



Keeping an Eye on the House While You're Away

Peace of Mind Away Cameras, smart plugs and a mail hold while you are on your trip

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1600** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1. The Whole Idea in One Glance

If you remember only this page, you will still get most of the benefit.

Keeping an eye on the house while you travel comes down to a few easy pieces. A camera or two lets you check in from your phone. Smart plugs and lights on a schedule make the house look lived-in. Holding your mail and packages keeps a pile from forming at the door. And a trusted neighbor with a key ties it all together.

- A doorbell or indoor camera lets you see the house from your phone
- Smart plugs and lights on a schedule make the place look occupied
- Put your mail on hold with the Post Office so nothing piles up
- Ask a trusted neighbor to keep an eye out and hold a key
- Set it all up at home before you leave, while it is easy

GOOD TO KNOW

You do not need a fancy alarm system to feel secure. A single doorbell camera and a couple of smart plugs cover most of what travelers worry about, for a modest cost.

WHY IT HELPS

2. Why a Little Setup Brings Big Peace of Mind

The worry of an empty house can quietly spoil a good trip. You wonder about the packages on the step, the dark windows every evening, and whether everything is all right. A small amount of setup turns all that wondering into simply looking at your phone and seeing for yourself.

None of this is about living in fear. It is about the ordinary comfort of knowing your home looks lived-in, your mail is handled, and you can glance at the front door any time you like. That comfort lets you actually enjoy being away.

GOOD TO KNOW

Start small. One camera at the front door and a hold on your mail already covers the two things most travelers fret about. You can always add more later.

WHAT YOU NEED

3. What You Need to Get Started

The tools are affordable and widely sold, at electronics stores, warehouse clubs, hardware stores, and online. You almost certainly already have the most important piece: a smartphone and home Wi-Fi. Everything else connects to those.

- Home Wi-Fi, since the cameras and plugs connect through it
- A smartphone to see the cameras and control the plugs
- A camera or doorbell camera, if you want to see the house
- Smart plugs or smart bulbs, if you want lights on a schedule

GOOD TO KNOW

Because all of this leans on your home Wi-Fi, a reliable internet connection is the foundation. If your Wi-Fi is spotty, that is worth sorting out first.

HOW CAMERAS WORK

4. How a Home Camera Lets You Watch From Afar

A home security camera is a small camera that connects to your home Wi-Fi. It sends its video over the internet to an app on your phone, so you can open that app from anywhere, a hotel, a cruise ship, or your daughter's kitchen, and see a live view of your home. It is the same idea as a video call, except the camera is always there, ready when you want to look.

Most cameras also watch for movement. When something moves in view, the camera sends a little alert to your phone and saves a short clip, so you can check what it was even if you missed it live.

WATCH OUT

You do not have to sit and stare at the camera all day. It quietly watches for you and taps you on the shoulder, through your phone, only when something happens.

TYPES OF CAMERAS

5. The Main Kinds of Cameras

There are three common types, and each has a clear job. You do not need all three. Most travelers pick one or two that match what they want to watch.

- Doorbell camera: replaces your doorbell and watches the front step and anyone who approaches
- Outdoor camera: mounts outside to watch a driveway, yard, or back door
- Indoor camera: sits on a shelf to watch inside, a living room or a pet

GOOD TO KNOW

The doorbell camera is the most popular first choice. It covers the busiest spot, your front door, and doubles as a regular doorbell when you are home.

DOORBELL CAMERAS

6. The Doorbell Camera, a Great First Step

A doorbell camera takes the place of your regular doorbell button. When someone presses it, or simply walks up, you get an alert on your phone and can see and even speak to the person through the camera, wherever you are. For a traveler, this means you can watch packages arrive and see anyone who comes to the door.

- See and talk to anyone at your door from your phone
- Get an alert when a package is dropped off
- Some run on a battery, others wire into your old doorbell
- Video of each visit is saved so you can look back

WATCH OUT

A battery doorbell camera is the easiest to install, with no wiring. If you already have a wired doorbell, a wired model never needs charging. Either works well for a trip.

INDOOR CAMERAS

7. Indoor Cameras and a Word on Privacy

An indoor camera sits on a shelf or counter and watches a room inside your home. Travelers use them to check on a pet, a plant being watered by a neighbor, or simply to confirm all is quiet inside. They are inexpensive and easy to set up.

