



HOME SECURITY

Monitoring your home

Our homes really are our castles. We don't need a moat keeping unwanted visitors away, but we do want to always feel safe and secure. It's never been easier to monitor every inch of our property, inside and outside, and access the security system from just about anywhere as part of a whole-home control setup.

Like other video products, security cameras have evolved in recent years. You might not be able to record every movement in high definition, but with today's models you can capture quality video in bright- or low-light conditions, in black and white or in color. Cameras can be low profile to blend in with your home's exterior, mounted to walls or placed on stands, or wireless for simpler installations.

Digitalization of security video has helped expand the viewing options, so we can keep a close eye on our homes while we're away from them. Hours and hours of video can be stored on digital video recorders (DVRs), which can be

fed into your networked PC or distributed video system. You can play back the recorded video on a computer monitor, any TV in your house or your wall-mounted and handheld LCD touchscreen. Internet-based security video products even allow you to watch streaming or recorded images from web browsers and cell phones.

Make sure to tie the security products into your home control system. A professional electronics installer can link and customize controls to make the video retrieval process as simple as touching a button or two. You can even view split or quad screens from your security cameras or door stations simultaneously on the kitchen TV, for example. For your gate and other entryway accesses, you can have customized codes programmed that allow certain visitors to come and go in your home for specific spans of time, such as housekeepers or pet-sitters when you are on vacation. If there's an emergency or dilemma in the home while you are out, some systems will

By connecting your surveillance camera to a modular, you can view images (even several images) on the screen of any TV in your house. If your camera will be mounted outside, make sure it'll be able to see in the dark and withstand the elements.

Photos courtesy of Channel Vision

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SECURITY: THE COMPONENTS

CAMERAS

Security cameras can provide video feeds to you day or night, in color or black and white. They come in many shapes and sizes to be as covert or noticeable as you wish.

INTERCOM CONSOLE

This will let you talk to, and perhaps see, who is ringing your doorbell or driving up to your gate. Two-way intercoms allow you to talk and listen; video intercoms can show who is there on a wall-mounted console or touchpanel.

DVR

A digital video recorder works for your security system as it would for your cable and satellite TV, saving hours of digitized video for you to peruse on your own schedule. Networked DVRs will let you view recordings on any web browser.

MOTION DETECTORS

These can be placed on drive-ways, pathways and entrances to trigger lighting so you're not coming home to a dark house, as well as to deter intruders. Some detectors can also send alerts to the homeowner, alarm company and police.

shoot a voice message or email alert to you, your installer and the alarm company. Some cameras can send a message and video clip to your email whenever a motion detector goes off.

Comprehensive intercom, paging and door access systems should also be included in your security package. A camera at the door will let you see who's ringing, and to ensure that you can actually hear the doorbell while you're sitting in your home theater or listening to tunes by the pool, smart systems can override music playing in a distributed audio system. A home systems contractor might also be able to make lights flicker in your darkened home theater to alert you to someone at the door or front gate, and you can then conveniently grab your wireless touchpanel to see who it is and maybe even let the person in. If the traditional deadbolt and security code combo isn't enough, you can add a biometric fingerprint scanner to your entryways. These recognize specific fingerprints in their database, so you can pick and choose who you'd like to permit in to your home. We're still pretty sure no two fingerprints are alike, so this solution's tough to crack.

Features to Look for in a Camera

According to several manufacturers, the ability for a camera to see at night is just one of many characteristics to consider. Depending on your lifestyle, you may want to be able to communicate remotely with your camera so that you can view images on the screen of your phone or laptop computer. It also might be helpful to find a model that can run off Ethernet wiring or that's easy to conceal. Camera styles, functions and performance values run the gamut, giving you plenty of options to fit your budget, needs and expectations.

LOW-LIGHT VIEWING. The lower a camera's lux rating, the better it can see in the dark for night vision applications. For viewing in total darkness, look for a camera with a 0 lux rating and built-in IR (infrared) illuminators, advises Darrel Hauk, president and CEO of Channel Vision. If the yard lights will be on, you can go with .01 lux; a starlit night, .001 lux.

WIRING. It can be difficult to route the necessary cabling to the planned location of an outdoor security camera. Even wireless models still require power. For ease of installation, go with a camera that requires as little wiring as possible. "Pulling one wire is always easier than pulling two," says Panasonic product manager for retail communication devices Erica Martinez. Panasonic makes models that can deliver both power and video over a single Ethernet wire.

STYLE. Do you want your camera to be noticed or to go unseen? "Sometimes a camera that's easy to see is an effective deterrent," says Joe Lautner, VP of sales and marketing at HomeLogic, a manufacturer of home control systems. If you'd rather be covert in your surveillance tactics, steer toward a stealthier design.

ADJUSTABLE. A fixed camera focuses on one spot, which may be fine for your intended use. However, if you'd like to be able to watch a larger area, you might be better served by a camera that can be panned, tilted and zoomed in.

RECORDING. Trespassers, vandals and toilet-paper toting teenagers are most likely to strike when you're not at home. For this reason, you may want to invest in a camera that can record captured images onto the hard drive of a computer or a digital video recorder.

WEB ACCESS (IP CAMERAS). For the same reason, you may want a camera that can be accessed via the web. You'll be able to see the yard, the front door or the patio from the screen of your iPhone or laptop computer.

PICTURE QUALITY. As great as IP cameras are at granting access from anywhere, the video they transmit is usually choppy than the images transmitted by analog cameras, says Lautner. If image quality is important, an analog camera can still communicate over the web—you'll just need to invest in extra equipment.

RAIN RESISTANCE. Some cameras are better than others at handling the rain. If your IP camera will be fully exposed to the elements, look for a waterproof rating of 65, advises Hauk. **EH**