

# HOME safe HOME

Cheap—and even FREE—ways to burglarproof your house

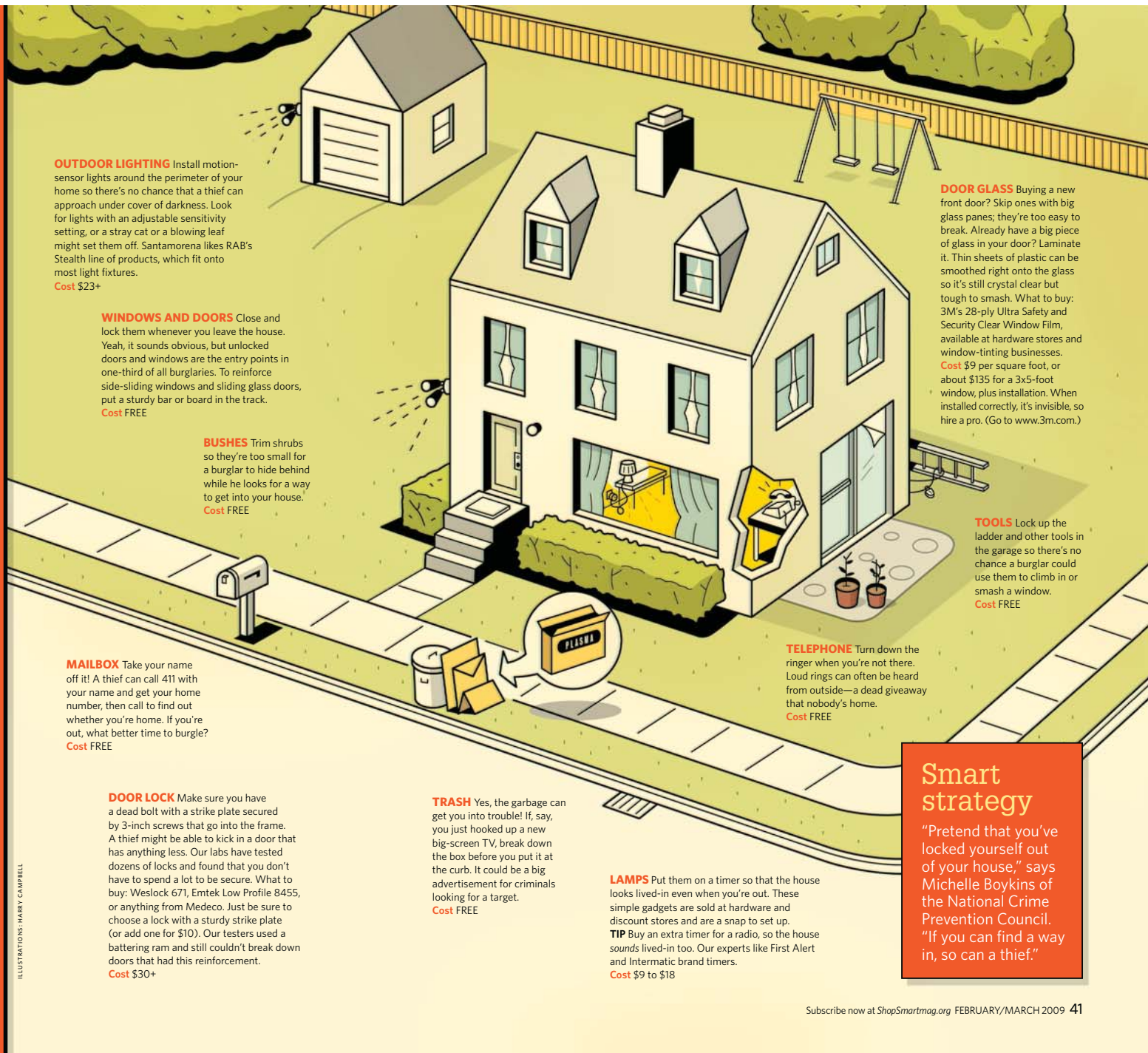
As if you weren't anxious enough about the economy, now you have to worry about someone breaking in and stealing your stuff. Yes, it's true—after years of decline, some cities are seeing a rise in burglary and other property crimes.

"You tend to see an increase in personal crime when the economy is going poorly," says Steven Raphael, a professor of public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, who tracks crime trends. Many metro areas—almost half of the 124 cities that responded to a survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors—are seeing an uptick in crime, including residential burglary, especially in neighborhoods where many foreclosed homes sit empty.

What can you do to protect your home? Don't worry, you don't have to buy a fancy security system that you'll have to pay for month after month. As you'll see on the next few pages, low-cost and even free, common-sense strategies can make all the difference.