Because an indoor camera watches inside your home, it is worth a thought about privacy. Point it only where you truly want to watch, and be mindful of a camera that could see a neighbor or a caregiver who comes in. When you are home, many people simply unplug the indoor camera or turn it off in the app.

WATCH OUT

Never point an indoor camera into a bedroom or bathroom, and tell anyone who stays in your home, like a house-sitter, that a camera is present. It is both courteous and, in some places, required.

THE BIG BRANDS

8. The Camera Brands You Will See Most

A handful of brands cover most home cameras, and they are sold nearly everywhere. You do not need to study a dozen names. Each makes doorbell, indoor, and outdoor models that work much the same way through their own free app.

- Ring and Blink, both widely sold and easy to set up
- Wyze, known for low-cost cameras
- Eufy, which leans on storing video on a local base rather than only the cloud
- Google Nest, which ties in with Google accounts and speakers

Prices change often, so I will not quote exact numbers that go stale. As a rough guide, a simple indoor camera can cost about as much as a nice dinner out, and a doorbell camera a bit more. Always confirm the current price before you buy.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

9. The Monthly Fee Question

Here is something to know before you buy. Many camera brands offer a monthly subscription, and some features, especially saving your video clips in the cloud, may need it. A camera without the plan often still shows you a live view and sends alerts, but may not keep older recordings for you to look back on.

- Live view and basic alerts often work without any plan
- Saving and reviewing past clips usually needs a monthly plan
- Plans are typically a few dollars a month per camera or household
- Some brands let you save video locally instead, avoiding a fee

WATCH OUT

Decide whether you want saved video before you buy, and check what the plan costs. A cheap camera with a required monthly fee can cost more over a year than a pricier one without a fee.

SETTING UP A CAMERA

10. Setting Up a Camera, Step by Step

Setup is gentler than people expect. Each brand walks you through it in its own free app, and it usually takes about fifteen minutes for your first camera. Do it at home, on your Wi-Fi, well before your trip.

- 1 Download the brand's free app and create an account
- 2 Plug in or charge the camera as the app directs
- 3 In the app, choose to add a device and follow the prompts
- 4 Give the camera your Wi-Fi name and password when asked
- 5 Name the camera, like Front Door, and place or mount it

TIP

Set the camera up a few days before you leave, not the night before. That gives you time to make sure the alerts work and the view is pointed the way you want.

SMART PLUGS

11. Smart Plugs Make a House Look Lived-In

A smart plug is a small adapter that goes between the wall outlet and a lamp or appliance. Once it is set up, you can turn whatever is plugged into it on and off from your phone, or set it to turn on and off by itself on a schedule. For a traveler, this is how you make an empty house look occupied in the evenings.

Plug a living room lamp into a smart plug, set it to come on at dusk and off at bedtime, and from the street your house looks exactly as it does when you are home. A dark house every night is the clearest sign nobody is there.

GOOD TO KNOW

Smart plugs work with ordinary lamps you already own. There is nothing to replace; the plug simply sits between the lamp and the wall and does the switching for you.

SMART BULBS

12. Smart Bulbs, Another Way to Light Up

A smart bulb is a light bulb that screws into a normal socket but connects to your Wi-Fi, so you can control it from your phone or put it on a schedule, just like a smart plug. The difference is that the bulb itself is smart, rather than the outlet. Either approach works for making a house look lived-in.

- A smart bulb screws into any normal lamp or fixture socket
- You control it from an app or set it on a schedule
- Good for a ceiling fixture that has no plug to use
- A smart plug is simpler for a regular table or floor lamp

TIP

For a lamp, a smart plug is the easiest choice. For a ceiling light or a fixture with no outlet nearby, a smart bulb does the same job from the socket.

SETTING A SCHEDULE

13. Putting Lights on a Schedule

The real magic for a traveler is the schedule, which tells a light to turn itself on and off at set times every day while you are gone. You set it once in the app, and it runs on its own until you turn it off. Most apps even let you tie the times to sunset, so the lights follow the real evening.

- 1 Open the smart plug or bulb's app
- 2 Find the device and choose Schedule
- 3 Add an on time, such as at sunset, and an off time, such as bedtime
- 4 Choose which days it should repeat, usually every day
- 5 Save it, and the light now runs itself

GOOD TO KNOW

Many apps, such as the Kasa app for TP-Link plugs, let you set a light to turn on at sunset automatically, so it adjusts as the days get longer or shorter. You set it once and forget it.

