

BUILDING THE ULTIMATE **HOME DEFENSE PLAN**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

Introduction

4-9

**Building the Ultimate Home
Defense Plan**

10-11

**Selecting A Home Defense
Firearm - Shotgun or AR?**

12-18

**Selecting the Right Shotgun &
Ammo for Home Defense**

19-23

**Selecting the Right AR &
Ammo for Home Defense**

24-25

Conclusion & Resources



Eric is a lifelong hunter and shooter with years of experience within the firearms industry, both as a media professional and as a trainee at some of the best shooting facilities in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Eric has trained with many of the best firearms instructors in the country, from [Gunsite Academy](#) in Arizona to Academi in Moyock, North Carolina. He has extensive experience in everything from defensive shotgun and pistolcraft to long-range shooting and carbine courses.

He currently works as a freelance gun writer and has written for multiple brands, including Guns & Ammo's Special Interest Publications, [Guns America](#), Gun Digest, [Mossberg.com](#), and American Handgunner. He has served as Editor in Chief at Gun Digest, as well as Online Editor for Petersen's Hunting, North American Whitetail, Gun Dog, Bowhunter, Petersen's Bowhunting, and Game & Fish Magazine. He has also hosted Modern Shooter TV on the Sportsman Channel.

BUILDING THE ULTIMATE HOME DEFENSE PLAN



On several occasions I've had the opportunity to attend defensive firearm training courses at Gunsite Academy in Paulden, Arizona. The brainchild of Col. Jeff Cooper, Gunsite was started in the late 1980s and has served as one of the premiere venues for training law enforcement and military personnel, as well as civilians, in the discipline of defensive shooting.

The Gunsite training staff has an untold number of years in law enforcement and military employments, and is extremely well-versed not merely in theory, but in the actual practices that have proved successful in the field. Their training staff obviously takes firearm techniques very seriously.

One of the most valuable lessons I've learned at Gunsite came at the conclusion of a week long defensive shotgun course. We made the brief walk to Cooper's residence, and what stood out about the home Cooper designed was that he took every possible step to making it as hard of a target as he possibly could, relying not simply on whatever firearm was in his hand but on a thoughtfully considered home defense plan. He'd spent considerable time thinking about how to defend it long before he'd ever have to fire a gun.

The reality is that home defense starts not with what firearm you select—important as that decision is, as we shall discuss—but with the preparations you apply to make your home as defensible as possible.

BUILDING A HOME DEFENSE PLAN: MAKING A HARD TARGET

A “hard target” is more than a mildly bad action flick featuring Jean-Claude Van Damme in the early 1990s, with his long, flowing mullet, loudly exaggerated grunts and powerhouse martial arts skills. It’s also the term military and law enforcement personnel use to describe how difficult a location, say your home, is to defend.

A hard target is the kind of home that an unwanted intruder is least likely to select or have success entering.

Like it or not, many of our homes are easy for intruders to case and home in on, simply because we’ve taken few steps to secure them. This is what we’d call a “soft target.”

Our homes are soft targets when we leave our doors unlocked (or when they have no dead bolt), have windows that are easily accessible from the outside, or when we don’t stop our mail or set light timers while on vacation or a business trip. They become soft targets even with small things like unkept yards and dilapidated siding.

We can and must make our homes hard targets by installing solid doors, sturdy dead bolts, and reinforced door jambs. Likewise, we’ve got to consider more than the front door.

How easy is it to enter through a garage door, sliding back door with chintzy plastic lever lock, or garden level window? Is your home well lit, especially at entry points? How much noise is an intruder going to cause when he enters your house? For most homes, a few hundred bucks goes a long way in hardening your home against unwanted intrusion, and things like Wi-Fi-controlled cameras are now easily operable and affordable. Even the presence of a high-mounted camera to cover the exterior of your home is a huge deterrent because it lets outsiders know you take your home security seriously. Other visual deterrents include large dogs, security signs, and reinforced metal doors on the front entry.



BUILDING A HOME DEFENSE PLAN

Even the hardest of targets is still prone to unwanted intrusion, which is why you also need a home defense plan. This plan needs to include everyone living in your home and must be customized to the features and inhabitants of your home.

