SOFTWARE & TECH

How To Pick A Deadbolt

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795583128572381

Introduction: More Than Just a Lock

When you hear the phrase "how to pick a deadbolt," your mind might immediately jump to crime movies or locksport hobbyists. However, for the vast majority of homeowners and renters, this phrase actually refers to a far more practical and crucial skill: how to select or choose the right deadbolt for your home. Your front door is the primary entry point for your home, and the deadbolt is its first line of defense. Choosing the wrong one can leave you vulnerable, while choosing the right one provides peace of mind that lasts for years. This comprehensive guide will walk you through everything you need to know about selecting the ideal deadbolt for your specific security needs, budget, and lifestyle.

The market is flooded with options: smart locks, keyless entry, single-cylinder, double-cylinder, bump-proof, pick-resistant — the list goes on. Making sense of these features is essential. A deadbolt isn't just a piece of hardware; it's a security investment. Whether you are replacing an old lock, upgrading your home security, or simply looking for something more convenient, understanding how to pick the right deadbolt is a skill every homeowner should possess. Let us break down the process step by step.

1. Understand the Three Grades of Deadbolt Security

The first and most important factor in learning how to pick a deadbolt is understanding the grading system established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Deadbolts are classified into three grades based on their durability, security, and construction quality. This is not a marketing gimmick; it is a standardized measure that directly impacts safety.

ANSI Grade 3: The Budget Option

Grade 3 deadbolts are the entry-level standard. They meet the minimum requirements for residential use and are the most affordable. While they offer basic security, they are often made with lower-quality materials, such as thinner metals and simpler internal mechanisms. They are suitable for interior doors or low-traffic areas where security is not the primary concern. However, for a front door or any exterior entry, a Grade 3 deadbolt is generally not recommended. They are more susceptible to forced entry, kick-in attacks, and picking due to their simpler pin tumbler designs.

ANSI Grade 2: The Residential Standard

Grade 2 deadbolts are the sweet spot for most homeowners. They offer a significant upgrade in durability and security over Grade 3 models. These locks feature sturdier construction, often with all-metal parts and reinforced strike plates. They are tested for higher cycle counts (opening and closing) and provide better resistance against physical attacks like hammering or drilling. When you are researching how to pick a deadbolt for your main entrance, Grade 2 is typically the minimum you should consider. It balances cost with reliable security and is widely available from brands like Schlage, Kwikset, and Baldwin.

ANSI Grade 1: The Commercial Grade

Grade 1 deadbolts are the highest standard, designed for commercial and high-security residential applications. These locks are built like tanks. They feature heavy-duty construction, hardened steel bolts, and complex internal mechanisms that offer superior resistance to picking, bumping, and drilling. Grade 1 deadbolts are tested to withstand hundreds of thousands of cycles and significantly higher physical force. While they cost more, they are the gold standard for anyone serious about home security. If you live in a high-crime area or simply want the best protection, a Grade 1 deadbolt is the right choice.

2. Selecting the Right Type of Deadbolt

Once you understand the grade, the next step in how to pick a deadbolt involves choosing the correct type for your door configuration and lifestyle. There are three main types, each with distinct advantages.

Single-Cylinder Deadbolts

This is the most common type. It uses a key cylinder on the outside and a thumb turn on the inside. You lock and unlock it from the outside with a key, and from the inside by simply twisting the knob. They are convenient and easy to use. However, they can be a security risk if a window is located near the door. An intruder could break the glass, reach in, and turn the thumb turn to unlock the door. For most homeowners, especially those without windows near the door, a single-cylinder Grade 2 or Grade 1 deadbolt is an excellent choice.

Double-Cylinder Deadbolts

Double-cylinder deadbolts require a key on both the inside and outside. There is no thumb turn. This eliminates the risk of someone breaking a window and unlocking the door from the inside. They are commonly used for doors with glass panels or doors near windows. However, they come with a significant safety trade-off. In an emergency, such as a fire, you must have the key to get out quickly. If the key is not readily available, this can be a serious hazard. Many building codes restrict their use for this reason. If you choose a double-cylinder deadbolt, always keep a key in the lock from the inside when you are home, and ensure all household members know where it is.

Keyless and Smart Deadbolts

Modern technology has introduced keyless deadbolts that use a keypad, fingerprint scanner, or smartphone app for access. These locks offer incredible convenience. You never need to worry about losing your keys. Many allow you to grant temporary access codes for guests or service providers and can send alerts when the door is unlocked. From a security perspective, high-quality smart deadbolts from reputable brands offer solid protection, often meeting Grade 2 or Grade 1 standards. However, they rely on batteries and electronics. If the battery dies or there is a software glitch, you could be locked out. Most models include a physical key override for this reason. When considering how to pick a deadbolt in the smart category, prioritize models with strong encryption, good battery life, and a physical backup key.