THE LIVED-IN LOOK

14. Making the House Look Truly Occupied

A single lamp blinking on at the same minute every night can look a little mechanical. A few small touches make the lived-in look more convincing, so your home blends in with the neighbors' instead of standing out as the dark one.

- Put two or three lights on slightly different schedules, not all at once
- Vary the times a little if the app offers a random or away mode
- Light more than one room, like a living room and a bedroom
- A radio or TV on a smart plug adds sound and a flickering glow

TIP

Some apps offer an Away or Vacation mode that turns lights on and off at slightly random times, mimicking how a real person moves around the house. If yours has it, turn it on.

CHECKING IN

15. Checking In From Wherever You Are

The whole point of this setup is that you can check on home from anywhere with an internet connection. From a hotel room, you open the camera app and see your front door live. You can confirm the lights came on, see that a package arrived, and simply reassure yourself that all is well.

- Open the camera app for a live look at any time
- Scroll back through saved clips to see what happened earlier
- Open the plug app to check or change your lights
- All of it works over hotel Wi-Fi or your phone's data

GOOD TO KNOW

You can check in as often or as little as you like. Some people glance once a day; others look only when an alert comes. There is no wrong amount; it is whatever eases your mind.

NOTIFICATIONS

16. Letting the House Tap You on the Shoulder

Rather than checking constantly, you can let the cameras notify you only when something happens. A notification is a little message that pops up on your phone, the same way a text does. When the doorbell camera sees someone, or a motion camera spots movement, a notification arrives and you can look right away.

- A notification pops up when the camera sees motion or a visitor
- Tap it to jump straight to the live view or the clip
- You can usually adjust how sensitive the alerts are
- Turn off alerts for a camera if it is sending too many

WATCH OUT

A camera pointed at a busy street or a tree may send a flood of alerts for passing cars and blowing branches. Aim it carefully and adjust the motion zones so it only watches what matters.

HOLDING YOUR MAIL

17. Stopping the Mail From Piling Up

An overflowing mailbox is one of the clearest signs that nobody is home. The United States Postal Service offers a free service called Hold Mail, which simply stops your mail delivery while you are away and holds it safely at the Post Office until you return. You can request it online in a few minutes.

- Hold Mail pauses your delivery for 3 to 30 days
- Your mail is kept safe at the Post Office
- You can request it up to 30 days ahead, or as soon as the next delivery day
- It is free, and you pick it up or have it delivered when you return

GOOD TO KNOW

Hold Mail covers only mail carried by the Postal Service. Packages from UPS or FedEx are separate, so you will need to handle those another way, as the next pages explain.

HOLD MAIL STEPS

18. Requesting a Mail Hold Online

Setting up a hold is done on the Postal Service website, usps.com. You create a free account, confirm it is really you, and choose your dates. The first time you prove your identity, you will not have to do it again from the same address.

- 1 Go to usps.com and sign in, or create a free account
- 2 Find Hold Mail under the Manage or Track and Manage menu
- 3 Confirm your identity if it is your first time
- 4 Choose the start date and the date you want delivery to resume
- 5 Submit the request and note your confirmation number

TIP

Request your hold a few days before you leave, not at the last minute. The start date must be set by early morning on the day you want it to begin.

INFORMED DELIVERY

19. Seeing Your Mail Before It Arrives

The Postal Service offers another free feature called Informed Delivery. Once you sign up, it emails you a photo each morning of the letter-sized mail that is on its way to your mailbox that day. For a traveler, this means you can see what mail is coming even while you are away, and notice if something important is on its way.

- A daily email shows photos of the mail coming to your box
- It is free and signed up for at usps.com
- You see your mail even while traveling
- It also lets you track packages coming through the Postal Service

GOOD TO KNOW

Informed Delivery and Hold Mail work together. You can hold your mail while away and still get the daily preview email, so you know exactly what is waiting when you get home.

PACKAGES

20. Handling Packages While You Are Gone

Packages are a bigger worry than letters, because a parcel left on the step is both a theft risk and an obvious sign of an empty house. The simplest answer is to avoid having anything delivered while you are away. If something must come, there are good ways to keep it safe.

- Delay any online orders until after you return
- Have packages held at the carrier's location for pickup
- Send parcels to a trusted neighbor or family member instead
- Ask a neighbor to bring in anything that does arrive

TIP

Most carriers let you ask for a package to be held at their facility or redirected. Look for Hold at Location or a vacation option in the carrier's app or website before you order.

