

22 Home Security Tips

Tip #1 Make your home security system like an onion, not an egg. Layers upon layers are not only the best deterrent, but the best defense against break ins.

Reason: It is easy for a criminal to bypass a single line of defense. Multiple layers not only slow him, but serve as a means to alert you or your neighbors that someone is trying to break in. Doing these "layered walk-aways" makes it more difficult for a criminal to meet his criteria of quick and unobserved entry. If, like the tip of an iceberg, enough of these deterrents are visible, most of the time the would-be intruder will simply choose not to even try. If he does try, then the layers he did not see will impede him.

A good example of a layered defense is rosebushes outside the window, double-locked, barred and safety coated side windows and something difficult to climb over inside under the window.

Tip #2 Pretend to be a burglar

Walk around your property and ask yourself: How would I break in? Examine your house from the street, where are the blind spots? What are the most vulnerable areas and, therefore, likely to be attacked? Stand outside the windows and look in, make sure no valuables, like expensive electronics or artwork, are visible. If you can see your belongings doing this, so can criminals.

Reason: We don't tend to think of our homes in these terms. So spend just a few minutes doing this. Find where "blind spots" are (areas where a criminal can work without being seen or would be screened from view of a neighbor looking to see what that loud noise they just heard). Also look for "weaknesses" (easy access points) are (for example, sliding glass doors, doggy doors or louvered windows). These are the areas that will be "attacked" by the criminal. That is also where you must focus your defenses.

Tip #3 Consider the area that the lock sits in

A lock is not enough, you must also address the area around it. You need to extend your thinking about security measures to 18 and twenty four inches around the lock itself. That is the area you must protect.

Reason: A burglar doesn't care how much damage he causes getting in. The best locks in the world will do no good if he smashes the door in. A pinewood door frame will splinter and give way after a few savage kicks. The backdoor deadbolt can often be bypassed by just breaking a window and reaching through to unlock it. Windows can be broken and locks undone. Many locked gates can be opened by simply reaching around and over. A hasp-and-lock will swiftly yield to blows from a even a small sledgehammer.

Tip #4 As well as locking something, you must also protect the lock and its components

A common combination of cheap locks and small construction flaws, that we tend not to notice, often give criminals the "cracks" in security they need to break in.

Reason: Many home doorlocks can be quickly bypassed with a knife or screwdriver slid in the gap between door and frame. After that the criminal can easily work the tongue of most cheap locks out of the door frame. A thin kitchen knife slid between sash windows can "tap" a normal window lock open. Hasps and locks can be hammered or twisted off in a few blows, or simply cut off with bolt cutters. Many sliding windows and doors can simply be lifted out of place.

Door: Look at the gap between your door and your door frame from the inside - can you see the lock's tongue? All it takes is a flip of the criminal's wrist while holding a screwdriver while on the outside to break away the thin doorjamb molding and expose that same gap. From there, it is another simple wrist gesture to jimmy the tongue out of the faceplate. Total elapsed time for break-in, about 10 seconds -- with minimal noise.

On ALL outside exit doors, buy locks that have locking tongues. Test this by holding the door open and locking the knob. Then attempt to depress the tongue into the door with your finger. Better locks will have a secondary tongue that doesn't move. The best locks will have entire tongues that don't move.

Window: Put "window stops" on the first floor and basement window frames. These often functionally amount to secondary and tertiary locks. The best kind are those that go through a moveable frame and lock it into place. Something as simple as drilling a hole through both frames when the window is closed and placing a nail in the hole will lock the windows in place.

Other: Use hasps with protective shrouds. These make it harder for the criminal to hammer away the lock. If for some reason you have an outward swinging door, not only get the best lock possible, but place a safety plate (a small formed sheet of metal) over the tongue so it cannot be seen or easily manipulated

These slow down the criminal and make him work hard to get in. This entails him making more noise for longer periods of time, thereby increasing his chances of being detected.

Tip #5 Brace doorframes and put multiple locks on all outside doors

What he doesn't know **will** hurt him. With a little extra work, the bracing can be hidden behind the doorframe's internal molding and will not be noticeable from either inside or outside. For the burglar, this is like unexpectedly hitting an invisible wall.

