

Introduction*

Your garden, as well as your house, has valued possessions that thieves would love to steal. It also has equipment that could help them break into your house. Most burglars are lazy. They look for easy ways of getting into a house or garden. By taking a few simple precautions you can reduce the risk of being burgled and make your house and garden more secure.

Basic considerations

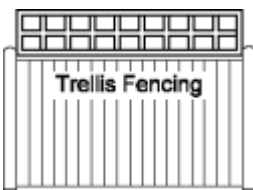
Start by looking at your property from the front. Avoid hidden areas where intruders can lurk unseen by making it as clear and open as possible with view lines into the garden. At least have a clear area above waist level so any intruders will be clearly visible. Consider security lighting for any areas that are in deep shadow at night and gravel paths to prevent a silent approach.



Gravel paths and drives are an ideal way of cheaply and unobtrusively discouraging thieves from your garden. The gravel makes a loud noise underfoot which carries well at night, when any thief relies on moving around silently. For this reason, it is also worthwhile putting gravel near house windows or doors, as the noise of any movement on it may wake the owners or any dog. Make the back garden a difficult area to access with prickly hedging or fencing around the perimeter. You may need planning permission for fencing over 2m (6ft 6ins) high at the back and 1m (3ft) high to the front of your property. Check with your local planning office. If you live in a conservation area, then check whether there are any other restrictions which apply.

Fences

The most vulnerable part of the house is at the rear. According to the 1996 British Crime Survey some 60% of all domestic burglaries took place via the rear or side windows and doors. This is a national average and can vary enormously depending on the amount of rear or side access. If burglars can be stopped from reaching these points an actual attack on the house itself will have been deterred.



It has been said that a 2 metre (6'6") fence all around the back garden will help keep the house secure but, unfortunately, most burglars are quite athletic and such a fence can be scaled. If the fence is topped with 30 to 45cms (12-18") of open-ended or other similarly weak trellising, i.e. that cannot support the weight of a human, the prospective burglar will be unable to climb it without a risk of being seen and physically breaking the trellising. The noise of this alone and the risk of injury is a deterrent in itself.

As an alternative to trellis a plant can be grown along a series of wires stretched between post extensions. All types of perimeter fencing can be softened with the right species of plants thereby reducing what can often be seen as an overly aggressive method to reduce criminal opportunity. Fence toppings can also be given the green finger treatment. For example, barbed wire can be replaced with a climbing rose so long as sufficient supports have been stretched along the top of the fence. If the barbed wire is firmly fixed and not easily removed, you could use this as the support for the plant. Single strands of barbed wire along the top of a fence are fairly easy to overcome requiring a couple of cuts with some wire cutters. A mature rose climbing along and over the top of the wall or fence will offer a far more substantial barrier.

Hedges and shrubs in the front garden should be kept to a height of no more than 3' in order to avoid giving a burglar a screen behind which he can conceal himself. Gravel paths prevent a silent approach and might alert the occupier to somebody's presence.

If you are considering erecting barbed wire or other such fence topping, it must comply with Section 164 of the Highways Act 1980. The general rule to be applied is to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to prevent injury. It must not overhang and must incline inwards.

Gates

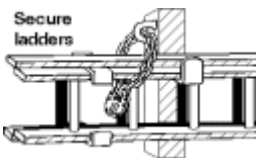
Solid wooden gates offer easy entry for thieves because they are sturdy to climb and tend to be tucked away at the sides of houses. Make these harder to climb by covering the cross members with a panel so there isn't an obvious foothold.

Unlikely though it may sound, wrought iron gates may be a far more effective deterrent. Their ornamental ironwork makes climbing difficult and any intruders can be seen through them. It's always wise to use at least two locks on a gate if possible. For example, on a wooden gate you could use a padlock and hasp at the top plus a barrel bolt near the bottom and in the case of a wrought iron gate, a thick heavy chain with a padlock.

If the burglar can't go over or through the gate, he may decide to try to take it off completely, so it's important to try to prevent this. This can be done by either welding the hinges shut, or positioning the metal pins in each hinge so that they slide in place at different angles to each other.



Precautions



Don't make a burglar's life any easier by leaving gardening tools available to act as the perfect tool with which to force his entry. Always lock them away securely after use. Likewise, do not leave ladders to provide easy access to otherwise inaccessible parts of your house. They should be chained and padlocked to a strong post or wall.

Consider installing a domestic style CCTV camera, linked to your TV/video, to overlook your garden. Not only will it add an extra element of security to your home but it can also offer you the benefit of being able to observe your garden and its wildlife at close quarters from the relative seclusion of your living room. This can be further enhanced by the installation of low pressure sodium lighting within the garden itself, activated by a photo-electric cell, making it both more attractive and secure after dark.

As a word of warning, if you do install a recordable CCTV system, give serious consideration to including a dedicated video recorder securely located within the house; if you connect the cameras to your household video recorder and you have the misfortune to suffer a burglary, not only could the recorder be taken but the recorded evidence with it.

