



A Burglar Free Vacation

You go on vacation, and burglars go to work -- stealing valuables from temporarily unoccupied homes. Don't come home to find that a burglar has celebrated the New Year by making off with your most prized possessions. Today's home builders install sturdy locks, bolts and, in some cases, alarm systems to protect your home from thieves. But you should also take a few precautions to keep burglars out of your house, especially if you live in an older home that does not have a security system or updated bolts and locks.

- Lock and bolt all your windows and doors. In over 40 percent of residential burglaries, the thieves entered the house through an unlocked window or door.
- Install dead bolt locks in every exterior door. Most thieves are skilled at picking doorknob locks. You need a deadbolt for extra security.
- Change the locks. If you just moved in to a previously owned house or apartment, re-key the locks. You don't know who might still have a set of keys to your place.
- Install metal doors. If you live in a high-crime area, you might want to install metal doors for added security.
- Do not hide keys in 'secret' locations outside of your house. Thieves know where to look for hidden keys. Instead, give a duplicate key to a trusted neighbor.
- Trim shrubs and trees that cover windows so a burglar cannot use them as cover to get into the house.
- Cut back tree limbs that could help thieves climb into second story windows.
- Secure sliding glass doors. Lock your sliding doors. Then cut a broom handle or another long narrow piece of wood so that it fits in the door's bottom track. With this wooden barricade, the door will not easily slide open when forced. For triple protection, drill one hole through both casings and sliding window and insert a nail or pin. Or you can purchase a double security commercial lock for sliding doors.
- Install double key deadbolt locks in doors with glass windows. This prevents a burglar from breaking the glass and reaching inside to unlock the door. But leave the key to a double key deadbolt lock inside the lock when you're at home so you can exit easily in the event of a fire or other emergency.
- Place home security warning stickers on your doors and windows. These actually do scare some thieves away.
- Secure double-sash windows with pins. Drill an angled hole through the top frame of the lower window partially into the lower frame of the upper window; then insert a nail or an eyebolt. But don't forget and try to open the window before you remove the nail.
- Lock and bolt the door inside your garage that leads into your house. You might have trouble securing your garage door. So treat the inside door from the garage into the house as an exterior door.
- Install an alarm system. If you don't already have a home security system, consider buying one. At the very least, they can't hurt. And they can effectively deter burglars from breaking into your home. Test the system monthly.

- Place an exterior light over every door and window. Most burglars don't want to try to break into a home while in the spotlight. Mount these lights in out-of-reach locations so burglars can't easily unscrew the bulbs.
- Lock ladders inside the garage when they are not being used. Don't make it easy for burglars to climb up to a less-secure second story window.
- Plant 'security shrubs' or plants with prickly leaves or thorns under windows. Would you want to crawl in a window located above a thorn bush? Neither would a burglar.
- Join a neighborhood safety watch group.
- Don't put your name on your mailbox. You don't want a burglar to know your last name because then he or she might call your home to see if you are there.
- Keep your garage door closed. A burglar might be able to tell who is home by the number of cars in the garage.
- Don't put valuables near windows where they can be seen.
- Don't list your street address in newspaper ads that advertise valuable items for sale.
- Make friends with your neighbors. Statistically, neighborhoods where residents are concerned with their mutual safety have lower crime rates.

Before you leave for vacation, take a critical look at your home and make sure that it looks like you are still there. Burglars are far less likely to break into a home that looks occupied.

- Leave something outside, such as a shovel, child's toy or water hose.
- Leave your draperies and blinds open.
- Put inside and outside lights, radios and televisions on timers, set according to your normal schedule.
- Call forward your telephone to another number.
- Don't change the message on your answering machine to indicate that you are away.
- Stop your mail and newspaper deliveries or have a neighbor pick it up for you.
- Ask a trusted neighbor to watch your property and 'fake' activity at your home. Your neighbor can make it look like somebody's home at your house just by taking out your trash.
- Hire someone to shovel snow out of your driveway while you are away. Also, if it snows, ask a neighbor or friend to drive on your driveway to leave fresh tire tracks and walk on your doorsteps to leave footprints.
- Leave your dog at home. Just hire someone to come and care for him or her while you're away. Any dog that barks can frighten a burglar.

Unfortunately, determined burglars will get into your house regardless of the precautions you take. So, to prepare for a worse case scenario:

- Mark your property. Burglars may decide not to steal marked, engraved property. And, in the case of a recovery, police can better identify marked stolen property and return it to its rightful owner. Whenever possible, engrave your valuables with your driver's license number.
- Make a list of your valuables. Record the brand names, serial numbers and other important details of your property. Keep the list in a safe place away from your home.

- Get insurance coverage for your most prized belongings.
- Do not keep large sums of cash around the house.
- Display your house number in clear view. You want the police to be able to find your house if there is an emergency.
- If you come home and see signs that someone has broken into your house, don't go inside. Go to a neighbor's house and call the police. You want to avoid any confrontations with a burglar since there is a good chance he or she is armed.

So relax and enjoy your vacation. If you take these precautions, you will have done your best to keep intruders away from your house. And you will most likely return home to find things just the way you left them. Unless that watchdog of yours went sniffing about for some precious jewels...