

## Garden Crime and how to prevent it

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.

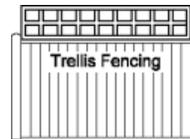
### **Start by looking at your property from the front.**

Avoid hidden areas in your front garden where intruders can lurk unseen by making it as clear and open as possible. 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.

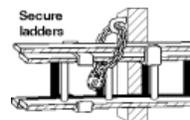
### **The most vulnerable part of the house is at the rear.**

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 can get over such a fence. If the fence is topped with 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. 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. I have included a list of burglar unfriendly plants below.

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. If you have a wheelie bin, this should also be securely chained to a 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.

Always property mark your gardening equipment and valuables with your postcode and house number. In most cases engraving will be the most suitable method.

Take photos of all your valuable garden items and plants.

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.

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.

#### In summary

- Put away all tools and equipment and ensure that all outside sheds and store cupboards are securely locked when not in use.
- Bring the tools inside if you do not have a garden shed or outbuilding.
- Use plant protection - such as thorny shrubs, see plant list below.
- Install outside security lighting which comes on automatically.
- Photograph valuable garden plants or ornaments.
- Mark your property with your postcode. This makes stolen property easier to trace and it can be positively identified as yours.
- Check that your household insurance policy covers theft from your garden and outbuildings.

## Natural plant protection

One of the best ways to keep thieves out is to use nature's own defence mechanisms to stop intruders. A barrier of prickly hedge may be all the protection you need around your property. Here are some suggestions for plants to use.

We have tried to identify the plants mentioned by their correct botanical name, but we cannot guarantee that the plant you buy will not grow into a small, fragrant flowering shrub with no more thorns than a daisy.

### Creeping Juniper

*Juniperis horizontalis* 'Wiltonii' - Also known as 'Blue Rug' because it has long branches and its prostrate shape forms a flattened blue carpet. It has a thorny stem and foliage.

### Blue Spruce

*Picea pungens* 'Globosa' - Rigid branches, irregular dense blue, spiky needles. Height 1-1.25m x 75cm - 1 m. Slow growing. Moist rich soil.

### Common Holly

*Ilex aquifolium* - Large evergreen shrub, dark green spiked leaves. Large red berries on female plants only. Any well drained soil. Plant with garden compost and bone-meal.

### Giant Rhubarb

(*Gunnera manicata*)- Giant rhubarb-like leaves on erect stems, abrasive foliage. Can grow up to 2.5m high. Plant by water-side for effect.

### Golden Bamboo

*Phyllostachys aurea*- Very graceful, forming thick clumps of up to 3.5m high. Less invasive than other bamboos. Hardy. Young shoots in spring.

### Chinese Jujube

*Zizyphus sativa* - Medium sized tree with very spiny pendulous branches. Leaves glossy bright green. Bears clusters of small yellow flowers.

### Firethorn

*Pyracantha* 'Orange Glow' - Flowers white in June, with bright orange-red berries. Thorny stem. Height 10-15ft. Suitable for north or east-facing wall or as impenetrable hedging.

### Shrub Rose

*Rosa* 'Frau Dagmar Hastrup' - Excellent ground cover, pale pink flowers, very thorny stem. May to September. Plant with garden compost and bone-meal.

### Pencil Christmas Tree

*Picea abies* 'Cupressina' - Medium-sized tree of columnar habit, with ascending spiky branches. Attractive form with dense growth. Avoid dry chalky soils.

## **Juniper**

*Juniperus x media* 'Old Gold' - Evergreen. Golden-tipped foliage. Prickly foliage. Height 2ft. Spread 6ft. Low growing. Excellent ground cover.

## **Purple Berberis**

*Berberis thunbergii* 'Atropurpurea' - Rich purple foliage. Thorny stem. Medium-sized deciduous. Any soil sunny position.

## **Mountain Pine**

*Pinus mugo* 'Mughus' - A very hardy, large shrub or small tree, with long sharp needles, of dense, bushy habit. Leaves in pairs, 3 - 4cm long, rigid and curved, dark green, cone.

## **Blue Pine**

*Picea pungens* 'Hoopsii' - Small to medium-sized tree, spiky needled stem, densely conical habit, with vividly glaucous blue leaves. Likes moist, rich soil.

## **Oleaster**

*Elaeagnus angustifolia* - Small deciduous tree, about 4.5 to 6 m (15 to 20 feet) high. Smooth, dark brown branches that often bear spines and narrow, light green leaves that are silvery on the undersides. The flowers are small, greenish, fragrant, and silvery-scaled on the outside, as are the edible, olive-shaped, yellowish fruits, which are sweet but mealy. Hardy, wind resistant, tolerant of poor, dry sites, and thus useful in windbreak hedges.

## **Blackthorn**

*Prunus spinosa* - Also called Sloe; spiny shrub. Usually grows less than 3.6 metres (12 feet) tall and has numerous, small leaves. Its dense growth makes it suitable for hedges. White flowers. Bluish-black fruit is used to flavour sloe gin.

## **Fuschia-flowered Gooseberry**

*Ribes speciosum* - Fruit bush, spiny, produces greenish to greenish-pink flowers in clusters of two or three. Extremely hardy, thrive in moist, heavy clay soil in cool, humid climate.

In addition, the following thorny plants can also be considered:

*Aralia*, *Chaenomeles*, *Colletia*, *Crataegus* (including hawthorn/may), *Hippophae* (sea buckthorn), *Maclura*, *Mahonia*, *Oplonanax*, *Osmanthus*, *Poncirus*, *Rhamnus*, *Rosa* (climbing & shrub roses), *Rubus* (bramble), *Smilax*

Although they will take some time to grow, the end result justifies the effort. They should deter even the most determined burglar