

A guide to home security



Make it difficult for the burglar

Home security is the best way to reduce your chances of being burgled. A lot of burglaries are spur of the moment, carried out by opportunist thieves who don't even have to use force – they get in through an open door, window or other easy point of entry and take their chance.

The good news is that it doesn't take much to improve security and put off burglars. Spending money on security measures can seem daunting but it is a good investment, it will last a long time and can add value to your home.

Look at your home through a burglar's eyes:

- **If you think that your security looks poor, chances are so will a burglar.**
- **Are there places where they could break in without being seen?**
- **If you have forgotten your keys but can still get in, so can a burglar.**

Windows



If you are replacing windows, take the opportunity to install new ones that are certified to British Standard BS7950 'Windows of Enhanced Security' and consider using laminated glass, particularly in ground-floor and accessible windows, as this is much harder to break.

Otherwise, window locks that can easily be seen from outside may put some burglars off, because they would have to break the glass and risk attracting attention. And even if they do break the window, they still can't open it so risk cutting themselves climbing through the broken glass.

Home security and DIY shops sell inexpensive, key-operated locks to fit most kinds of windows. You may need more than one window lock, depending on the size of the opening you need to secure.

Fit window locks with keys to all downstairs windows and windows that are easy to reach – for example, those above a flat roof or near a drainpipe.

Even small windows such as skylights or bathroom fanlights need locks. A thief can get through any gap that is larger than a human head.

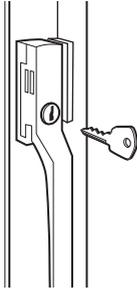
Remember to keep windows locked. Remove the keys and keep them out of sight in a safe place.

Louvre windows are especially vulnerable because burglars can easily take the slats out of the frame. Glue the slats into place, and fit a special louvre lock. Better still, replace them with fixed glass.

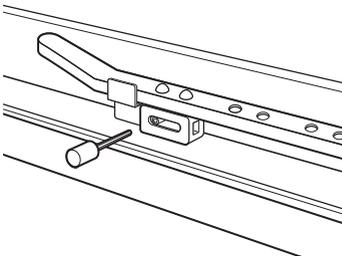


Before fitting locks to PVC-U or metal windows, talk to the installer to make sure this will not affect your warranty.

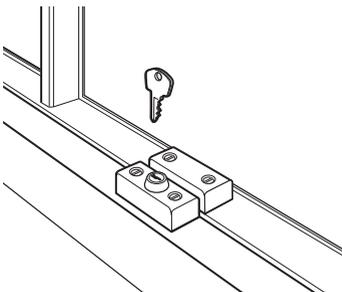
Consider fitting security grilles to vulnerable windows – but only if these windows are not escape routes in case of fire. Many DIY shops now sell decorative wrought-iron grilles.



Casement locks make it harder to open windows without the correct key.



Fanlight locks have a metal bolt to secure the metal arm, which is used to open and close the window. Ideally though, you should not rely on these locks – fit a casement lock too.



The lock shown here fastens the two windows together. A more discreet version is embedded into the wooden frame. Or there are devices to stop the window opening beyond a certain limit.

Doors



If your front and back doors are not secure, neither is your home. Keep them locked even when you're at home.

If you are replacing or fitting a new door set, make sure it is certified to British Standard PAS24-1: 1999 'Doors of Enhanced Security'.

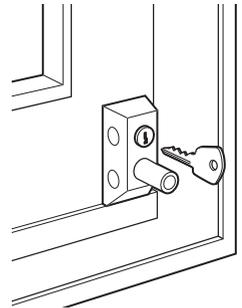
Ask for a door chain or bar and a 'spy hole' to be fitted to the door. The door chain or bar allows you to talk to the caller without opening the door fully, whereas the spy hole lets you see who is at the doorstep.

Make sure the doors and frames are strong and in good condition. Wooden doors should be solid and at least 44mm (1¾ inches) thick.

Fit five-lever mortise deadlocks (British Standard BS3621: 2004) plus a rim lock to all external doors, including French doors. They make it harder for a burglar to get out again. But don't leave the key near the door or in an obvious place.

Fit mortise bolts to the top and bottom of all external doors, including both sides of French doors.

Before fitting locks to PVC-U or metal doors, check with the installer to make sure that this will not affect your warranty.



