

❖ As the nights are starting to draw-in, the most important thing to prevent burglary is to make the home look as if it's occupied. The use of lights on timer switches is recommended, and if you can also put one on a radio tuned to a talk station that will also make it sound like someone is in, and having a conversation. Fake TV lights are now available, which gives the impression that someone is watching television, and these can work really well if you have them in an upstairs bedroom.

❖ Ensure that all doors and windows are closed and properly locked – use a key, don't just lift the door handle. Take the keys out of the door when it's locked and put them somewhere out of sight and reach, but make sure all the residents know where they are kept in case of emergency.

❖ Sheds, garages and outbuildings are popular targets for burglars, so increase the security to these whenever possible. Check that the contents of these places are included on our home and contents insurance.

❖ Register your belongings on the Immobilise property register. If anything lost or stolen is handed to the police you have a good chance of getting your property returned.

❖ Restrict access to the rear of your property wherever possible – lock any side gates leading to the rear – as the back or patio doors are the most popular site of forced entry. Think about growing some thorny bushes along the garden fencing.

❖ Lock away ladders or any tools that could help a burglar, and secure any garden furniture or wheelie bins that can be moved to help gain access to an extension or first floor window.

❖ If you're taking the car with you, ask a neighbour to use your driveway while you are away to make the home look occupied.

❖ Cut the lawn and keep the garden tidy. Long grass suggests that the house is empty or the occupant is unable to look after the garden.

❖ Consider installing a burglar alarm – they are a real deterrent – but get an approved or recommended model, as the cheap ones aren't really that reliable and if the alarm keeps going off your neighbours will soon lose interest and may ignore a real activation.

❖ Don't forget to cancel any milk or newspaper deliveries, and postpone ordering anything that may arrive while you're away.