The idea is to have a clear, simple response plan that everyone in the home can execute, and to practice it.

This is particularly important when considering other occupants in the home, especially children. The other major factor you'll want to consider is what home and personal defense laws exist in the state you live, if any, and what legal rights you have when defending your home and loved ones.

BUILDING A HOME DEFENSE PLAN: ASSIGN ROLES & A SAFE ROOM



Once you've been alerted that there's an unwanted intrusion underway, someone should be assigned to call the police. It's also a good idea to keep a set of car keys on your night stand, that way you can hit the car alarm as soon as possible, thus destroying an intruder's reliance on the cover of silence and darkness. From that point, you'll have a safely stored firearm you can access, a flashlight that you're prepared to utilize with your firearm, and a plan to gather loved ones into a secure location. Ideally, flashlight and firearm will be secured nearest to you as possible. An unloaded handgun in the basement is not going to do you much good in the event of an intrusion, and it certainly won't allow you to make a timely response.

How does the average person decide which setup is best for home defense?

One major part of the home defense plan is establishing a safe room, somewhere you can retreat with your loved ones, barricade yourself in, and wait for law enforcement officials to arrive if you need to do so. It may be a good idea to store extra flashlights and a first aid kit at this location. If you select a bedroom, make sure you've got a sturdy door, adequate locks, and perhaps items you can stack against the door to slow bullets down—mattresses, beds, etc.

SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM

Another key part of your home defense plan is the type of firearm(s) you choose to employ. A proactive plan will include a firearm ideally suited for home defense.

No shotgun has quite the reputation for reliable, effective home defense as Mossberg's [500® series](#) and [590® series](#) pump shotguns. The pump action has proven itself time and again, which is why the 590 is one of the top choices for law enforcement personnel. It can deliver payloads of buck- and birdshot, as well as devastatingly lethal slugs in a 12-gauge load (20-gauge and .410 in the 500 and 590 Shockwave).



No matter what firearm you decide to employ with your home defense plan, training and planning are paramount.

The other beauty of the 500/590 series shotguns is that they're available in several tactical models that offer pistol grips, accessory-friendly forends, and multiple sight options, all of which are ideal for in-home use. One of my personal favorites is the [590A1 Magpul](#), which features Magpul buttstock and forend and houses nine 12-gauge loads. With adjustable length of pull and factory installed XS ghost ring sights, the 590A1 is a home invader's worst nightmare. A light can be easily installed on the forend, making it ideal for nighttime home defense situations.


SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM CON'T.

There's also the brand spanking new [**590M®**](#) [**Mag-Fed**](#), which features a detachable 10-round magazine; and the [**Shockwave**](#), an ultra-compact firearm with a 14-inch barrel that's available in 12- and 20-gauge, as well as a .410 model, and even a [**590M Shockwave**](#).

While a handgun can serve as a viable option for defending the home, particularly for those whose only firearm is their carry gun, it wouldn't be my first or second choice.

However, right up there with the shotgun has got to be the AR-type rifle. Generally speaking, the AR-15 platform offers a lightweight, user-adjustable option capable of housing plenty of rounds in a single magazine. Mossberg's [**MMR Tactical**](#) fits that bill exactly, weighing just 7 pounds (without optics or lights) and is chambered in 5.56mm/.223. It comes with a 16-inch barrel and 1:8-inch twist rate, fully capable of stabilizing defensive bullets of various stripes and weights. The six-position stock is ideal for use with multiple shooters, and a full length Picatinny rail, as well as M-Lok handguard, make for easy attachment of lights and lasers.





**The question is:
Which is better for
your home defense?**

SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM - SHOTGUN OR AR?

When it comes to home defense, perhaps no issue is more hotly debated than which firearm—an AR-type rifle or a shotgun—is best suited for the task at hand. One train of thought is that a shotgun is capable of delivering a wide spread of projectiles on target, making it a lethal, fairly easy-to-operate platform ideally suited for the close confines of a residence. For others, the AR is superior because it is a lightweight, higher-capacity firearm that produces significantly less recoil than a shotgun while delivering substantial energy on target.



SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM: MASTER YOUR PLATFORM

Ultimately, the best home defense firearm is the one you've got access to and are most proficient with. Professional training is critical. You are morally and ethically responsible for every bullet, slug, or piece of shot that leaves your firearm. Your ability to defend your home has more to do with you than it does your firearm. It also depends greatly upon which shotshell or rifle ammo you select, as well as the overall set up of the home you're defending.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SHOTGUN & AMMO FOR HOME DEFENSE

The shotgun is known for its versatility, and rightly so. Your [**Mossberg 500**](#) can be used to defend your home and family. Like the shotgun itself, there's a vast number of options when it comes to shotgun loads



***But there's also a lot of
misconceptions about
shotguns and ammunition.***

SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM: **THE SHOTGUN**



A trainer at Gunsite once told me, in the midst of a defensive shotgun course, that the shotgun is the ultimate “thinking man’s” firearm. The well-trained defensive shotgunner will know which load is right for varying circumstances and distances and will be able to load and utilize each accordingly. He or she will be able to operate, reload, and appropriately manipulate the shotgun in homes and around barriers, and know the proper distances at which certain shot patterns expand.

I completed the Gunsite course with [Mossberg’s 590A1 Magpul Series shotgun](#), which features a nine-shot magazine tube, and is paired with an EOTech holographic sight. The 590A1 is an extremely versatile firearm, with factory-installed Picatinny top rail for easy mounting of and optic and dual sling attachments. The heavy-wall barreled, 3-inch chamber shotgun is an absolute workhorse, taking the heat and punishment of all-day, all-week operation. With an overall length just under 40 inches and an adjustable length of pull, the 590A1 Magpul is a full-size shotgun that can take heavy workloads. In an entire week of training in which we shot hundreds of rounds, I experienced not a single malfunction or loading issue with the shotgun. Meanwhile, the Magpul furniture allows for light and laser options, both of which are ideal for in-home use.

SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM: THE SHOTGUN

The other beauty of the shotgun is that it's less restricted and readily available across the U.S. vs. AR-style rifles. And with the introduction of the [**Mossberg 590 Shockwave**](#), which is available in 12- and 20-gauge, as well as .410 and 12-gauge mag-fed, there's also a compact option that's incredibly effective inside the home.

A shotgun loaded with nine shotshells is an extremely heavy proposition, and much of that weight is toward the barrel. It will wear your arms out in a hurry when clearing a house. In addition, it's difficult to develop the fine motor skills needed to think, shoot, and reload under stress.

The other major factor to consider is recoil.

Your average 12-gauge shotgun with 00 buckshot delivers almost 10 times the recoil as an AR, which can deter many shooters. Many manufacturers produce reduced recoil loads, which may be better for the home anyway and save your shoulder from considerable soreness when training.



SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM: SIZE MATTERS



In order to help you sort through all these options and make a more informed decision that's right for your household, we'll break it down. Keep in mind, each size range, whether that's for the 500 or 590, is built around the same central components. Barrel lengths vary depending on model, as do buttstocks and forward grips, but basic platform components, like the receiver, basically remain the same.

IN THE SMALL SIZE CATEGORY

We'll put the [Mossberg 590 Shockwave](#), which features a Raptor grip rather than a traditional shoulder buttstock and has a 14.375-inch barrel. Mossberg has won several awards for its design on the Shockwave, and is chambered in 12 and 20 gauge, as well as .410. The Shockwave is discharged without shouldering and can be fired either from the hip or raised to eye level. The greatest advantage of the Shockwave is that it's lightweight (roughly five pounds, unloaded), easy to maneuver in tight spaces, and easy to store in confined spaces, with an overall length of just 26.37 inches. And unlike other NFA items, the Shockwave is available in most states without a tax stamp or months of red tape.

One consideration with the Shockwave is the amount of recoil directed into your hands. It is worth mentioning the raptor style grip on the Mossberg Shockwave does assist absorbing the recoil due to the grip's angle, which allows your wrist to stay straight, to absorb the recoil into your body. With that said, full-size 12 and 20 gauge loads are pretty stout, especially in 00 buckshot. More recoil means many shooters will likely train less, which is something to consider.

