LOWE'S®
Let's Build Something Together™

Automate Your Home
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George Jetson had robots to prepare his food, walk his dog and even shave and dress him every morning. Technology is not quite to that point yet, but it is possible to automate many of the functions in your home. You can control lights, appliances and more through your home computer or through remote controls and switches.

Automating your home can be as simple as putting a few lights on a timer to fool the burglars or as elaborate as creating a system to control every appliance through a computer. The time, effort and cost of the project will vary depending on how elaborate you choose to make it. Most systems can be installed by anyone with basic knowledge of computers, and many require almost no wiring work. Lowe's is happy to provide this information as a service to you.

Selecting a System

A number of companies offer their own lines of products for home automation, but they all have a few basic functions in common. Start your project by deciding what functions in your home you would like to have automated, and from there you can select a system that offers the features you are looking for.

Cleaning the gutters is an annoying but essential chore.

Though many systems advertise that they integrate with each other, you may avoid potential conflicts if you work with products from only one company.

Once you have decided on a list of automated functions and have chosen a product line, consult the manufacturer's directions for specific installation instructions. Most companies' Web sites offer full information about their product lines, including installation tips and frequently asked questions. Though the basic concepts of home automation are the same across the board, there may be important differences in detail between manufacturers.

Installation

Though every system differs, most of them work through special wall plug receptacles that respond to commands from remote controllers and switches. Plug a receptacle into the wall, plug a lamp into the receptacle, and you can use a keychain remote to turn the lamp on and off. Larger units can control multiple lights, appliances and more.

Some functions require you to replace wall switches or receptacles with units that have the command capability built in. It is a simple do-it-yourself task.

For more complete automation, consider a system that is controlled through a home computer. Many can be programmed and then disconnected from the computer, so they do not tie up the PC when you want to use it for other things. Software and installation instructions will be included in the system, but be sure that the products you buy are compatible with the computer and operating system that you have.

Room by Room

Automation can reach into nearly every room in the house. Think about the following ideas as you plan your household system.

In the Living Room:

Programmable thermostats regulate your home's temperature — and your utility bill.

- Set lights to turn on and off at specific times. This will make your home look lived-in when you are away, so burglars will be less tempted to pay you a visit.

- Establish a schedule for raising and lowering the temperature on your thermostat. You can leave the house a little warm during a summer workday, then turn down the air conditioner in time for you to arrive home to a cool home. Installing a programmable thermostat makes this easy.

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- Make a light flash when the telephone rings, so you can turn off the ringer and avoid waking a sleeping baby.

In the Bedroom:

- Connect all your downstairs lights to a controller that you keep on the bedside table. If you go to bed and forget to turn off a light, you will not have to slide out from under the warm covers. Simply turn it off right from your bed.

- If you hear a strange noise in the middle of the night, turn on all the lights in the house with one command.

- Watch a satellite movie from the living room or a DVD from your computer on an upstairs bedroom television.

- Use timers to open your drapes automatically when the sun rises, letting natural light replace a jarring alarm clock.

In the Kitchen:

- Set up the coffee-maker at night, then use a timer to turn it on 10 minutes before your alarm clock goes off. Fresh, hot coffee will be waiting for you when you get out of bed.

In the Basement:

- Let a monitor warn you when a water heater or plumbing leak threatens to turn into a flood. Some systems can detect as little as 1/8" of water and can alert you by telephone.

Outdoors:

- Focus a camera on your front door area so you can see who is ringing the doorbell without squinting through the peephole. Some systems offer automatic door latches, so you can see the visitors on a monitor and let them in from any room in the house.

- Turn on the house lights and even unlock the front door from the car using a keychain remote. You will never have to fumble for your keys or walk into a dark house.

- Put outdoor lights on timers or motion sensors to discourage prowlers. You can also set a chime to ring when the light turns on, letting you know that someone is in your yard. Or choose a barking dog alarm to help scare away intruders.

By the Pool:

- Use a motion detector and an alarm to warn you when someone goes near your swimming pool – an easy method for keeping neighborhood children safe from harm and keeping yourself protected from crippling lawsuits.

All Around the House:

- Use door and window sensors to alert you to someone trying to enter unannounced. Or use them to keep children and others from wandering away.

- Combine entertainment equipment, lights, appliances and more on a single remote. You can control nearly everything in your home from your favorite chair.

- Use cameras to monitor pet behavior from your office computer.

Use a security camera to see who is at the door or watch for trespassers in your pool area.

Outdoor lighting in many styles and shapes can be used with motion detector units to discourage prowlers.

Door and window sensors combined with an alarm system can protect the whole house.