A TRUSTED NEIGHBOR

21. Who to Give a Key To

No camera replaces a trusted human being who can walk over and check. A good neighbor, a nearby family member, or a close friend is the single most valuable part of watching a house. They can bring in a stray package, move the trash cans, and step inside if an alert ever looks serious.

- Choose someone reliable who lives close by
- Give them a key and your travel dates
- Tell them how to reach you and who to call in an emergency
- Let them know a camera is present so nothing surprises them

GOOD TO KNOW

Give a key to someone you trust completely, not left under a mat where anyone could find it. A hidden key by the door is the first place a would-be intruder looks.

SHARING ACCESS

22. Letting a Family Member See the Cameras Too

You do not have to be the only one watching. Most camera apps let you share access with a family member, so your son or daughter can see the cameras on their own phone and help keep an eye out. This is a comfort if you would rather not be glued to the app on your trip.

- 1 Open your camera app and find the sharing or family settings
- 2 Invite your family member by their email or phone
- 3 They download the same app and accept the invitation
- 4 They can now see the cameras from their own phone

TIP

Sharing with an adult child is a gentle way to split the worry. They can glance at the door while you relax, and call you only if something truly needs your attention.

NIGHT VISION

23. Seeing in the Dark

Almost all home cameras can see in the dark, using what is called night vision. The picture turns black and white, but you can still make out a person, a car, or a package on the step in the middle of the night. This matters, because the hours you most want to watch are often the dark ones.

You do not have to turn this on; cameras switch to night vision on their own when it gets dark and switch back in daylight. Some also have a built-in spotlight that comes on when they sense motion, which both helps you see and can discourage a prowler.

GOOD TO KNOW

A camera with a motion-activated light does double duty: it lights the way for you and anyone welcome, and the sudden light often sends an unwelcome visitor on their way.

WHERE TO PLACE

24. Where to Put Your Cameras

A camera only helps if it watches the right spot. For most homes, the front door and the main approach cover the most ground. Think about where a person would actually come, and point the camera there, high enough that it is not easily reached.

- Front door: the busiest and most important view
- Driveway or garage: to see vehicles and the side approach
- Back door or patio: a common quieter way in
- Mount cameras up high, angled down, out of easy reach

WATCH OUT

Be thoughtful about aiming a camera where it stares into a neighbor's window or yard. Keep the view on your own property to respect their privacy, and in some places to stay within the rules.

WIFI AND POWER

25. Keeping Cameras Online While You Travel

Your cameras lean on two things staying up: your home Wi-Fi and your electricity. If either goes down while you are away, the cameras go dark until it comes back. There is nothing to fear here, but a little forethought keeps them running.

- Make sure the camera has a strong Wi-Fi signal where it is placed
- Charge any battery cameras fully before you leave
- A plugged-in camera will not die, but will go off in a power cut
- A brief internet or power blip usually fixes itself when it returns

TIP

A battery doorbell camera placed far from the router may drop off. Before your trip, stand where the camera is and check that your phone gets a good Wi-Fi signal there.

ALARMS AND SENSORS

26. A Word on Fuller Alarm Systems

Beyond cameras and plugs, there are fuller home security systems with door and window sensors, motion detectors, and a loud alarm, often with a company that calls for help. These offer more, and some travelers like the added coverage. They also cost more and usually carry a monthly monitoring fee.

You do not need a full alarm system to watch a house for a trip. A camera and good habits cover most people. But if you want the extra layer, especially for longer absences, a monitored system is worth considering.

GOOD TO KNOW

Even a simple sticker or yard sign saying a home is monitored can give a would-be intruder pause. The goal is to make your house a less tempting target than the next one.

WATER AND SMOKE

27. Watching for Trouble Inside

Not every home worry is a person at the door. A burst pipe or a failing furnace can do real damage to an empty house over a long trip. Inexpensive smart sensors can watch for these and alert your phone, so a small problem does not become a flood or a freeze while you are gone.

- A water leak sensor placed by the water heater or under a sink
- A smart smoke and carbon monoxide alarm that alerts your phone
- A smart thermostat that warns if the house gets too cold
- All of these send an alert so a neighbor can step in

TIP

In an Ohio winter, a leak or heat sensor earns its keep. It can warn you of a cold house before the pipes freeze, giving a neighbor time to act.