Patio doors

Patio doors are especially vulnerable to break-in by levering off the tracks. When buying, ask for the sliding section to be on the inside and for anti-lift blocks. Multi-locking systems are recommended, or install mortise security bolts with removable keys at the top and bottom of both doors. Existing patio doors can be fitted with additional security bolts to stop lifting or forced entry.



① Spy hole or door viewer

If there is no window near the door which allows you to see who is at the doorstep, fit a spy hole. Look through it to identify callers before you decide to open the door.

② Hinges

Check that the door hinges are sturdy and secured with strong, long screws. For added security, fit hinge bolts. These are cheap and help to reinforce the hinge side of a door against force. Hinge bolts or security hinges are especially important if your door opens outwards.

③ Letterbox cage

Letterboxes should be at least 400mm (16 inches) away from any locks. Consider fitting a letterbox cage or restrictor which prevents burglars from putting their hands or gadgets through the letterbox and trying the latches from the inside.

④ Rim lock

This locks automatically when the door is closed. It can be opened without a key from the inside and should meet British Standard BS3621. For extra protection, you should consider installing the following.

⑤ Automatic deadlock

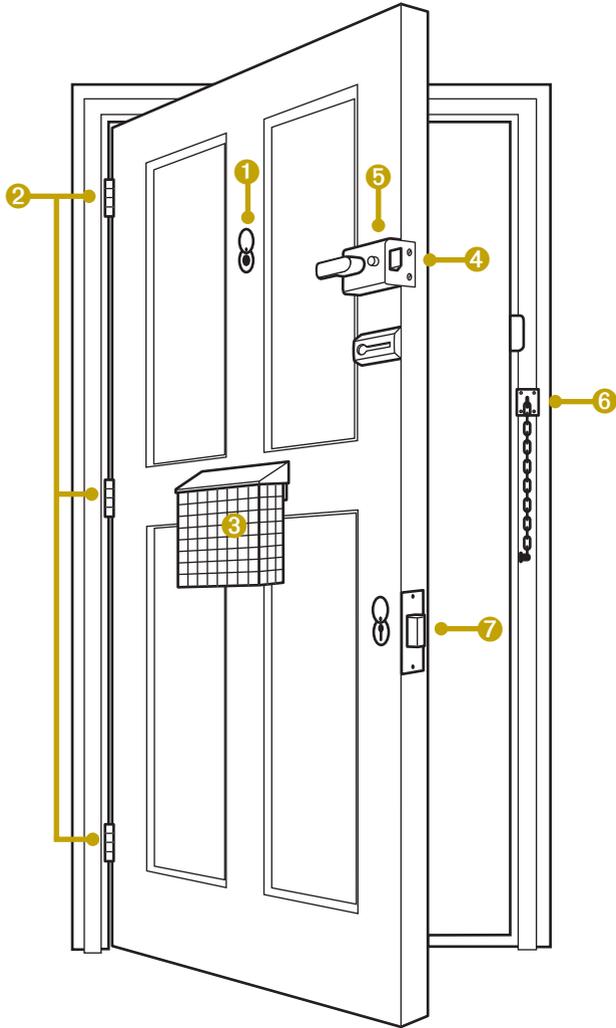
This locks automatically when the door is closed and is more secure than other types of rim lock. It needs a key to open it from both the inside and the outside and should meet British Standard BS3621. Ideally, both types of lock should be fitted to a door at roughly one-third spacing.

⑥ Door chains or bars

These allow the door to be opened a short distance to allow checking of identification. They can stop callers pushing their way in, but must be securely fixed to avoid screws being pulled out.

⑦ Mortise deadlock

Fit five-lever mortise deadlocks (British Standard BS3621) to all external doors, about a third of the way up the door.





Keys

Never leave a spare key in a convenient hiding place such as under the doormat, in a flowerpot or behind a loose brick – burglars know all the usual hiding places.

Never leave your house or car keys in or near a door or window. Some burglars have been known to use a fishing rod or magnet on a stick to steal them through the letterbox.

If you move into a new home, change the external door locks immediately – other people may have copies of the keys. Use a reputable locksmith who is a member of the Master Locksmiths Association.

Decide on a safe place for your keys and always use it, so you can find them in an emergency.

If you live in a flat or shared housing

Consider having a phone-entry system fitted to the main door to your building. Never 'buzz' open the main entrance for strangers or hold the door open for someone who is arriving as you are leaving or entering the building.

