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Five Things Burglars Don't Want You to Know

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While my husband and I were out visiting family one weekend, thieves broke into our home, took the pillowcases off our bed and filled them with our valuables. We didn't know this, of course, until hours after the burglars escaped, undetected, into the cool evening air.

Up until that point, I'd been naïve about home break-ins. I didn't think one could happen to me—and for good reason. The number of U.S. burglaries has declined over the past 10 years. Yet, in 2019 (the latest year where data is available), there were still more than 1.1 million committed, as reported by the [FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/burglary) (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/burglary>).

Although a [homeowners policy](https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/homeowners-insurance) (<https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/homeowners-insurance>) or [renters policy](https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/renters-insurance) (<https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/renters-insurance>) can help defray the costs of stolen goods, for many of us, a break-in is about more than just lost stuff. For weeks after our own, I felt violated, afraid and a little angry.

What's a homeowner to do? Turns out there are several simple steps you can take to help keep the bad guys at bay. Here's what you should know.

When Do Most Burglars Strike?

Most thefts are committed by careful burglars who plan crimes based on when they're least likely to get caught. That means they're sometimes walking the neighborhood, taking note of homes with:

- Dogs
- Security systems
- Long stretches of time with no one home

Burglars Strike During the Day

Burglars don't want to run into people. Doing so makes their job that much more difficult, which is probably why more than half of home break-ins occur [during the day](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-23) (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-23>), when most people are at work or at school.

Thieves are often “looking for signs that no one is there,” says Trooper Pascal DiJoseph from the Pennsylvania State Police. ‘They like the easy way. They don't want to make noise. They don't want to get caught.’”

Of course, we can't be home all the time. But that doesn't mean that we can't fool would-be burglars into thinking that we are.

Warmer Weather Welcomes More Burglar Activity

As temperatures rise, so do burglary rates. That's according to a research report released by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5028) (<https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5028>), which found substantial summer spikes in crime activity over a 17-year period. The combination of lengthier days and pleasant weather means people will spend more time away from home, creating greater opportunity for the neighborhood prowler.

The best defense may be to make it appear as if someone is home, even if you aren't. Read on to discover five easy-to-follow tips to fool would-be burglars.

Five Tips To Ward Off Burglars

1

Stopping One-Third of Break-Ins

Did you know locking your doors and windows can stop over one-third of all break-ins?

Many home burglaries are crimes of opportunity, according to Eric M. Gruss, a Monterey County, California-based police officer. "They'll try the front door, the side door, the back," says Gruss. Other common points of entry include a home's attached garage or its first-floor windows.

"People often don't double check to make sure their windows and doors are locked," explains Gruss. That's the kind of complacency thieves count on. In fact, about one in three burglars [enter the home when it is unlocked](https://www.consumersadvocate.org/home-security/home-burglary-stats-and-facts). (<https://www.consumersadvocate.org/home-security/home-burglary-stats-and-facts>)

Doors and Locks

Despite the high number of open-door-and-window break-ins,

most burglaries do involve some sort of forcible entry. Many locks—particularly those placed on secondary doors like those on back porches and garage doors—aren't strong enough to keep the people out. For best protection, all exterior doors should be solid—that means no windows—and kick-proof.

Also, “there should be deadbolts on all your doors,” advises Gruss. The most effective deadbolt locks will be installed with a box strike plate—an upgrade from the standard strike plate that rests on your door jamb. The strike plate is the weakest point of the door, making it a common entry for a door-kicking burglar. For added durability, install the box strike plate using three inch screws, instead of the standard one inch. While you're at it, protect your windows, too. Gruss suggests an auto-lock feature for those.

If you moved recently, make sure to [change all the locks](#) (<https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/moving-tips/>) and update any coded entry points. A previous owner could have left an extra key or pass code with a pet sitter, adult child or neighbor. In short, unless you change the locks, you don't know who has access to your home.

And what about [hiding your spare key](#) (<https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/hiding-spare-key/>)? “Never leave it on your property,” warns Gruss. “If you can think of a hiding spot, a bad guy can think of it too.” Instead, hand off a copy to a trusted neighbor.

Sliding Glass Doors

Large, sliding glass doors can be easy to shatter, often leaving them vulnerable to attack. They're also “notorious for lock failure,” adds Gruss. “To be extra safe, get something like a broomstick [or a dowel] and keep it along the bottom of the door, so no one will be able to open it.”