PRIVACY REALITIES

28. Being Honest About Privacy

It is worth being level-headed about privacy. These cameras send video over the internet to the maker's servers, and over the years there have been stories, with various brands, of flaws or of staff access to footage. This is not a reason to avoid cameras, but it is a reason to use them thoughtfully and protect your account well.

- Choose a well-known brand that takes security seriously
- Protect your account with a strong password and two-step login
- Point cameras only where you truly need to watch
- If you prefer, a brand that stores video locally keeps less in the cloud

WATCH OUT

The account that controls your cameras is the keys to the kingdom. Use a strong, unique password and turn on the free two-step login, so no one but you can see your home.

SECURING ACCOUNTS

29. Locking Down Your Camera Account

Because your camera account is so important, it deserves a little care. The two best things you can do cost nothing and take only a few minutes: a strong password that you use nowhere else, and two-step login, which asks for a one-time code in addition to your password.

- 1 In the camera app, open the account or security settings
- 2 Set a strong, unique password just for this account
- 3 Turn on two-step verification, also called two-factor
- 4 Save your recovery details somewhere safe at home

TIP

A password you can read off a card, like a phrase such as Sophie-1987, is both strong and easy to use. The point is that it is long and used only for this one account.

OLD-FASHIONED HABITS

30. The Low-Tech Steps That Still Matter Most

The fanciest camera cannot replace a few old-fashioned habits that have protected homes for generations. These cost nothing and make the biggest difference of all. Do these first, and let the technology add to them.

- Lock every door and window, including the garage
- Stop the newspaper as well as the mail
- Arrange for the lawn to be mowed or snow to be cleared
- Do not announce your trip to the whole world on social media

WATCH OUT

Posting your vacation plans or photos publicly while you are away quietly tells everyone your house is empty. Share the trip with friends and family after you are safely home, or keep posts private.

A LIGHT TIMER

31. The Simple Timer, No Wi-Fi Needed

If all the apps and accounts feel like too much, there is a wonderfully simple option that has worked for decades: a plain plug-in timer. It is a mechanical or basic digital timer that sits between the lamp and the wall and turns the light on and off at set times, with no Wi-Fi and no phone required.

You lose the ability to check or change it from afar, but you gain simplicity and reliability. A timer does not care if your internet goes down. For someone who just wants the lights to come on each evening, it is hard to beat.

TIP

A basic timer costs only a few dollars at any hardware store. It is a fine choice if you want the lived-in look without setting up an app or an account.

TESTING AHEAD

32. Testing Everything Before You Leave

A day or two before your trip, do a dress rehearsal. This is the single best way to avoid discovering a problem once you are a thousand miles away and cannot fix it. It takes only a few minutes and buys real peace of mind.

- 1 Open the camera app and confirm you see a live view
- 2 Walk in front of each camera and check the alert reaches your phone
- 3 Watch the lights turn on and off at their scheduled time
- 4 Confirm your mail hold shows the right dates
- 5 Make sure your neighbor has a key and your dates

GOOD TO KNOW

Test the cameras over your phone's cellular data, not just your home Wi-Fi, by turning Wi-Fi off on your phone. That proves they will work when you are truly away from home.

WHILE YOU ARE AWAY

33. A Gentle Routine on the Road

Once you are traveling, the system looks after itself. You do not need to hover over your phone. A light, relaxed routine is all it takes to stay reassured without letting the house chores follow you on vacation.

- Glance at the camera once a day if it eases your mind
- Respond to any alert that looks like it matters
- Leave the routine ones, like a passing car, alone
- Call your neighbor if anything ever looks truly wrong

TIP

Decide before you leave how much you want to check. Some people look once each morning with coffee; others only when an alert arrives. Pick what calms you, and then enjoy your trip.

COMING HOME

34. Easing Back In When You Return

Coming home has its own small list. A few minutes of tidying up puts everything back to normal and gets your mail flowing again. It is the gentle close to the whole routine.

- Release or collect your held mail so delivery resumes
- Turn off any away or vacation light schedules you set
- Decide whether to keep indoor cameras on now that you are home
- Thank your neighbor and retrieve your key

GOOD TO KNOW

Your held mail does not restart on its own if you chose to pick it up. Collect it or confirm the resume date so a backlog does not sit at the Post Office.

