



## THE BEST WAYS TO KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

Maybe crime doesn't pay, but you sure can spend a lot of money to stop it. Consider your alternatives.

# Money®

By: Gerri Willis, excerpted: April 2007



Those TV ads with the burglar dressed as a jogger and a frightened woman calling for help work on me. My husband and I installed a security system not long after buying our home. We'd heard the FBI statistics—a home break-in every 14.6 seconds—and we figured we'd rather be safe than sorry.

That's when our home-security trouble started. The system is amazingly sensitive, so much so that when a flower arrangement sitting on the dining room table wilted while we were away, a sensor caught the movement, leading the system to automatically dial for help. When we didn't respond to calls from the security service, our neighbors awoke to flashing lights. Not too long later, my visiting mother set off a smoke alarm that brought a fire truck to our front door.

I worry that the fire and police departments will write us off as fakers, but I still love my security system. For less than \$50 a month, it's a lot of protection. But if you'd rather not pay yet another monthly bill, or you figure you'll just turn off your system after false alarms like mine, there's plenty of low-cost stuff you can do.

### ALWAYS BE HOME

Okay, that's not practical. But think about the typical burglar: He's young and in search of cash and stuff he can sell quickly, like laptops and jewelry. His tools of choice are screwdrivers and pry bars, although he prefers to enter through open windows and unlocked doors. And he doesn't want to run into you, which is why break-ins spike in the daytime and during the vacation months of July and August. Convince him that you are home, or about to be. Buy timers to turn your lights and radio on and off (as little as \$10 each, or \$25 for a fancy timer that knows when the sun sets in your time zone). For more (\$90 and up), you can get systems that open and close your drapes. When you go on vacation, cut off your mail and newspaper delivery, turn your phone ringer down and don't leave a message saying, "We'll be back in a week."

### SLOW DOWN THE CROOKS

The next thing you want to do is frustrate the prowler who gives your house a try. Secure your home with deadbolt locks, double-pane windows and solid-core doors. Burglars don't want to be seen, and closely trimmed shrubs and motion-triggered outdoor lights cut down on hiding places. Prune tree branches that reach upstairs windows. If you have an alarm, make sure it's turned on and has a battery backup—in a study of break-ins in one town, Temple University professor Simon Hakim found that the alarm wasn't on in 41% of burglaries in alarm-protected homes. Although you think you've found a clever spot to hide your spare key, a good burglar knows to look there.

### ENLIST YOUR NEIGHBORS

On an unseasonably warm day last winter, I opened my front and back doors for a little fresh air. My neighbor, noticing the doors ajar and no car in the driveway, called us. I laughed and assured her that everything was fine, but as soon as I got off the phone I realized that my neighbors are one of the best alarm systems going. They know our routines and can sense when something is amiss. When you're away, ask your neighbors to do more than keep an eye out, like park a car in your driveway or even make footprints through freshly fallen snow.

But keep in mind that a savvy and dedicated burglar can still get in despite all your precautions. So take one more: Keep a detailed inventory of your valuables for your insurer.

### CHEAP FIXES

Burglars don't want to be seen, and they don't like hard work. Make their life tougher with these easy moves.

- **HEDGE TRIMMER:** \$20 Gives burglars fewer places to hide and makes your house more visible from the road.
- **DEADBOLTS:** \$60 Pay a locksmith \$100 to install it or get easy instructions at [thisoldhouse.com](http://thisoldhouse.com) (search "deadbolt").
- **CANCELLING MAIL:** FREE Do this when you travel, (you can sign up at [usps.com](http://usps.com)) to create the illusion you're home.
- **MOTION-ACTIVATED FLOODLIGHTS:** \$20 At that price, you'll get a 150° span.