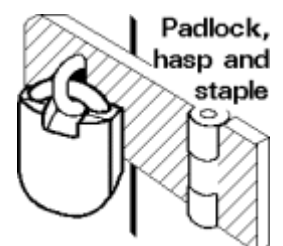
Costly garden furniture and valuable ornaments, such as statues or stone planters, can be further protected by remote movement detectors. These are suitable only for heavy objects which would not be affected by wind or casual vibration. Alternatively, you may prefer to anchor these items to the ground - even valuable plants can be treated in the same way. Hanging baskets are certainly worth protecting; secure or locking brackets are available for this purpose.

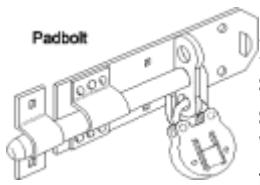
Always property mark your gardening equipment and valuables with your postcode and house number (see the section on Property Marking at the end of this page). In most cases engraving will be the most suitable method.

Garden Sheds



Garden sheds are a very popular target with burglars and are often overlooked when security is being considered. The value of the contents, such as garden mowers, strimmers and cycles etc. can often add up to many hundreds of pounds. It is therefore wise to secure the shed door with at least one heavy duty hasp and closed-shackle padlock.





It may not always be appropriate to fit a heavy duty padlock, hasp and staple as the shed door and frame may not be strong enough to support them. There is a range of smaller but sturdy padlocks, padbolts, hasps and staples which would be suitable. Whether fitting heavy duty devices or otherwise, always use coach-bolt fixings through the door and frame.

All opening windows require good window locks.

In addition to fitting external physical security to your shed, it is worth considering the installation of an alarm. This does not mean a complete burglar alarm system, though, if your house already has such an installation, it may be possible for it to be extended to the shed. There are various stand-alone devices on the market specifically designed for remote use in garages or sheds, which fall into two main categories:

- a passive infra-red detector within the shed to detect movement and body heat
- a door contact system

Both systems will operate a sounder if the shed is accessed without the correct de-activation. They are available with battery or mains power supply and can be purchased from your local locksmiths, D-I-Y or discount store.

The major problem with vulnerable garden sheds is that they provide burglars with an arsenal of house breaking implements, e.g. the versatile garden spade: because of the blade size and the leverage that can be exerted, few door or window locks can withstand a prolonged attack from this implement. If the shed is too fragile to secure adequately, the spade should either be bolted or padlocked to a heavy bench or frame, or, better still, kept in a more secure place such as a locked garage. Alternatively, your tools can be secured by chaining them together.

Consider the use of a strong lockable box or cage within the shed in which you can store not only your garden tools but also insecticides, weed killers or other items which may be harmful to health or plants if improperly used.

Garages

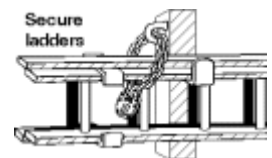
Garages are frequently used for storing not only cars, motor bikes and cycles, but also property similar to those found in garden sheds, as well as DIY power tools and sporting equipment.

Considering the value of the property contained therein, security precautions are often found to be wanting, and for this reason they are identified by burglars as easy targets.

If you already have a burglar alarm system, why not extend it to the garage? Alternatively, there are various stand-alone alarm devices on the market specifically designed for remote use in garages or sheds, which fall into two main categories:

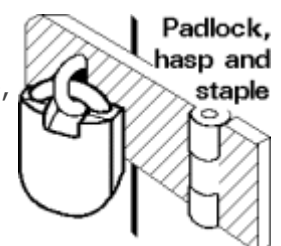
- a passive infra-red detector within the shed to detect movement and body heat
- a door contact system

Both systems will operate a sounder if the garage is accessed without the correct de-activation. They are available with battery or mains power supply and can be purchased from your local locksmiths, D-I-Y or discount store. Ladders should also be chained and padlocked to a strong post or a garage wall.



Wooden Double Leaf Doors

It would be preferable to secure the doors with a heavy duty hasp and staple, coach bolted through the doors, together with a closed shackle padlock.

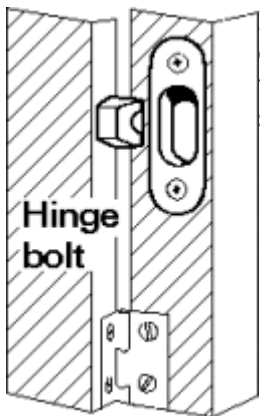


Up and Over Doors

It is probably best not to rely solely on the centre lock provided. If the door is the only means of entry to the garage, it should be fitted with a hasp and staple, together with a padlock as above. There are also mortice locks specially designed for garage doors that close into the side frame. Before fitting, take note of the gap between the door and the frame, as some of the bolts have only a short throw.

If there is another exit/entrance, and the door opens along runners, consider drilling through one of the runners just behind the wheel in the closed position, inserting a long bolt to stop the wheel moving along the runners. If the door operates on a hinged bar and not runners, drill through the side metal frame and pass a padlock through this hole and around the hinged bar to stop the door lifting.

Exit / Entrance Doors



If opening inwards this should be fitted with a 5 lever mortice (deadlock), and, if opening outwards, should additionally be fitted with hinge bolts. If the door is not thick enough to take a mortice lock, it should be fitted with a heavy duty hasp and staple, coach-bolted through the door, together with a closed shackle padlock.

