

Protecting Your Home From the Outside

Walk around the exterior of your home and scout out its weaknesses. The best way to protect your home from the outside is to survey it with the eyes of a burglar. If you can easily tell that a window could be pried open, a thief will definitely be able to come to the same conclusion. You can even contact your local police department and they'll provide a courtesy home assessment that can help you identify your home's weak spots.

While you're checking for vulnerable spots, take note of any expensive electronics, art, or furniture that is easily spotted through windows. You don't have to redecorate your entire home to keep expensive items out of sight, but it doesn't hurt to make small adjustments where you can. No need to tempt thieves any more than you have to!

Keep shrubbery around entrances and walkways trimmed. The last thing you want is to make it easier for a thief to hide when attempting to break in, so eliminate his options for hiding spots. He may only need a few minutes of cover to make his entry but with no place to hide while doing it, he's less likely to even try. You could even plant thorny shrubs by your windows to make it not only difficult to break in, but painful!



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Build a fence. If you don't have one already, a fence can be an excellent way to keep unwanted visitors off your property. [Open chain-link or ornamental metal fencing tend to be preferable](#) and are ideally secured into concrete to prevent lifting. Solid fences can be easier to climb and offer thieves a place to hide, though some homeowners prefer them for privacy and noise reduction. You can better secure them by having sharp pointed tops or, if you don't mind rough [barbed wire fencing](#).

Stow expensive items like grills, cars, and bikes in the garage. Though it may seem like a hassle to roll out the grill for every barbecue, leaving it out makes it an easy target for thieves. They don't even have to enter your home to grab it, and if it's got wheels it can be a breeze to sneak away with. If your area only offers street parking, always lock your car and be sure to park in a well-lit area.

Use curtains on garage and basement windows. Chances are these areas don't need the sunlight, so [put up curtains or blinds for privacy and protection](#). Stowing your outdoor valuables only does so much good if they're constantly on display!

Install motion sensor lighting around your home, especially at entrances. Shine a spotlight on a potential intruder before he can even touch your doors or windows by adding extra lighting with motion detectors at entrances and especially dark corners of your home. If you live in an apartment, ask your landlord to install sufficient lighting in walkways and halls to eliminate dark corners.

Get to know your neighbors. Crime tends to be lower in tight-knit communities because [neighbors are more likely to look out for each other](#) and can easily spot a stranger. Your neighbors can be one of your best assets in home crime prevention because they offer extra eyes and an outside perspective. Plus if they have a different work or school schedule from yours, they might be around during the day when you're away and can alert you to any suspicious activity that may occur in your absence.

Keep your yard free of toys, tools, and ladders. A yard littered with toys signals to a thief that the house may be filled with equally interesting entertainment, like game consoles, tablets, or laptops. A ladder or toolbox left out even briefly for an afternoon can give an opportunistic thief help in gaining access to your house.

Talk to your neighborhood association about increased lighting on your street. Burglars often case an entire street or neighborhood to determine if it's a good target, but often prefer to do so in the dark of night. A well-lit neighborhood will likely deter him from your area, or at the very least make it very difficult for him to slip away undetected.



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Prune trees around two-story homes. A determined crook may scale a tree and break into an upstairs window if branches are long enough to give him access. If you have a second floor, [trim back tree branches](#) to prevent a cat burglar from making his move.

Consider forming a neighborhood watch program. This will [give you the opportunity to get to know your neighbors better](#), and create an invaluable awareness and commitment to crime prevention in your area. You can speak to your local police department about giving your group an informal lecture that can provide insight into identifying a suspicious person and what to do if you spot one loitering on your street, how to recognize a burglary in progress, how to recognize an auto theft in progress, and what to do in an emergency. Local PD will also usually distribute free literature on home safety and sometimes even offer window stickers and ID cards identifying your neighborhood organization.

Work with your neighbors to clean up the neighborhood if needed. A run-down, graffiti-lined, littered street can [send the message to criminals that the residents of your area don't care](#) about the neighborhood or each other. That makes a prime location for theft. You can contact your local public works department to assist in the clean-up. It can be an excellent chance to bond with your neighbors, not to mention make your area a more beautiful place to live.

Keep fences, gates, and garage doors locked. It's worth investing in a quality padlock for each outside entrance, even if you only lock it at night. However, since most friends and family won't mind calling ahead to let you know they're visiting, it's best to leave them locked at all times. Never leave your garage door open if you aren't in it or outside and able to keep an eye on it.

Install large, reflective numbers on your house and mailbox. This makes it easier for police to identify your home in the event of an emergency. Burglars prefer dark houses difficult to identify by address as it can buy them crucial spare moments in the event they're caught in the act.

Secure your car. If you must park on the street, do so in a well-lit area and bring valuables like cell phones, purses, GPS devices, and satellite radios inside. Never leave anything of value in plain view, and always lock the doors and roll up windows. Break-ins can occur in even the safest neighborhoods, and an unlocked car is one of the easiest possible targets. Never leave a spare key in the visor or anywhere else inside, even if the car is locked.