Reason: The most common means of breaking into homes is simply by kicking in the door. Most doorframes are made of 1 inch pine which saves the contractor money. This makes them vulnerable to this basic assault. Multiple locks and bracing under the molding make this kind of entrance unlikely and will not destroy the beauty of your home.

Bracing: Take between a 2 and 3 foot piece of flat steel stripping (1/8 x 2 inches is good) and drill a staggered series of holes down its length. When you take the interior molding off the door -- in

most houses -- you will see the 1x6" (or 1x5") pine plank of the doorframe. That is nailed to the 2x4" studs of the wall. (You may or may not be able to see the studs because of drywall, but they are there). That thin 1 inch piece of cheap wood (it is usually pine) is all that was between your possessions and a burglar. A few savage kicks, and it usually breaks off in a 2- to -3 foot sliver and the door swings open.

Fast and more secure version: On the inside wall, where the molding was, position the steel strip so that all the lock strike plates are behind it and its edge is along the edge of the 1x6. Screw it into place with long screws -- leaving a few holes open. The staggered drill pattern should result in the screws seating into both the 1x6 and the 2x4 studs. Take the molding and shave or chisel out the thickness of the metal strip in the proper place. Replace the molding, using the remaining holes to tack it down over the strip. Putty and repaint.

Slower, better looking, but slightly less secure: This version looks slightly better, but requires some precision Dremel or chisel work. Instead of abutting the strip to the exact edge of the 1x6, seat it between 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch away from the edge. When carving your groove in the molding, leave the same sized tongue running down the doorside edge. This seats over and covers the steel, making it invisible. Repaint.

Strike plate: Just assume that they did it wrong -- and odds are you will be right. Using the same length of screws that you are using for the steel strip, remove the shorter screws that are in the door frame strike plate and replace them with the bigger screws. It is not uncommon for short screws of less than a half inch to be used (or come with the lock assembly), such short screws are easily ripped out after a few kicks. On the other hand an 1 1/2 or 2 inch set of screws that reach into the house's very framing is not going anywhere quickly -- no matter how hard you kick it.

Multiple locks: Deadbolts, rim locks and floor locks are your friends. All outside doors should have at least two separate locks.

Doors that are on the blind side of the house or homes in high-risk areas should have more. The deeper the tongue goes, the better.

Tip #6 Find alternatives to normal deadbolts in doors that have windows (or windowed frames)

Talk with a locksmith about what is available.

Reason: Most burglaries occur during the day when you are away at work. Unfortunately, many back doors are decorative and windowed. It is easy for a burglar to punch out a small window, reach in and unlock the door. Since they are off the street and out of view this is why most break-ins occur through the back and side doors.

A single-key deadbolt has a key on one side and a handle on the other. After punching out a window a burglar can reach in and, with ease, open the deadbolt then the doorknob - elapsed time five seconds. Placing a secondary lock (i.e., a floor lock) outside of the reach of the windows is recommended. If that is too much, a double-key deadbolt is recommended for non-primary access doors. This secures the door while you are not at home. If fire safety concerns you (and it should) at night put your keys in the deadbolt. This not only allows you immediate exit should a fire occur, but you will also always know where your keys are.

Tip #7 Treat inside garage doors the same as an outside door: multiple locks and bracing.

Even though it is inside your home, it must be able to withstand a full out assault. Often, the doors that access the house from the garage are hollow-core and have cheap locks (if they are locked at all) which is why break ins through garages are so common.

Reason: Criminals often cruise neighborhoods looking for open garage doors. Once an open garage door is found, they pull in, close the door, park their car and then start piling your possessions into it. Although they might still do it occasionally, criminals no longer need to cruise the neighborhood with a stolen garage door opener and pushing the button to see whose door will open, and

incredible number of people just leave the door wide open for them when "just running down to the store."

For criminals on foot, the side door of a garage is a prime target, as it is often easier and offering better ease of access/escape than a back door. This is why you must treat the door into your home from the garage like an outside door.

If the inner door is locked it is usually hollow core and with minimal locks. Realize that with the garage door closed the criminals can unleash a sustained full out assault against that inside door. Usually the door will give way. By bracing it and replacing hollow core doors with solid core ones, you significantly lessen the chances of that happening.

It should also be noted that many home invasion robberies come through open garage doors and these inner doors. More so than the front door.

Tip #8 Plant rosebushes or cactus in front of all vulnerable windows.

