to become zero-waste nations. You can even build a smaller scale one for your home, and there is a lot of information online about such DIY projects.
- **Wind Generators** – These generators are usually more expensive than their gasoline-powered counterparts. However, they don’t require any fuel, and you can even build them yourself if you have the right knowledge.

There are all sorts of DIY projects and books available on the internet, teaching you how to make your own.

- **Hydro Generators** – Just like the wind generators, the costs for these types of generators can rise pretty high if you want to power your entire home. However, as long as you have a running water source, you will be able to build one, and you won't have to worry about needing fuel ever again.

A last word

Selecting a good generator for your home may seem tricky at first, but with all the right info, it will become just another shopping trip that you need to make. If you settled on buying one don't wait until there's a pressing reason to do so. Make sure to get one in advance since it will save you the headache of the last minute shopping spree and competition.