Doors to flats over a floor level of 4.5 metres (normally those on the second floor or higher) should have locking mechanisms fitted in line with British Standard BS5588-1: 1990 'Fire precautions in the design, construction and use of buildings'.

If you are a student, take high-value goods home with you during holidays or take advantage of secure storage schemes at your university or college.

In halls of residence, always lock your room door, even if you are just going down the corridor.



Distraction burglary

Most people who call at your home will be genuine, but sometimes someone may turn up unannounced, with the intention of tricking their way into your home.

If someone calls on you:

- **LOCK** – Keep your front and back doors locked, even when you are at home.
- **STOP** – Before you answer, stop and think if you are expecting anyone. Check that you have locked the back door and taken the key out. Look through a spy hole or window to see who it is.
- **CHAIN** – If you decide to open the door, put the chain or door bar on first, if you have one. Keep the bar or chain on while you are talking to the person on the doorstep.
- **CHECK** – Even if they have a pre-arranged appointment, check their identity card carefully. Close the door while you do this. If you are still unsure, look up a phone number in the phone book and ring to verify their identity. **Do not use a phone number on the identity card, as this may be fake!** Bogus callers may be smartly dressed and claim to be from the council, police or utility companies. They can also turn up as builders or gardeners and try to trick you into paying for unnecessary work. You should never agree to having work done by someone who is just passing by. If you think work needs to be done, get at least two quotes from trusted companies. **If you think a bogus caller has called on you, report it to the police immediately.**

If you have any doubts, **keep them out!**

Around the home



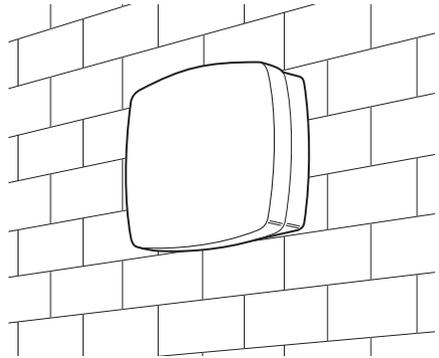
Outdoor lighting

Good outdoor lighting can put off or draw attention to a burglar.

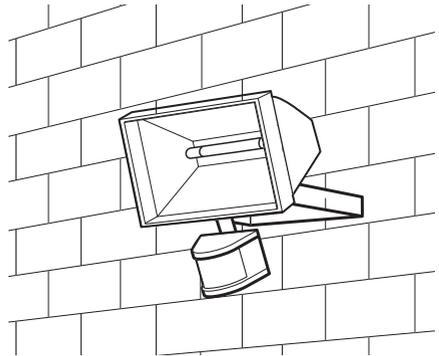
The most appropriate form of lighting to use is high-efficiency low-energy lighting, controlled by a dusk-to-dawn switch so that it comes on only when it's dark. This provides a constant and uniform level of light. It costs very little to run and helps to create a more reassuring environment.

Lights that are automatically turned on when a person passes by a motion sensor can be annoying to neighbours and dangerous to passing traffic. If you have these, make sure that they are directed downwards.

Fit outdoor lights out of easy reach – at a height of at least 2.5 metres (8 feet).



Dusk-to-dawn light



Movement-activated light

Make your home look occupied when you are out

Most burglaries happen when a house is empty. They are also more likely to happen in the evening or at night.

Don't leave your curtains closed during the daytime as this shows the house is empty.

Use automatic timer switches to turn lights on when it goes dark. They can also turn on radios and other appliances when you're out.

If you're going away:

- ask a trusted neighbour or a friend to look after your house (collecting mail, turning lights on, closing/opening curtains etc.);
- cancel any regular deliveries such as newspaper or milk;
- cut the lawn and trim back any plants that burglars could hide behind;
- do not put your home address on luggage labels when travelling to your destination;
- keep all valuable items out of sight;
- consider leaving important documents and valuable items with other family members or a bank, or lock them in a safe; and
- don't forget to lock all external doors and windows. If you have a burglar alarm, make sure it is set.



Gardens, gates and fences

Prevent intruders getting to the back and sides of your home by installing strong fencing or gates.