Burglars' favorite things include portables like computers and jewelry, but cars can also be a temptation. On one episode of the home-security TV show "It Takes a Thief," a prized Mercedes was left with the keys in the ignition. So lesson No. 1 is: Don't leave keys in a convenient spot for thieves! Simple, right?

For other tips, we talked to security pros like Frank Santamarena, an adviser on "It Takes a Thief"; experts at the National Crime Prevention Council; and our own in-house authorities on doors, locks, alarms, and more. Here's what they advise to make your home more secure.



**OUTDOOR LIGHTING** Install motion-sensor lights around the perimeter of your home so there's no chance that a thief can approach under cover of darkness. Look for lights with an adjustable sensitivity setting, or a stray cat or a blowing leaf might set them off. Santamarena likes RAB's Stealth line of products, which fit onto most light fixtures.

Cost \$23+

**WINDOWS AND DOORS** Close and lock them whenever you leave the house. Yeah, it sounds obvious, but unlocked doors and windows are the entry points in one-third of all burglaries. To reinforce side-sliding windows and sliding glass doors, put a sturdy bar or board in the track.

Cost FREE

**BUSHES** Trim shrubs so they're too small for a burglar to hide behind while he looks for a way to get into your house.

Cost FREE

**MAILBOX** Take your name off it! A thief can call 411 with your name and get your home number, then call to find out whether you're home. If you're out, what better time to burgle?

Cost FREE

**DOOR LOCK** Make sure you have a dead bolt with a strike plate secured by 3-inch screws that go into the frame. A thief might be able to kick in a door that has anything less. Our labs have tested dozens of locks and found that you don't have to spend a lot to be secure. What to buy: Weslock 671, Emtek Low Profile 8455, or anything from Medeco. Just be sure to choose a lock with a sturdy strike plate (or add one for \$10). Our testers used a battering ram and still couldn't break down doors that had this reinforcement.

Cost \$30+

**TRASH** Yes, the garbage can get you into trouble! If, say, you just hooked up a new big-screen TV, break down the box before you put it at the curb. It could be a big advertisement for criminals looking for a target.

Cost FREE

**LAMPS** Put them on a timer so that the house looks lived-in even when you're out. These simple gadgets are sold at hardware and discount stores and are a snap to set up.

**TIP** Buy an extra timer for a radio, so the house sounds lived-in too. Our experts like First Alert and Intermatic brand timers.

Cost \$9 to \$18

**DOOR GLASS** Buying a new front door? Skip ones with big glass panes; they're too easy to break. Already have a big piece of glass in your door? Laminate it. Thin sheets of plastic can be smoothed right onto the glass so it's still crystal clear but tough to smash. What to buy: 3M's 28-ply Ultra Safety and Security Clear Window Film, available at hardware stores and window-tinting businesses.

Cost \$9 per square foot, or about \$135 for a 3x5-foot window, plus installation. When installed correctly, it's invisible. So hire a pro. (Go to [www.3m.com](http://www.3m.com).)

**TOOLS** Lock up the ladder and other tools in the garage so there's no chance a burglar could use them to climb in or smash a window.

Cost FREE

**TELEPHONE** Turn down the ringer when you're not there. Loud rings can often be heard from outside—a dead giveaway that nobody's home.

Cost FREE

## Smart strategy

"Pretend that you've locked yourself out of your house," says Michelle Boykins of the National Crime Prevention Council. "If you can find a way in, so can a thief."

## HIDE IT RIGHT

### NEVER stash valuables here ...

- **Under a fake rock.** This hiding place for a spare house key isn't fooling anyone. You might as well leave the front door unlocked, according to the experts we interviewed.
- **In the freezer.** Burglars know about the fake orange juice can, the fake peanut butter jar, and the fake can of cleanser. Chances are, they'll find your cold cash—even if it's tucked away in a "safe" place.
- **In the sock drawer.** Burglars make a beeline for the bedroom—and often go directly to the sock drawer. So skip that hiding place, and take your valuables out of the pocket of that old cardigan. One staffer made a costly mistake: She donated a sweater with her jewelry still in the pocket.
- **Under the mattress.** What, you thought they wouldn't look there? C'mon, the money-under-the-mattress trick is a cliché. If you've seen something in a movie, so have the burglars.
- **In plain sight.** Is your checkbook sitting on a desk along with new credit cards? Is your passport in the top drawer? Thought so. Don't leave out financial information for an intruder. Same goes for jewelry in jewelry boxes.