Is the Shockwave a good choice for your home? In urban areas with extremely tight quarters and limited space, it can be an excellent option. Most home and personal defense encounters are going to occur inside 10 yards, distances the Shockwave excels at covering. If you have children or other occupants in your home, heavy-recoiling 00 buckshot may not be the best load choice anyway because of over-penetration through drywall, so a birdshot load will reduce the pounding your hands take. If you live in the middle of nowhere, however, and you want to be able to engage targets at closer and longer ranges with either buckshot or a slug, one of the larger shotgun platforms may suit you better.

SELECTING A SHOTGUN FOR HOME DEFENSE: **SIZE MATTERS**

THE LARGER CATEGORY

Mossberg's 500/590 Tactical models, which are one of the most popular and widely available options for home defense. The [**Mossberg 590A1 Tactical**](#), boasts of a 7- or 9-round capacity, 18.5- or 20-inch heavy-walled barrel, and is available with multiple stock configurations. The ability to shoulder the shotgun helps shooters manage recoil, as does the additional weight (7 to 7.5 pounds, unloaded). There's an option for a six-position stock, ideal for speedy custom adjustment to multiple defensive shooters in the home, or a Magpul SGA stock that features spacers to change the length of pull from 12.25 to 14.25 inches. Recoil management and sighting are the main advantages of the full-length shotgun, whereas the major downside is weight. Those who wish for less recoil in a full size shotgun would find benefits looking into the [**Mossberg 500 Tactical**](#) shotguns in 20 gauge and .410 configurations.

Those who've mastered the full-size shotgun find it's a highly capable defensive tool that can cover close, medium and long distances rather effectively.

While the pump has reigned supreme for home defense, those looking for an autoloader also have an option with [**Mossberg's 930 Tactical**](#), which is available in 12-gauge with an eight-round capacity. The 930 Tactical features a 14-inch length of pull, 18.5-inch barrel and weighs in at 7.5 pounds. Semi Autos make for quick follow up shots, though ultimately the shooter has to be proficient enough with reloads and proper target acquisition to match the gun's pace. As always, training is key.

***Your greatest asset isn't the shotgun
in your hand, but your own mind.***

Whether you go small, medium, or large with your defensive shotgun, it's essential that you train in a real-world environment with the platform you select so that you're prepared to defend your castle. Defending your home with a firearm should always be a last resort, but if you are faced with such a situation, you don't want to be unfamiliar with your firearm, your abilities with it, and ammo performance.

SELECTING A SHOTGUN FOR HOME DEFENSE: **AMMO SELECTION**



Most common is probably the notion that accuracy or careful aim of a shotgun isn't necessary because of the scattering of shot. The truth is, every shotgun, regardless of load type, is going to deliver a fairly tight pattern of shot at close ranges. That shot pattern obviously increases with distance, but increased spread also creates an issue of hitting unwanted targets. As a result, defensive shooters must take into account load type and pattern at differing ranges.

There are three basic types of shotgun loads: birdshot, buckshot, and slugs. Birdshot delivers a large payload of pellets that quickly lose energy and penetration but can be lethal at close ranges. Buckshot is typically more lethal, but also tends to penetrate and hold energy even in multiple layers of drywall. Slugs are best for greater distances and, like buckshot, carry the risk of over penetration. The question is, which load is best for home defense?

SELECTING A SHOTGUN FOR HOME DEFENSE: AMMO SELECTION CON'T.

The most common home or personal defense load in a shotgun is probably 00 buckshot, which typically delivers nine small projectiles, .33-caliber in size, at 1,250 fps from the muzzle. While 00 buckshot is extremely lethal, it also produces a considerable amount of recoil. The other major issue with buckshot is that it tends to over penetrate, especially in drywall. This is a serious concern when you're planning for the defense of a home with multiple occupants, or if you live in a thin-walled apartment complex.