COMMON WORRIES

35. The Questions Travelers Ask Me Most

A few worries come up again and again, and the answers are reassuring.

- Do cameras work when I am far away? Yes, over any internet connection
- Can someone else see my cameras? Only people you share access with
- Is holding my mail free? Yes, the Postal Service offers it at no charge
- What if my Wi-Fi goes out? The cameras resume on their own when it returns

GOOD TO KNOW

The most common mistake is setting everything up the night before and never testing it. Give yourself a few days, test it, and leave on your trip with confidence.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

36. You Do Not Need All of It

It is easy to look at all these options and feel you must do everything. You do not. The best setup is the one you will actually use and understand. For many travelers, three simple things cover the worry entirely.

- One doorbell camera at the front door
- A couple of lights on a schedule or a plain timer
- A hold on your mail and a trusted neighbor with a key
- Add cameras or sensors only if you truly want more

TIP

Start with those three basics on your first trip. Once they feel easy, you can add more. A simple setup you trust beats a complicated one you are unsure about.

YOUR CHECKLIST

37. Your Pre-Trip Home Checklist

Run through this list a few days before you leave and your home is well looked after.

- Camera set up, tested, and alerts reaching your phone
- Lights on a schedule or a timer, and confirmed working
- Mail placed on hold with the Postal Service
- Packages delayed or redirected
- Doors and windows locked, including the garage
- A trusted neighbor has a key, your dates, and your number

GOOD TO KNOW

Do the setup and testing calmly at home, not in the rush before you leave. A little time in advance is what turns worry into peace of mind.

TWO-WAY TALK

38. Speaking Through the Camera

Most doorbell and many indoor cameras have what is called two-way talk, which means you can both hear and speak through the camera from your phone. A delivery driver rings, and from your hotel you can say, 'Please leave it behind the planter,' as if you were standing right there. It is a simple feature that does a lot.

- Hear what is happening and speak back through your phone
- Direct a delivery or greet an expected visitor from afar
- A voice from the doorbell often sends an unwelcome visitor off
- Tap the microphone button in the app to talk

TIP

Practice the two-way talk once before you leave, so you know where the microphone button is. Fumbling for it while someone waits at the door is no fun.

A PET AT HOME

39. Checking On a Pet or a Sitter

If a pet stays home with a visiting sitter, an indoor camera lets you peek in and see that your cat or dog is comfortable and the sitter has come by. It is a gentle reassurance, not a way to spy. Many people find it eases the worry of leaving a beloved animal behind.

The key is to be open about it. Tell the sitter the camera is there and what it watches. A camera aimed at the pet's food and water area, rather than following a person around the house, keeps the focus where it belongs and respects the sitter.

WATCH OUT

Always tell a pet sitter or house-sitter that a camera is present, and point it at the pet, not at where the person sleeps or changes. It is both courteous and, in many places, the law.

THE GARAGE

40. Watching the Garage Door

An open garage door is an easy thing to forget in the rush of leaving, and an open garage is an invitation. Smart garage door controllers let you see whether the door is open or closed from your phone, and close it from anywhere if you left it up. Some will even alert you if it opens while you are away.

- See if the garage door is open or closed from your phone
- Close it remotely if you left it open
- Get an alert if it opens unexpectedly while you are gone
- It attaches to most existing garage door openers

GOOD TO KNOW

If a smart garage controller feels like too much, a camera pointed at the garage gives you the same reassurance, letting you confirm the door is down before you drive to the airport.

VOICE ASSISTANTS

41. Letting a Smart Speaker Help

If you have a smart speaker, like an Amazon Echo or a Google Nest speaker, it can tie your lights and cameras together and even play a part in the lived-in look. A speaker left at home can be set to play the radio on a schedule, adding sound to an empty house, and it can control your lights with the camera system.

- A smart speaker can control compatible lights and plugs on a schedule
- It can play radio or music to add sound while you are away
- Many cameras show their view on a speaker with a screen
- It is a nice extra, not a requirement, for watching a house

WATCH OUT

Do not feel you must connect everything to a speaker. If you already have one and like it, it is a handy hub. If not, your camera and plug apps do the job on their own.

SEASONAL WORRIES

42. Longer Trips and the Seasons

The length and season of your trip change what matters. A weekend away needs little more than a locked door and a held mail. A month in the winter, with an Ohio freeze possible, calls for more thought about heat, pipes, and someone checking in person every so often.

