

## Tips for Buyers

# Assess a home's security

Look at every home through the eyes of a burglar.



The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that 2.1 million burglaries were committed in 2004. Not all of these situations involved forced entry; many were the result of unlocked doors and windows. Once you close that loophole, though, how can you determine if one house is more vulnerable than another? Well, a residence surrounded by a 15-foot electric fence and patrolled by guard dogs might be a giveaway, but here are some more-subtle ways to judge a house's security.

**Entrances should be visible and the exterior well-lit.** Thieves don't like to be seen. If a home's doors and most-accessible windows are visible from the street or a neighbor's house, they might look for another home. Most homes have outside lights; make sure those lights are positioned correctly. Lighting up the front door and driveway is great, but what about the dark corner of the yard near the living-room window? Use motion-sensor lights in these areas.

**Exterior doors must be metal or solid-core wood.** A particle-board or similarly weak door will break long before most locks give out.

**All exterior locks should have dead bolts with metal strike plates.** Dead bolts alone don't deter burglars. Without a heavy-duty metal strike plate screwed in the door frame to receive the lock, someone could break open the door by busting through the wood.

**Watch for old sliding-glass doors.** Old doors with worn-out rollers can be lifted off the track, bypassing any lock.

**Any fence gates should have locks.** Yes, burglars can climb over most fences, but they risk more exposure by scaling a fence instead of quickly walking through a gate.

**Look for "painful" landscaping.** A good way to discourage a thief from breaking in through a first-floor window is to install a rosebush or other thorn-covered plant under it.

You can't keep a determined, professional burglar out of a home. However, you can make it less appealing for him to try.



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