

Before you go – checklist for home owners

Home owners – use this checklist to make sure you're ready to hand over the care of your home to your house sitter on the day that you leave. If you're leaving one or more pets in the care of your house sitter see the companion document to this one: Before you go – checklist for pet owners.

1. Create an information pack

It's a good idea to put an information pack together containing all of the material that your house sitter needs to provide top quality care to your home. Your signed and completed house sitting agreement will provide the cornerstone of your information pack. By placing all of your records in plastic A4 sheets in a sturdy folder, this pack can be used by your house sitters for years to come. Consider including the following in your information pack:

Contact information

If you would like to have a role in the management of your property while you're away you will need to leave your contact information. You may like to ask your house sitter to send you regular email updates on the status of your home and animals while you're away.

Emergency contact information

You may want to assign a friend, relative or neighbour the role of nominated contact person to liaise with your house sitter in your absence. If so, leave enough of their contact information so that your house sitter can reach them at any time of the day or night. You need to establish how comfortable your nominated contact person is with the idea of making decisions on your behalf.

Visitors policy

If you have strong feelings about the numbers and types of people who may (or may not) visit your home with your house sitter's consent, include this information in your house sitting agreement.

Rules and regulations

If your home is a condominium, a unit or a rental property, you may want to leave a copy of the by-laws or lease for your house sitter to refer to.

Home contents out of bounds

You may like to make a list of items you don't want your house sitter to use (add this to your house sitting agreement).

Rooms out of bounds

You may like to write a list of any areas or rooms in your house or on your property that you don't want your house sitter to use (add this to your house sitting agreement).

2. Telling others you're leaving

It's crucial that other people know about your arrangements with your house sitter to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

Neighbours

Let your neighbours, friends and family know that you have a house sitter moving into your home on a particular date.

Insurance

Contact your insurance company to let them know you will have a house sitter moving into your home. Your home and contents premium should be unaffected by this information.

Service providers

If you've negotiated with your house sitter to keep some of your usual services running while you're away, it's important to tell your service providers (maid, gardener or grounds person etc) about your house sitting arrangement.

3. Preparing your home

Your home is like a ship and you are like its captain. Before you go, you need to get it shipshape both for your house sitter and for your own return.

Store your breakables

Stash away your breakables in a secure area such as a locked cupboard or your attic space. This can include anything made of glass or ceramics that you value (such as framed photographs, sculptures, trophies, vases, artworks, even a favourite snowdome). Accidents do happen...but they don't need to happen to your breakable treasures.

Store your valuables

It is only commonsense to store your valuables in a secure locked area while you're away. If your valuables are especially expensive then you need to maintain your usual security precautions in your absence. Make an inventory of your valuables before you go. Put your wine collection and bar supplies well out of sight of your house sitter.

Clean your home and yard

It's a good idea to ensure your house and grounds are clean and tidy in preparation for your house sitter's arrival. Note that in the house sitting agreement your house sitter has agreed to maintain your home and garden to the condition that they first encountered them.

Perishable foodstuffs

You may want to empty your refrigerator of any perishable foodstuffs. Although your house sitter is probably happy to eat or otherwise dispose of these!

Shut down parts of your home

If your home is larger than your house sitter needs you may want to shut parts of it down (for example, you could make all but one bedroom and bathroom off limits to your house sitter) just so that these parts of the house remain in pristine condition for your return.

4. Preparing your vehicles

When you go away you may be leaving a car, SUV, RV, boat, bicycle or tractor behind to face a period of disuse. You may ask your house sitter to clean and maintain your vehicles in your absence.

Use of your vehicle

If you are happy to have your house sitter use your vehicle while you're away you need to do the following:

- familiarize them with your vehicle before you go
- add their name to your motor vehicle insurance policy
- have them confirm in writing that they will be liable for any costs and damages incurred while using your vehicle including paying any excess fees on any resulting insurance claim (this can be added to your house sitting agreement).
- provide local driving regulation information for their reference

Maintenance of your vehicle

You may want to have your vehicle maintained in your absence. This could include asking your house sitter to start your car once a week and/or clean your car of leaves, dust and bird droppings.

Use of your bicycle

You may be happy for your house sitter to use your bicycle. Familiarise your house sitter with any security locks you may use including combination numbers and spare keys.

Remote control devices

Be sure to leave your garage door opener or similar device out in plain sight to allow your house sitter access to your garage.

5. Preparing your animals

Take the time to prepare your animals for your departure, thoroughly pet proof your home and educate your house sitter in the finer points of caring for your pets. This process is crucial to ensuring the house sitting assignment is a success for every party (your animals included). Please see the companion checklist: Before you go – checklist for pet owners.

6. Preparing to travel

A few simple preparations can make being away from home a snip!

Email

If you are currently using an email address that is dependent on your home internet service provider, you may need to set up a new address that can travel with you. There are many hundreds of good, free email service providers you can sign up with in less than five minutes. Ekit is an email service provider that is specifically for travelers. Choose a service provider that gives each member account enough disk space to store, send and receive jpg (image) files. Yahoo gives each customer an especially generous allowance of 250mb.