The installation of a glass break detector can also trigger a home alarm if the sound of shattered glass is detected. Other safety options include the installation of shatterproof film or a heavy duty sliding door lock.

Windows

We all want to open some windows to let some fresh air inside, particularly when the weather turns warm. When it comes to safety, however, the window is easily shattered, making it the most fragile entry way into the home. They're also often left unlocked or equipped with a latch, making it easier to force or pry open. That's why the most effective ways to maintain window safety include:

- **An installed secondary locking mechanism:** A track lock can be installed on vinyl or aluminum windows to stop the frame from moving freely up or down. Wooden windows can be secured by pushing a bolt nail, or dowel through a hole drilled through the bottom panel's stile and then halfway through the upper panel's stile.
- **Close windows when you're not home:** It only takes a burglar a few minutes to break in and rob a home. Closing the windows, even for a quick trip to the store, may be the delay needed to send a prowler packing.
- **Carefully select which windows to open, when you do open them:** When sleeping, keep only the hard-to-reach windows—like those on the second floor, away from any flat roofing—open. It's also best to open the windows that are visible from the street. A thief will have a harder time slipping into a window that's easily visible to neighbors.
- **Don't open windows too wide:** Even better, keep all windows open by a margin of less than four inches. Why? That's the diameter of a child's head, which means there's little chance a burglar can fit his head

through an opening of that size.

2

How To Fool Thieves

Sometimes thieves do invest time and effort in finding the perfect victim. Don't help them in their research.

What Do You Do With Packaging From Expensive Purchases?

- **Don't** leave the packaging boxes from an expensive new TV or game console outside by the trash cans for would-be burglars to spy, warns Gruss. "That's just advertising that you're a good potential victim."
- **Do** break down the boxes and place them inside your recycling bin where they'll be out of sight.

Do You Leave Doors Open When You're Home?

- **Don't** keep the doors to your home, garage or shed open, even when you're home. An open door gives thieves a sneak peek at what tools they may be able to use to jimmy a lock or to climb to a second story window. It also showcases your pricey stored goods like a high-end tool chest, a riding lawn mower or circular saw. If you've converted your garage into a livable

space, be extra wary. “Here in California, a lot of people turn their garages into man caves. Keep the garage door open and everyone can see that you have a nice TV in there,” says Gruss.

- **Do** keep the door closed and keep would-be thieves from knowing what expensive toys you have stashed away.

Do You Keep Your Car Doors Locked When You're Home?

- **Don't** leave your car doors unlocked, especially if you park on the street, in the driveway or in an unlocked garage. Any items left in the car are at risk, but there's an even greater danger most people may not consider. “Thieves may steal the garage door opener in the middle of the night and then return to your house during the day,” explains Gruss.
- **Do** keep the car door locked and any remote garage door openers out of sight.

What Are You Posting on Social Media?

- **Don't** publicly post photos to your social media sites. Once online, anyone can access your—or your child's—photos, which could showcase your expensive electronics and help thieves map the layout of your home. This goes double for vacation photos, which can tip crooks off to the presence of an empty home.
- **Do** set your profiles to private, warns Gruss. Carefully vet friends and contacts, making sure you're connected only with people you actually know and trust in real life. Wait to post vacation photos until after you've returned home.

Are You Home?

- **Don't** make it obvious that you're not home. Would-be thieves are looking for tips to identify a homeowner's schedule, particularly one who is not often home.
- **Do** throw thieves off the trail by leaving a few lights on or setting a timer to turn them on at dusk. Leave some window shades up and some shades down, so it looks like someone is home. If you're on vacation or away for an extended time, think about hiring a house sitter or asking a neighbor to check in on the house one or two times a day. A little regular movement can be just enough of a deterrent to scare off a potential burglar.

3

Be a Good Neighbor (It Can Decrease Local Break-Ins)

Getting to know your neighbors, and looking out for each other, is one of the most effective ways to deter would-be burglars in search of a neighborhood to prowl.

- **Create a neighborhood watch:** Criminals don't want to be approached by nosy neighbors. An area with high foot traffic, where people know each other and watch out for unfamiliar activity, will be a lot less attractive to

burglars.

