

Doors & Locks

Locks and doors are your first line of home security as most burglars enter through an existing opening. With locks, perhaps more than with other hardware, you get what you pay for. You shouldn't scrimp when selecting locks, A few dollars up front can prevent a sizable loss later. You want the best quality locks you can afford!

You have security with a lock only when you can account for every key; if you are buying an existing home, pay for a qualified and reputable locksmith to change the keyways and establish good key control from the outset.

Key-in-the knob locksets offer virtually NO security; if your home is equipped with these, they should be replaced. The most secure locks are double-cylinder deadbolts, which require a key to operate from either side. The bolt (the part that extends from the door) should be at least one inch long, and should be hardened steel. The strike (the plate which the bolt sticks into) should be installed with screws long enough to engage the structural stud behind the doorframe (and not just the door frame or trim like many are currently installed); a box strike (one which surrounds the bolt; not just a "plate") is best.

The door should swing in to prevent any attack on the hinges; if code requires a door swing outward, it should be installed on non-removable pin hinges or the hinges should be "pinned" (meaning you remove the screw from opposing positions on both top and bottom hinges, and drive a pin or nail into one of the holes; when the door is closed, this pin engages the matching hole, and holds the door in place even if the hinge pin is removed). Any contractor

can pin hinges (you can probably do it yourself with simple hand tools).

Whether to have double-cylinder deadbolts on a home (if permitted by local fire codes) is largely a safety decision. Double-cylinder deadbolts are those which have no inside thumb-turn, but require a key to open from the interior. While much more secure, they can pose a threat to personal safety in the event of fire. Most law enforcement officials agree that this threat can be minimized by forming the habit of inserting your key(s) in the main entry lockset whenever anyone is home. This enables you to have the security of the double-cylinder deadbolt, but ensure that no one is trapped should a fire or other emergency necessitate evacuation.

The safest locksets are called panic-proof deadbolts; they give you the security provided by a deadbolt but open from the inside with a single action (usually a turn of the knob), thus preventing any entrapment in the event of an emergency. Panic-proof deadbolts are somewhat vulnerable to manipulation from outside if adjacent to a glass panel. Doors should be configured so that any glass panel is at least thirty-six inches from the inside doorknob to prevent manipulation from the outside. If glazing panels must be closer than this, non-breakable glazing should be used (polycarbonate or acrylic panels are available).

If there is a mail slot in the door, it should be removed and the hole patched, or the flap should be secured in place from the inside so that the opening cannot be used as a means through which the lock can be reached and manipulated.

If there is no glazing panel in the front door, or the glazing is not transparent, a door-viewer should be installed. Door viewers are available which give a very wide field of view; the wider the field,

the better for security. Low cost surveillance cameras can also be used and viewed from your living room or bedroom T.V.

Sliding doors are inherently less secure, and should be avoided if possible. Double-door sets incorporating one fixed door and one working door within a sliding door-sized opening are much more secure and give nearly equal light and openness. If sliding doors are already in place, or must be used for some other reason, make certain the sliding panel is inside. If it's outside, you've got a serious security problem, because most can be lifted and removed, and almost all effective security devices for sliding doors rely upon the sliding portion being inside. Have your contractor install screws in the track above the sliding part so it cannot be lifted and tilted out of the frame. Ask for an after-market security device such as a "Charley-Bar", which is a solid bar that latches in place between the sliding panel and the frame. Also install a pin-lock (drill a hole completely through the sliding panel so that a solid metal pin can be inserted and secure the sliding to the fixed panel). Most locks on sliding doors are of poor quality; any device which latches to the frame can often be jostled out of the locked position from the outside. Look instead for a plunger-type lock which operates in the same manner as the pin-lock described above but incorporates a keyed plunger.

French doors, or any paired doors which do not have a center post, are inherently insecure, and should not be used on the exterior of a home. If an existing home has such doors, security can be enhanced by installing heavy-duty vertical bolts to secure the inactive leaf of the set to the threshold and the top jamb, and installing a quality deadbolt on the live leaf to secure it to the inactive one. Comments {above} about hinges apply to these doors.

Auxiliary locks on doors, typically a sliding piece attached by a chain to the door jamb, are not effective security devices, and their use is discouraged, as it tends to create a false sense of security. Almost any adult can force open a door secured only with a chain; proper security is achieved by not opening your door until you are satisfied that you want to admit whomever is outside. Locks are only effective when properly installed in a quality door and jamb assembly. Installing a quality lock on a cheap door is pointless. And installing a lock improperly negates almost all security value. Check to ensure your primary security devices are providing the desired protection!

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