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Protecting Your Home from the Inside

Keep all doors and windows closed and locked at all times. An open exterior window or door is an invitation for burglars to easily enter your home, so keep them shut and securely locked whether you're home or not. Don't underestimate strong window locks, and update them if needed. Thieves know how to spot weak locks that would be easily forced open. Make sure exterior doors have deadbolt locks. Sliding doors should have vertical bolts and a metal or wooden rod in the track to prevent being forced open or doors being lifted off the track. Never leave your home without locking the front door, no matter how brief your trip. Even if it's pouring rain, don't forget to take the extra moment to lock up. Burglars don't take days off due to weather!

And don't forget the door attached to the garage. It's one of the easiest targets and a likely route of entry. Don't depend on your automatic garage door for full security.

Change the locks when moving into a new place. If you're a renter, [ask the landlord to change them](#) if it wasn't already done. Even if an old tenant returned all the keys originally issued, there's no way to know for sure if there were ever other copies made and distributed. It's better to be safe than sorry, especially when it comes to a stranger being able to walk into your locked home.

Secure valuables in a home safe or lockbox. If it is small and not mounted, consider having your safe bolted to the floor since [many burglars will simply take it with them](#). Give your pass code or combination only to a trusted loved one in case of emergency. Don't leave it posted anywhere in your house easily accessible to an intruder.

Don't label your personal keys or or hide spares outside. If your keys are labeled and get lost or stolen you could be in big trouble, especially if your wallet with your ID and address are with them. And thieves [know to look under mats and in the gravel for fake rocks](#) to find hidden keys, so instead leave a spare with a trusted neighbor. If you live in a rural area and your closest neighbor is miles down the road, opt for a combination lockbox in a discreet area of your property.



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Add privacy film to decorative glass on and around exterior doors. Stained and decorative glass displays can be a beautiful addition to any entrance, but they can present a bit of a security issue. [Line them with privacy film](#) to distort the view from the outside and reduce the chances of window shopping or alerting an unwanted visitor to your presence (or lack thereof). This can be especially beneficial for anyone who lives alone or in a house with children old enough to be left on their own.

Consider buying a home security system. There are countless features with any security system, and some particularly valuable ones are outdoor motion detectors, sensors at exterior doors, windows, and the door attached to the garage, an outdoor alarm to alert other neighbors to an intrusion, and security cameras. Select the features that best fit your needs and be sure to go with a well-known, reputable company. Once it's installed, make it a regular habit to use it. Though it may seem inconvenient to have to arm the system every time you leave the house, many burglars are aware that the responsibility is often neglected and may not be deterred by window stickers or yard signs warning of home protection.

Do your best to learn and inform your family about the security system to cut down on false alarms. They can actually [bring on expensive fines](#) not to mention annoy your neighbors. Plus, you don't want to have a boy-who-cried-wolf effect where your neighbors eventually learn to ignore your alarm anytime it goes off!

Reinforce windows with safety glass or metal bars. It may seem an extreme step, but burglars will often break a small window in order to gain entry. Make it impossible for them to break through by [installing safety glass or impossible to squeeze through by installing metal bars](#). There are plenty of decorative options for metal grilles that can make the adjustment both practical and aesthetically-pleasing.

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Protecting Your Home While You're on Vacation

Double- and triple-check all doors and windows before you leave. Make sure your house is as locked-up and secure as it can be in your absence. (Don't forget the door leading to the garage!) Be sure to leave some curtains and blinds open to give the illusion that someone is around. Thieves tend to take note of a house that's clearly been closed up.

Talk to a trusted neighbor about helping create a “lived-in” look. Have them [use your outdoor trash cans](#) and collect your mail, newspapers, and any delivered packages. Stacked up mail and newspapers along with empty trash cans can be a clear sign to anyone that you’re not home and may be gone a while. If you’re taking a winter getaway, ask your neighbor to create tire tracks in your driveway and leave footprints leading up to your front door to create the illusion that someone is home. If you’re taking an extended summer vacation, pay someone to cut your grass and keep the yard tidy.

Don’t forget to give your spare key directly to your neighbor rather than leaving it under the mat or in a faux rock or statue. It’s important to leave a key in case of emergencies, but it’s also helpful to have someone check in on your home periodically to ensure no one has entered in your absence. Make sure you leave a contact number where you can be reached while you’re away. And always return the favor to a neighbor in need!

Put timers on lights. Select a few rooms in your house to remain lit to reduce the chances that any thief casing the neighborhood will notice that you’ve been gone. Have outdoor lights, especially around entrances, set to light up every evening. A bright house welcomes friendly guests, but a dark house welcomes undesirable visitors.

Lock your garage door and disconnect the automatic opener. This is an easy, but often forgotten step to keep your home safe while away. Garage doors seem like impenetrable forces so it’s easy to overlook additional steps in securing them. But if you’re going to be gone for a week and won’t need the automatic lift anyway, why not disconnect it and add an easy extra layer of security?

Leave a radio on and turn down your doorbell. A battery-operated radio is a practical, cheap way to make it sound like someone is around. And since [many burglars ring the doorbell or knock to see if anyone’s home](#) turning down the sound of the doorbell combined with a loud radio will make thieves unsure if the house is empty or if the resident simply doesn’t hear the door.

Don’t advertise your trip. It’s pretty common for people to post all about their upcoming trip on social media, but avoid the urge. The more people who know your house will be empty, the more you open yourself up to the possibility of a break-in. Similarly, don’t leave a message on your landline answering machine that you’re out of town.