- **Watch your neighbor's back:** Create a network of neighbors who will watch each other's homes while away. Bring in mail, water the lawn, bring garbage and recycling cans to and from the curb. Park in each other's driveway so it appears as if someone is home. Any act that mimics everyday activity will give thieves an indication that it's business as usual at home.
- **Share key security information:** Share emergency contacts, a spare key and any security codes with a trusted neighbor or two. Agree to listen for each other's home security sirens, particularly when you know a neighbor won't be home.

4

Do THIS With Your Valuables

Even if you don't post your photos online, an experienced thief probably already knows where to go. "A lot of people keep their valuables in a jewelry box and that's an easy target," says DiJoseph. "They grab it and off they go."

He suggests keeping valuable items and family heirlooms in a household safe that is either too heavy to carry or professionally mounted to a floor or beam that can't be removed from the home.

It's also a good idea to keep a [home inventory](#).

<https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/home-insurance/home-inventory/> of your most important possessions. You should also [photograph your keepsakes](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/photo-video-home-belongings-inventory/) <https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/photo-video-home-belongings-inventory/>. Document the models and serial numbers for big-ticket electronics and guns. Think about engraving an ID number and the name of your home state on valuable electronics. Sometimes stolen items are recovered at a later date. The more identifying information you have about an item, the more likely it is to be returned to its rightful owner.

“Unless you have that information on file, though, there’s not a lot we can do to return property to its rightful owner,” explains Gruss.

Does insurance cover your stolen valuables? Your homeowner’s policy covers up to certain limits; however, by adding The Hartford’s [Valuable Items Blanket Coverage](https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/homeowners-insurance/valuable-items-blanket) <https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/homeowners-insurance/valuable-items-blanket> to your policy, you can be assured this added layer of protection will provide a hassle-free and inexpensive way to protect your high-value items.

5

How To Make Your Home a Difficult Target

The harder it is for a thief to enter your home, the more likely they are to go somewhere else. Here are some effective deterrents:

Home Security

- **Mount a visible camera:** Many home security cameras can be set to send an alert to your smartphone if someone enters the frame. “A quick glance can tell you if it’s the gardener, the exterminator or someone else,” says Gruss. Even a fake camera can work wonders. “Thieves are more likely to pick a place that looks like it has no security on the house,” he explains.
- **Invest in a home security system:** As with a camera, just the sight of an alarm system sticker can be enough to deter a would-be thief. “People sometimes don’t like the sticker, they don’t like the way it looks, but posting it really does make a difference,” affirms Gruss.
- **Don’t just bluff that you have a secure home:** Don’t just buy a home security sticker or decal to post in front of your house. If a burglar forces entry through your back door and doesn’t trigger an alarm, they’ll know pretty quickly that the sticker is a sham—and that your home is unguarded.
- **Set the siren for a short interval:** Even with an alarm, once a burglar is in, time is of the essence. “Sometimes they’re out before the siren even goes off, sometimes within a minute or two,” says DiJoseph. “That sounds like a short amount of time, but try it. Set a watch and see if you can run through every room of your house in under a minute.” (Note: I tried it. He was right. I was able to make it through my home in under a minute.) DiJoseph suggests setting your system’s siren delay for just 10 to 15 seconds.
- **Install motion detecting lights:** Nighttime intruders can be deterred by a blinding spotlight, triggered by an intruder’s presence.

Other Deterrents

- **Trim your hedges:** “High shrubs provide cover for a prowler,” explains Gruss. Keep them cut back to below your window so a burglar can’t hide while trying to pick your lock or break your glass.
- **Post a “Beware of Dog” sign:** Even if you don’t have a dog, some burglars may be dissuaded. Better yet, adopt an actual dog. Just be aware of how certain breeds can [affect homeowner’s insurance premiums](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/10-things-affect-home-insurance/) (<https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/10-things-affect-home-insurance/>).
- **Keep a television or radio on:** This can deter some burglars by leading them to assume someone is home.

What To Do If You See Someone Suspicious

It’s not always easy to keep your cool in the heat of the moment. It can make sense to establish an emergency plan—just in case you come across a would-be intruder at home.

