

Home Getaway Checklist

Here are a few simple but effective ways to help safeguard what's probably your most valuable possession: your (temporarily vacant) home.

That lived-in look (and sound)

An obviously unoccupied residence is like hanging a "Come on in!" sign for burglars. As any home security expert will tell you, the last thing an intruder wants to encounter is people, so giving the appearance of activity may help prevent a break-in.

- Use the "away" mode for Amazon's Alexa Bluetooth speaker, or set a multiroom streaming audio system such as Sonos on a timer to play music, talk radio or news programming for several hours each evening.
- Leave a couple of lamps—located in different areas of the house and visible from outside—plugged into timers that activate them at dusk and turn them off several hours later.
- Use dusk/dawn or motion-activated flood lights, especially near exterior doors.
- Stop newspaper and mail delivery—or ask a trusted neighbor to pick them up daily. That same person can also check your porch for packages and take your trashcans to the curb at least once while you're gone.
- If you have a garage, clear the clutter and use the space as intended. There's no reason to leave your car in the driveway or on the street, where it's more vulnerable to thieves or vandals.
- Ask neighbors to park in your driveway at different times of the day to simulate comings and goings.
- Keep your lawn maintained; have it cut as always, whether by a neighbor or a yard service.

Water, power

Running appliances while you're gone is not only a needless expense, but it can also lead to costly problems. Take these steps to avoid an appliance breakdown when no one is home to react:

- Unplug small appliances and electronic devices (exception for music-streaming gear, including devices and WiFi).
- Switch the water heater to its money-saving "vacation" mode.
- Shut off water valves to the dishwasher, washing machine, and all sinks and toilets.
- Set your thermostat closer to outside temperatures (warmer than usual in summer, cooler than normal in winter) but without endangering pets, plants and furnishings.

General prep

- Alert your credit card and home security companies that you'll be out of town for an extended period. Also let your bank know where you're going so they don't suspect suspicious activity with your financial accounts.
- Make sure your smoke detectors work properly and have fresh batteries.
- Leave your emergency contact information with a neighbor.

Finally, here's a trio of kitchen-related tips:

- Dispose of any food that could spoil before you return.
- Empty the trash so nothing stinks while you're away.
- Refresh your garbage disposal by running it with a half cup of vinegar and plenty of cold water.