Thorny landscaping not only adds beauty to your home, but makes even getting close to such windows an unappealing prospect
Reason: The second most common way of breaking into homes is through rear or side windows. A thief can work on such windows with little chance of detection. Standing in the middle of a thorn bush to do it, however, is not a pleasant experience.

Tip #9 Look into safety-coating the most vulnerable windows. Safety coat is an adhesive plastic sheeting that makes breaking out windows difficult.

Reason: It's not going to be fun for him, standing in a rosebush only to discover that the window isn't easy to break either. Instead of a quick pop, he now has to stand there and repeatedly pound before he can even reach the lock. Wait until he discovers that the window has window stops as well.

If you can afford it, there are many quality windows that are not only good to keep inclement weather out, but provide serious burglar protection, as well.

Tip #10 Put a secondary lock that prevents the panel from being moved on all windows.

This is repeating what was mentioned earlier, but it is important enough to warrant such emphasis.

Reason: Put stops on the frame on all sash windows. This allows them to be opened, but only so far. On sliding windows and doors, the best type of lock is a pin that goes through both frame and sliding part. This prevents the window from being lifted out.

Tip #11 Get and close heavy drapes -- especially on rooms where there is expensive equipment.

Thin, sheer drapes --although attractive -- also allow burglars to look inside.

Reason: It is often amazing how often a home intruder will walk up and look through the windows of a home to see if there is anything worth stealing. Sheer curtains allow him to do this. He knows what he wants to steal before he even breaks in.

Getting into the habit of closing heavy drapes not only keep your home warmer in winter but lessen the chances of your home being targeted by a burglar. Without this ability to see into the home, there are less guaranteed results for him, which helps to serve as a deterrent.

Tip #12 In really bad neighborhoods, get safety bars on the windows.

In so-so neighborhoods, you might want to consider putting them on side windows -- especially ones that are perfect break-in spots. Reason: When it comes down it windows are always breakable. A set of regular bars on high risk, non-bedroom windows are not likely to destroy the looks or value of your home. And the added security is well worth it.

On bedroom windows, it is advisable to spend the extra money and get the releasable bars that can be jettisoned in case of fire.

Tip #13 Make sure sliding glass doors and windows are installed correctly.

Not everyone in the construction industry is a rocket scientist. And their incompetence and laziness can cost you plenty.

Reason: An estimated one quarter of all sliding glass doors and windows are installed backwards (so the sliding part is on the outside track). This allows the criminal to simply lift out the panel and enter

Tip #14 If you use a pole in the track to secure sliding doors and windows make sure it is the right length.

It should be within a ¼ - inch of the track's length.

Reason: If the pole is not long enough to keep the criminal from slipping his fingers in, it is of no use. Staple or tape a piece of string to the pole to make it easy to pull out when it is in the track. Better yet get a "track stop" or "track lock" that you can put in the tracks. They are far better than the "poor man's version" of a dowel. Better yet get sliding window/door bar (jamb bar).

Tip #15 Install motion detectors in areas where no one should be. This way, you know something isn't right when they go off.

Reason: Most people put safety lights where they do the least good. While they illuminate your approach as you pull into your driveway, such lights are often hard to see if you are indoors. Put them along the side of the house or back, so that someone lurking there sets them off.

Position them so you can see when they go on. The lights are adjustable, so even if you have a blind wall you can turn the lights so they will both illuminate an area and attract your attention. Put them high enough so that they cannot be knocked out of service by someone jumping.

Look into low voltage and/or solar powered outdoor lighting. This kind of lighting illuminates your property at very little cost.

Tip #16 Get a dog.

A barking dog, whether inside the house or in the yard is proven as the best deterrent to burglars.

Reason: It doesn't have to be a 250 - pound Rottweiler named Spike, even a smaller yappy dog serves as an early warning system. Not only does the intruder risk a bite, but the barking attracts attention. And there is no such thing as a stranger intimidating a dog into silence.

We don't recommend dog doors. It is not uncommon for thieves to bring small children and send them through these and have the child open the main door. Also, since many burglars are, in fact, teenagers, it is also common for them to bring a younger child with them to do this. If you do have a dog door already, either a) put the dog out and lock the door during the day or b) make sure the access gates to your yard are locked. That way the criminals cannot simply walk by, open your gate to let the dog out and then return when the dog has wandered away.

