

COVER STORY

Dale Bass believes that most homeowners never give their locks a thought.

"It's somewhat of an overlooked item," says Bass, president of Bass Security Services Inc. in Bedford Heights, Greater Cleveland's leading lock specialist.

Yet so much depends on your locks.

They protect your home from unwanted entrants and thieves. They make it possible for you to sleep at night safe in the knowledge that your home won't be invaded and that your children will not walk out the door.

But do you think of them?

Basic lock unchanged

The basic lock has not changed in 40 years, although experts like Bass say new electronic locking systems with remote controls and keys that can't be duplicated will soon change how you close up your home. These locks function like the remote-controlled locks on cars and are not tied to a house wiring system.

Still the most common locks today are the normal latch lock and the deadbolt, both of which require keys. The typical knob set offers some security when it's installed correctly, says Steve Tepper, owner of Southgate Lock & Security in Maple Heights. It has a spring latch that catches as the door shuts and prevents you from opening the door without a key.

An auxiliary lock like a deadbolt can be installed requiring a key to unlock it on both sides, inside and outside of the home, or with a key on the outside and a turning latch on the inside.

The leading lock manufacturers are Schlage Locks and Kwikset. Locking systems - those short of wired or whole house security systems - can cost as little as \$20 to about \$200, depending on the type and quality of the lock.

"You can buy an economy-priced deadbolt for \$20 or you can go up to \$150 to \$160," says Mark Brajdich, president of **Cleveland Key Shop** in Cleveland. High-security deadbolts, those for which you can have duplicate keys made, cost up to about \$150, he says.

Ratings for locks

The American National Standards Institute tests door hardware and rates locks Grades 1, 2 or 3. Grade 1, the higher grade with the most stringent testing, is rated for commercial use. Grade 2 is the highest level for residential use. Grade 3, the basic minimum, is the lowest acceptable rating for residential use.

Most locks last the lifetime of the home. They do require maintenance, however. Experts recommend periodic lubrication and checking to make sure they work properly. Bass suggests lubricating your locks with a silicon lubricant rather than graphite, which becomes gunky.

"Even though the lock works, you should consider upgrading today," says Bass.

Today's locks are stronger and of a better quality. They have longer bolts, stronger latches and the overall products are better.

But your next upgrade might be to an electronic lock which can cost as much as \$350.

Remote keyless entry

Three years ago, Kwikset introduced remote keyless entry. A remote control similar to the one you use to lock and unlock the doors to your automobile can now be used to open and close a deadbolt. It also can open the garage door and operate internal lights, says Clint Garwood, a Chicago-based spokesman for the company, which is based in Irvine, Calif.

These locks are not tied to home wiring. But electronic advances coupled with home wiring and computer systems may ultimately lead to your being able to access locks from your office, says Max Ruckman, a group manager for Kwikset.

You can program some electronic locks to recognize codes and to provide you with an audit trail that allows you to determine who entered the house and when, says Bass.

Even without electronics, key control is becoming more of an issue, he says. Some lock manufacturers already guard against uncontrolled duplication of keys. Although more common for commercial locks, keys that cannot be duplicated by just any locksmith will become more popular for homes, he says.

Schlage is developing a patented key system that cannot be duplicated by other than approved outlets, says Bass. The Colorado Springs, Colo., company hopes to control the blade of the key so that it cannot be copied, he says.

Ruckman says Kwikset will look at controlling keys in the future.

Beyond the locks

Still Brajdich cautions that your locks are not the only things you should be looking at if security is your concern.

"We always explain to the customer, your locks are only going to be as good as your door or your door frames are," he says. If a door frame is weak or cracked, no deadbolt will prevent entry. He says hollow metal doors will give you more protection than standard wood ones.

"The quality of your locks and your doors have to go hand in hand with each other," he says.

E-mail: achatman@plaind.com Phone: (216) 999-4115

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