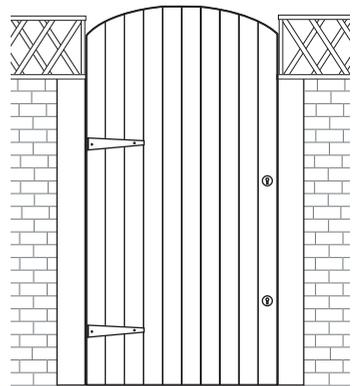
Check for weak spots where a burglar could get into your garden, for example a low or sagging fence, or a back gate with a weak lock.

A thorny hedge along the boundary of your property can put burglars off. But make sure that passers-by can still see the front of your home so that a burglar can't work without being seen. Burglars don't like gravel, it's noisy to walk on.

Don't build pergolas, gazebos and so on too near to the house – they can help thieves reach upper windows.

Solid fences or walls (particularly those with a flat or rounded top) are relatively easy for a burglar to climb over. Fixing trellising to the top can make it more difficult.

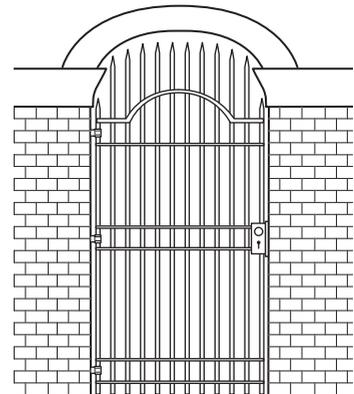
Do not use barbed or razor wire, or broken glass –you could be held legally responsible for any injuries caused. You can get safer alternatives that are designed not to cut or injure.



Passageways at the side and back of your home

Fit a strong, lockable, high gate across the passageway to stop a thief getting to the back of your home where they can work without being disturbed. If you share a passageway with a neighbour, ask their permission and for help with the costs.

However, if the passage is a right of way (for example, where it connects two streets rather than just allowing access to the back of a limited number of houses), you would need special permission to fit a gate from your local authority or the courts.





Garages and sheds

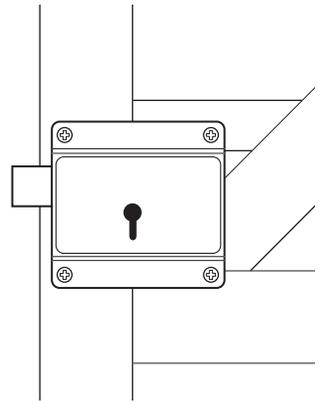
Garages and sheds are often full of expensive tools, which are ideal for breaking into the rest of the house.

Never leave a garage or garden shed unlocked, especially if it has a connecting door to the house. A burglar could get in and work on the door inside without being seen.

Fit strong padlocks to shed and garage doors, and make sure that the doors are solid enough not to be kicked in.

Lock ladders inside your garage or shed to stop a burglar using them to reach upstairs windows. If there is no room in your garage or shed, chain or padlock them horizontally to a sturdy bracket on an outside wall.

Consider having lockable steel boxes fitted to the floor to store your tools in, or anchor posts fitted to the floor to secure larger tools and equipment.





Burglar alarms

Many burglars will avoid breaking into a property with an alarm.

There are many alarm systems on the market. These range from fairly cheap alarms, which you can fit yourself, to more sophisticated systems, costing hundreds of pounds, which need to be installed by professionals. Low-cost alarms are less reliable and can, through false alarms, be a nuisance to both you and your neighbours.

Consider whether you need an audible-only alarm (which sets off a siren or bell) or a monitored alarm (connected to a central 'listening' service). Due to the huge number of false alarms, police will only respond to audible alarms if there is confirmation of suspicious activity – such as a neighbour saying they saw someone or heard glass being broken.

For monitored systems, the monitoring company will check whether any alarm was false – for example, set off by the homeowners entering the wrong access code – and call out the police if necessary.



Monitored systems are particularly important for isolated properties.

If you are thinking about installing a burglar alarm, you should do the following.

- Ask the crime prevention officer at your local police station for advice before you buy an alarm.
- Get at least three quotes and specialist advice from companies that supply alarms. Use companies registered with either the National Security Inspectorate or Security Systems and Alarm Inspection Board.
- Talk to your insurance company about the alarm companies it recommends before you decide which best suits your needs. The system should meet British Standard BS4737 or BS6799 (wire-free) or the new European Standard EN50131-1.
- Get professional help to install the alarm and to explain how to operate it correctly to make sure that it will work properly.

Remember, an alarm that is not fitted properly can create problems in itself. Don't fit an alarm yourself unless you have the electrical knowledge and practical skills to do so, it could end up costing you more.