The truth is a dog, even a small dog, inside a house is not something a burglar wants to deal with. Getting bit is not fun.

Tip #17 Create a neighborhood watch on your block.

Even just the signs often send would-be burglars elsewhere.

Reason: An alert and involved community is the criminal's nemesis. It is often reason enough for him to try business elsewhere.

Even if you can't create an organized program, get to know your neighbors, especially retired folks who are home all day. Let them know who belongs there and who doesn't. Have them watch your property and pick up your newspaper when you are on vacation. It is also a good idea to hire a trustworthy preteen/young teen neighbor to do such mundane jobs as mowing your lawn or taking out the trash. Such kids then have vested interests in your property

and they are home to watch your property when adults aren't. The kids like it because they get spending money and you get to watch TV on the weekend instead of doing lawn work.

Tip #18 Make sure the gates are locked if you have a fence.

This is especially important with accesses to the alley.

Reason: Each layer serves as a deterrent. The more layers and hard work the criminal has to do, the more likely he is to pass by your home. A locked fence is something he must climb over while carrying objects. If the gate is left unlocked, however, he can just walk right through it

Tip #19 Leave the stereo/TV on

An empty house "feels" empty. There is no vibration or noise inside that indicates someone's presence. Put the "vibes" in.

Reason: Although this is not a guaranteed deterrent, it can serve as a "bluff" to young, inexperienced prowlers. Even though they have "checked" to see if anyone is home (e.g. knock on the door), the unexpected noise, especially from the back or upstairs (any place they can't look into), indicates that they made a mistake on their primary recon. Maybe someone is home and just didn't hear the doorbell.

You might especially want to consider this strategy for vacations.

Close the drapes, turn the stereo/TV on in the room where the criminal is most likely to try to break in.

Tip #20 Etch your name on all electronic equipment

TV/stereo/computer and then tape it

Etching, in and of itself serves as a deterrent in case of a break in, failing that it greatly assists the police in the recovery of your property

Reason : Items with your name and address cannot be easily sold.

The reason for this is that anyone buying them is buying something that can easily be proven to be stolen property and they know it.

What protects most buyers of stolen goods is the fact that it is

difficult to prove something is stolen property. However, a name and address on an item combined with a police report is a fast way to end up in the county jail for possession of stolen property -- even if the person who has it bought it off the burglar. As such, why steal something that you a) can't sell, b) if you are caught with you're definitely going to jail for?

Although it is better to record serial numbers, a faster way to assist the police in recovery is to video tape every room and all the items in them. As you tape say what it is (for example Sanyo TV, Hitachi DVD player, etc.,) Title the tape something like "Family Reunion" or something you will remember and put it in your video collection. This way, if items are stolen you can give the tape to the police, video and the etching will identify your property when the police encounter it. Which quite often they do, being called to homes where stolen property is present, but without a means to identify it as such, they cannot prove it. Also send a duplicate copy to a relative.

Tip #21 Get a safe!

It's not just cash and jewels that need to go in there, but *your important paperwork*.

Reason: Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the US.

Although many people think burglars are going to go for jewelry, silverware or electronics, what most people don't realize is that the greatest damage to you will be *if the criminal gets access to your personal identification and financial records!!!* A criminal can clone your identity and steal everything you have, up to an including selling your property. Passports can sell for as much as a thousand dollars. And a passport and your checkbook...kiss all that money good-bye.

Make sure the safe is bolted through the floor and cannot be carried out. If you are in a situation where you cannot use such measures (such as an apartment) then invest in a large, heavy duty filing cabinet with locks. Do NOT leave the keys nearby!

Tip #22 On top of everything else, get an alarm system.

This is another layer of the onion. You can go anywhere from a basic system to incredibly high tech.

Reason: Now that you've made it slow and difficult for him to get inside, an alarm is far more effective since it gives the cavalry a chance to arrive in time. In addition, burglar, carbon monoxide and fire alarms do wonders to keep your home owner's insurance down.

Know however, that the bread and butter of most security companies is the service they sell you in support of the alarm system (calling the police, paging you if there is a problem or even sending their own guards). While shopping around is important, do your homework on security systems, providers and services first. And remember, you are investing for the long term. That is how you must think when investing in an alarm system.

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