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8 Security Tips for Homeowners

If homeowners approach home theft from the offender's point of view, they can reduce the chances that their home will be targeted, says Steve Houseworth, a program director for Theft Talk, a nonprofit counseling service. In an interview with U.S. News & World Report, Houseworth outlined eight simple, inexpensive steps that owners can take to make their properties less vulnerable to intruders.

1. Sign up: *While home security systems are great tools for preventing burglaries, they can be quite expensive. For a more affordable alternative, Houseworth recommends a little trickery: putting a home security sign in your yard without actually obtaining the service. It's an approach Houseworth uses himself — "I'm too cheap," he says. The sign convinces would-be burglars that your home is in fact protected by a security system, which makes them less inclined to target your property. "Just think from a burglar's point of view: 'Am I going to break into the building or the home that has a security system?'" Houseworth says. "'Or am I going to go next door to the one that doesn't?'"*

2. Beware of the garage: *Garages are a common entry point for burglars, Houseworth says. Open garage doors serve to advertise your belongings to passers-by, which increases the likelihood of theft. So homeowners should make sure their garage door remains closed any time they aren't present. "Take away the attractive appeal to what someone might want to steal," Houseworth says.*

3. Be a neighbor: *Neighbors can play a key role in preventing home thefts. Homeowners on friendly terms with their neighbors are less likely to be victimized by other members of their community. At the same time, closely knit neighbors are more likely to call the police if they see someone suspicious poking around your property. "If they like you and they care about you and they are concerned about their community, then if they see something unusual going on, then they will check it out or call the police," Houseworth says. So don't be a hermit: Get out and interact with your neighbors.*

4. Keep valuables outside the bedroom: *A burglar on the hunt for valuables in a home will make the master bedroom his first stop, because that's where the cash and jewelry are most commonly stored. So if you do keep such valuables on your property, find another room to store them in. "I don't keep anything in my bedroom," Houseworth says. "And I don't have much — deliberately — of great value of the small items [that] are the ones burglars like to steal [stored in my home]."*

5. No land escaping: *Burglars prefer to target homes that have hiding spots and escape routes in the yards, and abundant bushes and trees make for great cover, Houseworth says. As a result, yards with less shrubbery and more open spaces aren't particularly appealing targets. "If the home is open and relatively exposed, a burglar will think, 'I'm going to go in, and if something goes wrong, how am I going to get out of here?'" Houseworth says.*

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6. Install motion sensors: Light is a great deterrent for nighttime break-ins. Houseworth recommends homeowners install motion sensors on outdoor lights that turn on automatically if someone triggers them. "I have mine hard-wired in, but they have some that are actually screwed in," he says.

7. Radio running: Noise helps prevent burglaries as well. Houseworth leaves his radio on all day so that would-be burglars think that someone is at home. "Your home is more likely to be burglarized during the day because they think that nobody is home," he says.

8. Free police inventory: Homeowners should be sure to remember the basics of home-theft prevention: keeping windows and doors locked at all times. For homeowners looking to go a step further, Houseworth suggests contacting the local police department and having an officer stop by the house for a safety checkup. "I don't know of any police department that if you call them and ask them to do an inventory of your home to help harden it, they won't come out free and give you advice on how to improve your home," Houseworth says.

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