

How good is your home security?

As well as opportunistic burglaries, some burglars scope out a property beforehand, sometimes working with other criminals. It's therefore important to think about measures to ensure your home looks occupied at all times, that there aren't any clear places where a potential burglar could hide to assess the house.

Also, don't make it obvious that you are away on holiday. Consider using lights on timers or getting a friend or neighbour to occasionally pop around to check on your home. Also, avoid mentioning about going away on any public-facing social media accounts as you never know who is browsing your profile. You can get a free timer switch or shed alarm by contacting the Community Safety Unit at

community.safety@sevenoaks.gov.uk

- To help keep your house and property safe you can use this simple checklist
- Are windows and doors left open, even if they're not easily accessible?
- Do your windows and doors have visible locks?
- Is there a spare key that's easily visible, or easy to find, such as underneath a plant pot or above the ledge on the door?
- Do you have high walls and hedges, which could give burglars protection from being seen?
- Is accessing your house noisy for a burglar? For example, is there gravel around the property?
- Are there any ladders lying around that a burglar could use?
- How secure is the shed or garage? Is it always kept locked with high-quality padlocks and security locks?
- How does a burglar scope a house?

There are various ways to protect your home. Here are our top tips, some of which cost little or nothing:

Visible burglar alarm

If you have a burglar alarm system, make sure the external sounder or 'bell box' is clearly visible on your property to let potential burglars know you have an alarm. You could also use a dummy camera.

Door security

When fitting a lock to a window or door, use the strongest screws you can, not necessarily the ones supplied, and make sure they are all to British Standard.

Fit a chain or a latch to the door, and opt for a viewer so you can check who's there before letting them in.

Letter boxes should be fitted 40cm from the door lock, and valuables and keys shouldn't be within sight of it - an internal cover plate will offer extra protection.

Window security

Don't leave windows open or unlocked anywhere in the house.

Security lighting

Outdoor lights, either ones that you switch on manually or those that are set off by movement, are a good way to ensure a burglar is more visible, which will help to put them off.

For indoor lighting, the key thing is to make sure that a burglar thinks people are in the house, even when they're not. Just make sure these are in sync around your home, such as turning the light off five minutes after the TV goes off.

CCTV and wireless home security cameras

CCTV or wireless security cameras (either indoors or outside) can be an extra security measure to put burglars off.

Another product to consider is a smart doorbell, as they can act as a digital guard for your front door, checking for suspicious characters while also alerting you to legitimate visitors. See fully tested models in our smart doorbell reviews.

Burglar-proof your garden

Gravel around your home is a great deterrent, as it makes it harder for burglars to approach without alerting the occupant.

Make sure hedges are trimmed back so your property is not hidden from view.

Do some defensive gardening – plant shrubs with thorns at the borders of your home so burglars aren't able to hide in them.

Put in strong gates or fences to any part of your garden accessible from outside, ideally 2 metres high and with 30-45cm of open-ended trellising at the top - if they jump the fence and break this, it will be heard.

If you've bought new valuable items, don't leave the packaging out with your recycling for an extended period of time, as it can be a clue as to the value of your possessions.

Use padlocks on shed doors, and consider fitting them with a small, battery-powered alarm,

It's also worth remembering that while you want to make your home as secure as possible, you need to make sure this won't stop you from being able to escape – or be rescued – in an emergency such as a fire.