

# Bye-Bye, Burglars

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Home Security Store



## Do-It-Yourself Home Security Systems That Cost Less and Work Great

**J**ust how much home security protection is enough—and how much do you need to pay for it?

Many security companies advertise alarm systems for less than \$100, including installation. But that requires that you sign a multiyear alarm-monitoring contract costing perhaps \$25 to \$35 per month, which promises that the monitors will alert police if the alarm is triggered.

You can avoid that monthly bill by installing your own unmonitored alarm system. Systems just like the ones supplied by security companies can be purchased for less than \$300. Today's wireless technology makes them easy to install without having to drill holes and run wires through your walls.

### IMPROVED SECURITY

While traditional security systems usually alert the security company when they detect a problem, self-installed alarm systems generally call the home owner's cell phone (or some other phone number), then the home owner calls the police. This not only saves the monthly monitoring fee, it often improves home security. The false-alarm rate with professionally monitored alarm systems is so high that busy police departments often make responding to alarm company calls a low priority. The police generally arrive faster when the home owner calls.

Professional alarm monitoring might make sense if you cannot always answer your cell phone quickly...if you feel more secure knowing a professional is monitoring your alarm, including smoke and carbon monoxide

detectors...or if your homeowners insurance provider offers a substantial discount—typically 10% to 20%—for maintaining a professionally monitored security system.

There's no need to pay high security-company monthly rates, even if you want professional monitoring, however. There are companies that will monitor your alarm system for much less if you buy and install it yourself.

**Example:** Alarm Relay, Inc., charges \$8.95 per month for monitoring services with a one-year contract. There is a onetime \$35 start-up fee (800-624-6866, [www.AlarmRelay.com](http://www.AlarmRelay.com)).

### WIRELESS SYSTEMS

A home alarm system should include alarms for both the front and back doors and a motion detector inside the home. Having two motion detectors is even better—most home owners put one in the family room and the other in the master bedroom, the rooms most often targeted by burglars. *Top choices...*

- DSC PowerSeries 9047 wireless alarm kit (888-888-7838, [www.dsc.com](http://www.dsc.com))
- Honeywell Lynx Plus wireless security system (800-323-4576, ▶)

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed Ralph Winn, a 38-year veteran of the security industry and cofounder of the Home Security Store, which sells all major brands of home security products through its Riverside, California, location and its Web site. Prior to founding the Home Security Store, Winn founded and ran Norco Alarms, an alarm-installation company. Prior to that, he worked for Honeywell Security's Government Division and served as a security consultant to foreign governments, including Russia and Ukraine. [www.HomeSecurityStore.com](http://www.HomeSecurityStore.com)



▶▶ [www.Security.Honeywell.com](http://www.Security.Honeywell.com))

- Visonic PowerMax+ wireless home security system ([www.Visonic.com](http://www.Visonic.com))

These all are reliable and sell for around \$200 to \$300 when packaged with two compatible door alarms and one motion detector. Smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and freeze detectors that detect dangerously low temperatures can be sensible add-ons and typically cost less than \$100 apiece.

Alarms that sense when a window is opened may be worthwhile, but most homes have so many windows that adding these at \$30 to \$40 apiece can be expensive. Other types of window alarms identify the sound of glass breaking, but they are effective only if a window is shattered, not jimmied. Unless your home is in a particularly dangerous area or you have high-end valuables that make it a likely target, it's reasonable to skip the window alarms.

#### VIDEO MONITORING



A home alarm system is much more likely to scare away an intruder than to lead to his/her capture. If your goal is to identify trespassers and burglars so that they can be brought to justice or made to pay for damages, you'll also need a video-monitoring system. This captures and stores images of those who venture onto your property so that you can prove to the police or in court which neighborhood teen has been vandalizing cars in your driveway (or which dog has been digging up your garden).

The range and clarity of reasonably priced digital security cameras have improved dramatically in just the past year. A system featuring two high-quality cameras with infrared capabilities to see in the dark, a digital recording device and a view screen can be purchased for around \$400. The digital recorders packaged with these systems typically can be set to record constantly, only when motion is detected or on a specific schedule. Some video systems can send images to your computer or even your cell phone. *Top choices...*

- Lorex (888-425-6739, [www.LorexTechnology.com](http://www.LorexTechnology.com))

- SVAT (866-946-7828, [www.svat.com](http://www.svat.com))

These companies make excellent, affordable security camera systems. For around \$400, you can purchase a kit from either company featuring two cameras capable of crisp night-vision images at up to 40 feet, a digital recording device and an LCD monitor.

#### EVEN LESS EXPENSIVE ITEMS

For less than \$100, it's possible to reduce the odds that a burglar will target your home. Among these low-cost security products...



#### Motion-activated floodlights.

Burglars generally steer clear of homes that light up as they approach. Motion-activated floodlights are widely available for less than \$30, but it's worth paying \$70 to \$80 for solar-powered LED floodlights that don't need to be wired into the electrical system. *Top choice...*

- Maxsa 80 LED solar floodlight sells for about \$75 (703-495-0661, [www.MaxsaInnovations.com](http://www.MaxsaInnovations.com)).

Avoid bargain-basement solar-powered floodlights, which may be dim.



#### Fake TVs.

These produce a flickering colored LED light that effectively replicates the light emitted by a television. One of these should convince anyone lurking outside at night that someone is home, awake and watching TV. It costs just \$30, has a built-in timer and consumes far less electricity than leaving on an actual TV (877-532-5388, [www.FakeTV.com](http://www.FakeTV.com)).



#### Security company yard signs and window decals.

The security industry doesn't like to publicize this, but you can reduce the odds of break-in by perhaps 50% just by posting signs warning that you have an alarm system, even if you don't really have one. *Example...*

- An alarm company yard sign with a solar light and eight window decals are available for \$29.95 on my Web site ([www.HomeSecurityStore.com](http://www.HomeSecurityStore.com)) or by calling 888-501-7870.

#### SECURITY WHEN YOU'RE HOME

Most alarm systems primarily protect property when the home owner is away. Two products that offer effective

security when you are at home...



#### Driveway alarms.

These sound a chime inside the home when someone walks or drives up the driveway, giving the home owner a chance to see who's approaching before the person arrives. *Examples of ones that work well and sell for around \$130...*

- Dakota Alert Wireless Motion Alert 3000 (605-356-2772, [www.DakotaAlert.com](http://www.DakotaAlert.com))

- The Optex Wireless 2000 Annunciator System (909-993-5770, [www.OptexAmerica.com](http://www.OptexAmerica.com))



#### Front-door video/intercom systems.

The intercom allows easy two-way conversation, while the video camera and monitor provide a better view than a peephole could.

*Example:* The Optex iVision wireless two-way video intercom has a portable, handheld monitor so you can see and speak with someone who rings your bell without even walking to the door. It has infrared capabilities so that you can see nighttime guests, and it records pictures of visitors, which you can show to the police later if you become suspicious. It sells for around \$300.

#### UNNECESSARY ADD-ONS

If you have a contract with a security company, it may try to convince you to add services that you may not need. Unless you have tremendously valuable possessions that make you likely to be targeted by professional criminals, a basic system should be sufficient. Two unnecessary add-ons that you might be offered...



#### Cellular service.

This lets your alarm system contact your security monitoring company even if a burglar cuts your phone lines. It typically adds \$10 per month or so to the bill. Most home owners do not require cellular service, because the vast majority of burglars do not cut phone lines.



#### Video surveillance.

If this is something you want, buy and install a wireless system yourself, as discussed above. This will be cheaper than paying your security company an extra \$20 or more per month for video monitoring, and it offers no less security. ■■