Property marking

It is good practice to mark property, and ideally keep photographic and detailed records of valuables (i.e. the make, model and serial number). Keep these in a safe place.

Items should be visibly and permanently marked showing your postcode plus the number of your house or flat or the first two letters of its name.

Only use an ultraviolet marker pen when other methods would reduce the value of the object. The mark isn't visible and so this might not put burglars off. The marks can fade in months. It should therefore be used as part of a specialist product, such as chemical trace liquids or microdots painted on internal or hidden components.

Works of art, antiques and silverware should be photographed. You may consider keeping jewellery or watches in a safe.

New belongings

Don't leave empty boxes (of high-value goods such as a plasma TV or laptop) outside your home. They may attract burglars.

Never buy stolen goods, no matter how tempting the bargain.

Don't keep large sums of money at home, and don't keep a cheque book and cheque card together.

Keep documents containing personal details such as bank statements, passport, utility bills out of sight. These items enable criminals to steal your identity. If no longer needed, carefully dispose of or shred these documents.

Home security



Insurance

Insurance will take away the financial worry of replacing stolen goods.

Many insurance companies offer reduced premiums for people with good home security. But make sure you lock your home up properly and switch on any alarm – if you don't you may not be covered.

Ask your insurance company which security products it recommends.

Fire safety

When you are fitting security devices, you must consider the risk of fire and how you would escape.

Fit at least one smoke detector on every floor of your home. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and check them every month.

Agree a plan with your whole family for getting out in an emergency and make sure you know where your keys are at all times.

Be a good neighbour

If you see anyone acting suspiciously in your neighbourhood, call the police.

Join a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme – there are over 125,000 in this country. Anyone can start up a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme – ask at your local police station for details or look on the internet at www.neighbourhoodwatch.uk.com

More advice on preventing crime

Your local police station will be able to give you helpful advice on preventing crime. Some police forces will check your home or business premises and recommend ways of improving the security. This is a popular service and, if there is a waiting list, they may send you an information pack so you can check your property yourself.

You can get useful advice at:

<http://crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk> and www.homeoffice.gov.uk
or the police website www.securedbydesign.com

If you are burgled

Good security will reduce the chance of your home being burgled. But, in case the worst happens, think about how you would deal with the situation.

If you get home and notice the signs of a break-in:

- don't go in and shout as the burglar could still be inside;
- go to a neighbour's to call the police – if you think the burglar is still inside, let the police know; and
- don't touch anything, you could destroy valuable evidence.

If you are in the house and you hear a burglar, how you react will be a personal choice and might depend on the situation. *The law allows you to use reasonable force to protect yourself or others. Wherever possible, you should call the police.*

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Association of Chief Police Officers have issued a short leaflet called 'Householders and the use of force against intruders'. It is available on the CPS website at:

www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/intruder_leaflet2005.pdf

or from CPS Publicity Branch on 020 7796 8442.



Security checklist

Here's a quick reminder of some of the things you can do to improve the security around your home.

- If you are replacing new doors or windows, get ones that are certified to British Standard PAS24-1: 1999 (doors) and BS7950 (windows).
- Fit five-lever mortise deadlocks (British Standard BS3621) to all external doors, and locks to all downstairs windows and windows that are easy to reach.
- When buying a new patio door, ask for the sliding section to be on the inside and for anti-lift blocks. Existing patio doors can be fitted with additional security bolts to stop lifting or forced entry.
- Fit a burglar alarm, but make sure it is installed properly and works.
- Prevent easy access to the back and sides of your home by installing locked gates, fencing or walls at a minimum height of 2 metres. Trellis topping also makes climbing difficult.
- Security lighting should make offenders feel vulnerable and observed, should illuminate high-risk areas and allow occupiers to see persons approaching.
- Fit strong padlocks and hardware to shed and garage doors, making sure that the doors are solid enough not to be kicked in; fit locks or bars to windows, and keep tools secure and out of sight.
- Trim back any hedges or plants that a burglar could hide behind.
- Make sure you have up-to-date insurance.

When you are away:

- don't leave your curtains closed during the daytime;
- use timer switches to turn on some lights when it gets dark;
- cancel any milk or newspaper deliveries; and
- ask a neighbour to look after your home.

Produced by COI on behalf of the Home Office
July 2007 Ref: 282715