- For a long winter trip, keep the heat on enough to prevent frozen pipes
- A smart thermostat lets you watch and adjust the temperature from afar
- Arrange for snow to be cleared so the driveway does not sit unshoveled
- Have a neighbor walk through the inside now and then on a long trip

WATCH OUT

Turning the heat off entirely in an Ohio winter risks frozen, burst pipes. Set it low but safe, and a smart thermostat lets you check from your phone that the house has not gotten too cold.

WHAT NOT TO EXPECT

43. Being Realistic About What It Does

It is worth being honest about the limits so you are never disappointed. A camera does not stop a break-in; it records one and alerts you. Smart lights do not guarantee no one tries the door; they make your house a less obvious target. The goal is to deter, to notice, and to respond, not to build a fortress.

- A camera records and alerts, but cannot physically stop anyone
- Lights and the lived-in look deter, they do not guarantee
- You still rely on locks, a neighbor, and good sense
- The real payoff is noticing early and responding calmly

GOOD TO KNOW

Set your expectations right and this all becomes a quiet source of calm. You will almost always know your house is fine, and that is most of what travelers worry about.

WHEN TO CALL

44. When It Is Worth Calling Me

Many people set up a camera or a smart plug themselves once they have seen how. But if the app will not connect, if you are not sure which camera fits your home, or if you would simply rather have someone set it all up and show you how to check it, that is exactly what I am here for. Bill's Home Tech serves Portage County, and a first in-home visit is a flat \$99.

TIP

Call me at (330) 200-8042 or ask Sophie, my phone helper. I can set up your cameras and lights, put your mail on hold with you, and show you how to check on home from your phone, so you can travel with a calm mind.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy before your trip. It is the short answer to the questions travelers ask most about watching the house while away.

- Set up a doorbell or indoor camera to check in from your phone
- Put a couple of lights on a schedule or a plain timer
- Hold your mail free at usps.com, for 3 to 30 days
- Sign up for Informed Delivery to see your mail each morning
- Delay or redirect packages so none sit on the step
- Give a key to a trusted neighbor, never leave one under the mat
- Protect your camera account with a strong password and two-step login
- Lock every door and window, and keep trip posts private until home
- Get help: call Bill at (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Three Layers of Peace of Mind

Each one covers a different worry.

See It

Doorbell or indoor camera
Live view on your phone
Alerts when motion happens

Lived-In Look

Smart plugs and lights
On a daily schedule
House looks occupied

No Pile-Up

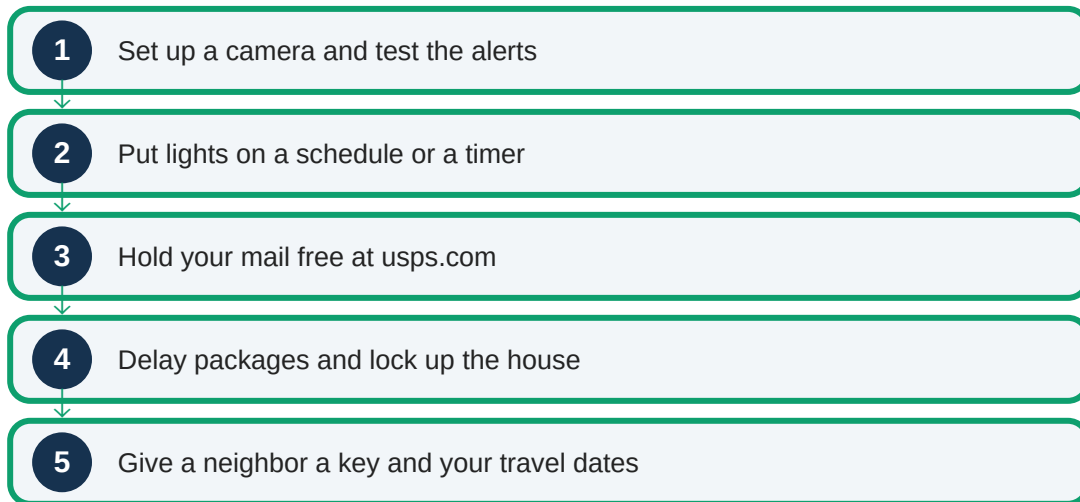
Hold mail at Post Office
Redirect packages
Neighbor holds a key

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Getting the House Trip-Ready

A calm order to set things up before you go.



BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.