Inventory of valuables

Make an inventory of your valuables before you go and store it in a secure place (such as with a relative, a solicitor, or in an online digital safe). Note that this list does not go in your house sitter's information pack.

7. Services

Your house sitter needs to know everything about your home's usual services in order to keep everything sailing along.

Rubbish collection

Make a note of which day your rubbish is collected. Provide plenty of rubbish bags of the right size and strength.

Recycling services

Make a note of the day your recycling is collected. Have any recycling equipment available for your house sitter to use. Let your house sitter know what can and can't be recycled through your kerbside collection service.

Subscriptions

You may want to suspend or cancel any magazine or newspaper subscriptions you may have.

Pay-per-view TV

You may want to suspend or cancel your satellite or cable TV service.

DVD rental

You may want to suspend or cancel your DVD rental subscription.

Internet access

You may want to suspend or cancel your home internet access account. Although your house sitter may want this service to continue and may be prepared to pay for the service while they're in your home.

Mail redirection

You may want to set up a redirection order for your mail – although this is what house sitters are for!

Home deliveries

You may want to suspend or cancel any regular home deliveries you may have including dairy products and organic vegetables .

Cleaning, gardening and lawn mowing services

You may want to suspend or cancel visits by your regular cleaner, gardener or lawn mower. If your house sitter wants to retain these, you need to discuss who will pay for these services.

8. Your house sitter's needs

House sitters are people too and they will need the facilities to live their own lives in your home as well as enough information to settle into your home and neighbourhood quickly and easily.

Spare keys

Leave a set of spare keys with your nominated contact person (if you have one). Your house sitter will need their own set of your keys plus a spare set.

Childcare

Leave details on local childcare facilities and places of fun for your younger house sitters.

Tourist information

Mark up a local map with some of the area's best assets for your intrepid house sitter. Include your local supermarket, library, internet café, cinema, DVD rental shop, dog park etc.

Transport maps

Local transport maps covering travel by bicycle, bus, train, tram and underground are invaluable for helping your house sitters get oriented.

Storage space

You may need to empty some cupboards and drawers for your house sitter to stow their belongings.

Clean linen

Put out clean bed linen and towels for your house sitter.

First meal

Provide the essentials for your house sitter's first meal in your home.

Parking

Describe what parking is allowed on or near your property including costs and restrictions. You may be able to arrange for a visitors parking permit for your house sitter to use during their stay.

Local driving information

Provide local driving regulation information for your house sitter's reference.

9. Utilities

Your utilities will (thankfully) continue to be paid for and function in your absence. Your house sitter needs to know everything about maintaining these critical elements in your home.

Gas and electric

Leave instructions for the safe use of your electricity and gas services. Show your house sitter where the relevant meters are as well as the fuse boxes and cut-off switches. Take meter readings on your last day in the property so that your house sitter's share of the utility bills can be worked out on your return. (Use the fields in your house sitting agreement to record your meter readings.)

Heating and air-conditioning

Leave detailed instructions on how to program the heating and air-conditioning systems. Show your house sitter where the relevant heating and air-con switches and thermostats are.

Water and drains

Leave instructions on the location of your water mains tap and the access area to your drains system in case of emergency or routine maintenance.

Laundry appliances

It's amazing how quirky and bad tempered your laundry appliances can get with age. Leave instructions for your house sitter on how to keep on the right side of your washing machine and dryer.

10. Grounds maintenance

Only you know just how much loving your outside space needs in your absence.

Compost

Make a list of what you would and wouldn't like your house sitter to add to your compost.

Pool maintenance

Have your pool equipment and chemicals available for your house sitter to use. Attach clear written instructions to these.

Garden tools

Make sure your garden tools are accessible. Leave a copy of your shed keys for your house sitter.

Indoor plant maintenance

Leave any supplies for your indoor plants out for your house sitter. Attach written instructions to these.

Lawn maintenance

Check that your lawnmower is in good working order. Leave a spare can of fuel for your lawn mower if required. Attach hoses to outdoor water supplies for watering your garden and lawn. Leave rakes and a wheelbarrow out for your house sitter.

Bird feeders

Leave enough wild seed to keep your bird feeders topped up while you're away.

11. Security

Your usual security systems and precautions should continue unabated in your absence. Your house sitter will make every effort to conscientiously protect your home and household contents in all the ways that you describe.

Security systems

If you have an alarm system, you may need to make arrangements with the security company for a code and security password specifically for your house sitter to use. Security systems can be very tricky (and noisy) so be sure to tell your house sitter how to manage your alarm system in exact detail.

Window locks and security doors

Any keys for window locks and security doors should be left with your house sitter.

Phew!

Well done...you've made it to the end of this list. Now you can leave your home knowing that your house sitter is exceptionally well-prepared to take on their duties and responsibilities toward you, your property and your animals. Relax and go.