### ... Put them here instead

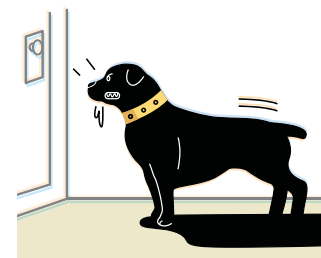
- **Behind the wall.** Stash a wad of cash or some jewelry inside a mini safe that fits behind a fake wall outlet. (Check out the cute little outlet safe at left.) You can buy one for about \$17 at [SafetyCentral.com](http://SafetyCentral.com).
- **Under covers.** A hollowed-out book, like the one at left, among dozens of real books is a great tactic. (Note: This will NOT work unless you have many shelves of books. If you have one shelf full of computer manuals and there's a James Patterson novel stuck in the middle, it's likely to draw attention.) You can find a fake book for \$25, also at [SafetyCentral.com](http://SafetyCentral.com), or hollow out your own. Got a big collection of stuffed animals? You could sew valuables into one. A thief isn't going to take the time to rip through 20 teddy bears to see if there's treasure hidden inside.
- **In the coffee table.** That's right in, not on, the table. Use a power drill to hollow out the leg (start from the bottom) and then cap it with a rubber tip once you're done stowing small valuables inside.
- **Overhead or underfoot.** You can remove a ceiling tile or a section of the floor and stow valuables out of sight.
- **In a safe.** See "Are Safes Safe?" on the next page. If you have really good jewelry, take it to the bank and get yourself a safe-deposit box.

## Are safes safe?

Sure they are—as long as you buy the right kind and put it in the right place. Just make sure it is:

**FIREPROOF** Or all your important documents could go up in flames.  
**HEAVY** You don't want a safe that a thief can pick up and carry away. If you have family jewelry or other irreplaceable heirlooms, or if you keep cash in the house, go for a good-sized model. The Gardall B1515, \$735, at locksmiths and some hardware stores, and the SentrySafe Fire-Safe electronic safe, \$383, at hardware stores and

online. Both weigh about 135 pounds when empty. (We did not test these products.)  
**BOLTED DOWN** A smaller model might do as long as you can bolt it to the floor—ideally, in a closet where it's not likely to be spotted. The SentrySafe Fire-Safe waterproof chest is big enough for passports, deeds, and some jewelry, and costs just \$67.50 at office-supply stores and online.



## The woof factor

A barking dog is a proven way to scare off burglars. That's why even a poodle can make a good watchdog. But if you're looking for a pooch bred for the job, do your homework. According to [Ukcdogs.com](http://Ukcdogs.com), the Web site of the United Kennel Club, certain breeds, such as boxers, rottweilers, mastiffs, and bull mastiffs, are natural guardians. (Nope, pit bulls aren't on that list. They're naturally friendly, even with strangers.) Of course, any dog can be a pussycat. To find a qualified trainer who can teach your pet appropriate behavior with strangers, contact the Association of Pet Dog Trainers at [www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com).

Allergic? Adopt Rex, the barking machine. Place the Rex Plus, \$79.95 (sold at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and other online retailers), behind your door, set it on "ferocious attack dog," and Rex will bark like a real dog if it detects motion outside. When the movement stops, the barking does too. Rex also works behind a wall or a window but not behind metal. The woofs weren't as deep and scary as we would have liked, and it doesn't growl. But even though Rex is all bark and no bite, he could deter thieves looking for easy targets.



**BARK IN A BOX**  
Scare off thieves without vet bills.

## THE ALARMING FACTS

You want to make your property as unappealing to an intruder as possible, and an alarm system is the single most intimidating security tactic—though dogs also work. Ask a law-enforcement official: According to a survey conducted by the *Journal of Police*, 96 percent of law-enforcement personnel say they believe alarm systems can be valuable.

But they can also be costly. If you're going to make the investment, we recommend the type that's linked to a central monitoring station. You can choose a national company such as ADT or a local one—just make sure it monitors 24/7. Expect to pay \$1 to \$2 per square foot of your home for installation, plus around \$25 a month for monitoring. The best systems have sensors placed on

doors and windows as well as motion detectors that trigger audible and silent alarms. You'll get a sign too; place it in front of your home so it's obvious your home is protected.

Other expert tips:

- If you have pets, ask for the kind of motion sensor that a cat or dog won't trigger.
- Don't fall for scams. Vans advertising "ready to install your system today" probably aren't legit. Find a reputable dealer at [www.alarm.org](http://www.alarm.org) or by checking with your local Better Business Bureau at [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).
- Call your local police station or city hall to see whether your town requires a permit, which costs about \$10 to \$30. If your system is registered, police will be able to reach you if the alarm goes off.