3. Essential Security Features to Look For

Beyond the grade and type, specific features directly impact a deadbolt's resistance to picking, bumping, and physical attacks. These are critical factors in the selection process.

Picking and Bumping Resistance

Traditional pin tumbler deadbolts are vulnerable to lock picking and lock bumping. To counter this, look for locks with **security pins** such as spool pins, mushroom pins, or serrated pins. These make the lock significantly harder to pick. For bumping resistance, look for locks with a **bump-stop feature** or those that use a **sidebar mechanism**. Brands like Schlage and Kwikset offer their own proprietary bump-resistant technologies (e.g.,

Schlage's "BumpGuard" or Kwikset's "SmartKey"). If you are specifically concerned about how to pick a deadbolt in the context of lock bypass, these features are non-negotiable.

Drill Resistance

Drilling is a common brute-force attack on locks. A high-quality deadbolt will incorporate **hardened steel inserts** or **ball bearings** in the cylinder. These materials will dull or break drill bits, making the attack much more time-consuming and difficult. Look for locks that explicitly mention "drill-resistant" or "anti-drill" in their specifications.

Strike Plate and Screws

The deadbolt itself is only as strong as the strike plate it locks into. Many standard deadbolts come with a thin strike plate and short 1-inch screws. This is a weak point. To maximize security, upgrade to a **heavy-duty strike plate** and use **3-inch or longer screws** that penetrate deep into the door frame and reach the wall stud. This dramatically increases resistance to kick-in attacks, which are far more common than lock picking in home burglaries.

Bolt Material and Throw

The bolt should be made of **hardened steel**, not brass or softer metals. Additionally, look for a **1-inch throw** (the length the bolt extends into the door frame). This is the standard for Grade 1 and 2 deadbolts. A longer throw makes it harder to force the door open. Some high-security locks feature a bolt with a **ball bearing** inside it, which resists hacksawing.

4. Installation Considerations

Knowing how to pick a deadbolt also means knowing if you can install it. Some deadbolts are designed for easy DIY installation, while others require professional locksmith services.

Standard Fit: Most deadbolts are designed to fit standard door preparations with a 2-1/8 inch bore hole and a 1 inch edge bore. If you are replacing an existing deadbolt, a standard model will likely fit without modification.

Adjustable Backset: The backset is the distance from the edge of the door to the center of the bore hole. Most doors have a 2-3/8 inch or 2-3/4 inch backset. Many modern deadbolts offer an adjustable backset to fit both sizes. This is a convenient feature if you are unsure of your door's measurement.

Installation Difficulty: Brands like Kwikset are generally easier for DIY installation due to their user-friendly mechanisms and clear instructions. Schlage and higher-end brands may require slightly more precision but offer better build quality. If you are not handy with tools, factor in the cost of professional installation when you pick a deadbolt.

5. Key Control and Convenience

Key control refers to the ability to restrict who can duplicate your keys. Standard keys can be copied at any hardware store. For higher security, consider deadbolts with **patented keyways**. These keys can only be duplicated by authorized dealers, and you need a security card to order copies. This prevents unauthorized key duplication.

For convenience, many deadbolts now offer **keyless entry** via a keypad. This allows you to set multiple user codes, eliminate the need for physical keys, and often includes features like auto-lock and temporary codes. If convenience is a top priority, a keypad deadbolt combined with a strong core is an excellent solution.

Conclusion: Making Your Final Decision

Knowing how to pick a deadbolt is a multi-layered process that goes far beyond just buying the most expensive

model on the shelf. It requires a clear understanding of your specific security needs, the type of door you have, and the features that matter most to you. Start by prioritizing an ANSI Grade 2 or Grade 1 lock for any exterior door. Then, choose between a single-cylinder, double-cylinder, or smart lock based on your door's location and your lifestyle. Pay close attention to pick and bump resistance, drill protection, and the quality of the strike plate and screws. Finally, consider the ease of installation and key control options.

Remember, the best deadbolt is one that combines robust security with practical daily use. A lock that is too complicated or inconvenient to use every day might not get used at all, defeating its purpose. By following this guide, you can confidently navigate the market and select a deadbolt that provides real protection, convenience, and long-lasting durability. In the world of home security, knowledge truly is power — and in this case, it is also peace of mind.

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