- If you see a suspicious vehicle in the neighborhood, write down the license plate number or snap a photo. It may turn out an unknown visitor from down the street but it won’t hurt to have the info if it turns out to be someone up to no good.
- If a stranger knocks on your door, make sure they know you’re in the home. Be loud, even if you choose to not answer the door. More than anything, you want to make your presence known. Thieves most often prefer an empty home.
- If you choose to answer the door, do so while on the phone with a friend (or pretend you’re on the phone). This will key a burglar in to the fact that someone else will know if a break-in occurs.
- If you’re positive a break-in is in progress, call 911 and shout statements like, “I just called 911!” You want to let

the burglar know you're aware of their presence and that help is on the way.

- If you come home to a burglarized home, call the police immediately. Don't touch anything the criminal may have touched. Wait outside for the police to arrive. It's possible a burglar may still be inside the home.

Even if you follow these tips, they aren't guaranteed to keep your home safe from burglars. Still, the harder it is to get to your goods and the more likely they are to get caught, the less likely a thief will select your home.

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161 Responses to "Five Things Burglars Don't Want You to Know"

Kris | March 22, 2026 at 11:34 pm

Reply

I learned something new.

Kidney and the stone | April 22, 2024 at 12:59 pm

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My home makes Fort Knox look bad.

somegiy | April 14, 2024 at 3:21 pm

[Reply](#)

If you use camera that can be accessed over the internet, use strong passwords otherwise they will be useful to hacker to spy you...

Safety chick | August 30, 2023 at 9:07 am

[Reply](#)

We always disconnect our garage when we leave so if someone was to get our garage opener it would not let them open the garage. We always leave one of our locked cars outside when we go on trips and keep our big living room blinds open with one light on. If we get packages while we are away we have our neighbors bring them into their house so it doesn't look like we are gone. I also never open the door to strangers, sometimes not even my neighbors when I'm home with just the kids. I always have my doors locked and double check every night that everything is locked and that my garage door closed. If I'm closing it, I watch it go down all the way and not assume it did after pushing the button and going inside. I have to have the visual of it actually fully closed.

Manley Gary | May 4, 2023 at 7:07 pm

[Reply](#)

If your a woman living alone get a pair of mens boots or shoes, large and maybe a hat or coat to leave by your door. Then when you answer the door and feel unsafe you could mention your husband is asleep talk low, getting ready to go shopping or anything else so he knows

you have someone to call out for help.

Manley Gary | May 4, 2023 at 6:57 pm

[Reply](#)

Sliding patio doors are removed by prying them up out of their track with a large screwdriver. To stop this I have screwed 2 narrow pieces of wood above mine. I have also done this above all my ground floor sliding windows. Another tip is to meet the neighbour behind you and exchange contact info.

Heidi Marie Wilde | February 1, 2023 at 3:43 pm

[Reply](#)

All good points, one that I would like to shed some additional light on is insurance; sure most of us have it. We were robbed in 2011, 2013 and 2016 and when we filed the insurance claims, all over 20k, we received maybe 1500 dollars from the insurance company. Yes they say you're insured but what they make you do is replace the items and then once you provide a receipt, within a year, they will pay you 50% of the cost. I don't have 20k lying around to replace everything stolen and then to only get 10k back.

My point is, speak extensively with your agent and make sure you're covered at a level that you're comfortable with. If not, you're going to be so angry for a multitude of reasons. Stay safe!

Don Smith | January 28, 2023 at 11:54 pm

[Reply](#)

Even if you don't have a dog, leave a dog dish with water in it by the front door and the back door. Burglars hate dogs and will avoid your house if you have one.

Donald J. Booth | December 26, 2022 at 9:16 pm

[Reply](#)

Good advise. Reading this helps me to be more aware.

Extra Mile Staff | December 29, 2022 at 12:32 pm

[Reply](#)

That's great to hear, Donald! We're glad you liked the article.

William Tsoukalas | December 19, 2022 at 8:28 am

[Reply](#)

The neighbors have to get to know each other. On my street we are all very close, like an extended family. The neighbors all know me, we all share our phone numbers. I am retired and keep an eye out for everyone. This works great for all of us. I have lived here for 40 years and have never had a problem. Know your neighbors, and their children. look out for each other trust me it works.

Extra Mile Staff | December 19, 2022 at 11:53 am

[Reply](#)

That's great advice, William. Thank you for sharing it!

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