The final test at Gunsite was with No. 7½ birdshot, a 1 1/8-ounce load with a muzzle velocity of 1,250 fps. The 12-gauge birdshot load had enough initial penetration to prove lethal, but not so much that it would put occupants in a second room in jeopardy.

For those who live alone and aren't concerned with over penetration, 00 buckshot is a more lethal option than birdshot. Keep in mind, the beauty of the shotgun platform—and especially a pump like the 500—is that you can select different loads at any time. Likewise, the 590M® Mag-Fed shotgun allows shooters to carry a high capacity of shells and interchange with a different magazine, and different types of loads, at any point in time.



SELECTING THE RIGHT AR AND AMMO FOR HOME DEFENSE

Unlike a shotgun, the AR-type rifle is generally lightweight, capable of housing a high capacity magazine, and is easy to operate within close confines. Rifles like **Mossberg's MMR** can be custom fitted to almost any size shooter in relatively no time at all. This allows your home defense plan to accommodate all authorized and qualified household members with a single firearm. And because of modularity, the standard AR can be easily equipped with lights, lasers, optics, or a combination of all.

Likewise, a single .223 round delivers significant energy on target and is highly accurate. As multiple field tests have shown, many defense-worthy .223 loads actually penetrate less in drywall than 00 buckshot, making the AR platform ideal for in-home use. But with so many options on the market for .223 ammo, in everything from full metal jacket to ballistic tip varmint loads, how do you decide which option is best for defending your home? But with so many options on the market for .223 ammo, how do you decide which option is best for defending your home?

Not surprisingly, everything that makes the AR-type rifle effective in close quarters combat around the world, also makes it incredibly well suited for home defense.



SELECTING A HOME DEFENSE FIREARM:

THE AR

For the most part, the AR is lighter, easier to manipulate and reload, and offers a higher capacity of ammunition at a lighter weight-to-round ratio. While proficient mag swaps still require practice, it's fairly easy to master on the AR-type platform.

[Mossberg's MMR Carbine Rifle](#) in 5.56mm/.223 weighs 6.75 pounds, and a fully-loaded magazine on the MMR is significantly lighter than nine rounds of 00 buckshot in the magazine tube of the 590A1. The MMR comes with flip-up sights and a full-length Picatinny top rail for mounting accessories, while an M-LOK handguard offers mounting options at the 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions. This is ideal for home defense use because it's incredibly easy to mount lights or forward grips.

Of the downsides to the AR as a defense firearm, legal restrictions in the U.S., at least in certain parts of the country, have got to be at the very top of the list. Many states impose magazine restrictions, while others make it virtually impossible to own an AR. And, unlike a shotgun, an AR is capable of delivering only a single projectile at a time on target, with a significantly smaller pattern of impact.



SELECTING AN AR PLATFORM FOR HOME DEFENSE: **SIZE MATTERS**



Based on Eugene Stoner's original conception of the AR-type rifle, every standard AR is built around a semiautomatic, direct gas-impingement system. Pistol length ARs feature a barrel length of less than 10 inches, with a shorter gas length to match. Carbine length is between 10-18 inches, mid length is 14-20 inches, and rifle is 20 or more inches.

There's also a distinction to be made between a short-barreled rifle (SBR) and an AR pistol. The key difference is that an AR pistol is intended to fire from the hand, not the shoulder. An SBR features a barrel length of less than 16 inches, or an overall length less than 26 inches. The SBR, unlike the AR pistol, is a National Firearms Act (NFA) regulated item which requires a \$200 tax stamp and a mountain of paperwork to climb through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE).

SELECTING AN AR PLATFORM FOR HOME DEFENSE: **SIZE MATTERS CON'T.**

WHICH SIZE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Generally speaking, a shoulder-fired AR-type rifle with as short of a barrel and overall length as possible is going to be ideal for home defense because it provides the shooter with optimal maneuverability in close quarters with a high degree of control over the firearm. Based on legal restrictions and NFA requirements, the SBR won't be the most feasible option for many shooters. This leaves the carbine-length AR, which is still very compact, avoids NFA restrictions, and retains a high degree of maneuverability in the close confines of a home.

A great example is [Mossberg's MMR Carbine](#), which features a 16.25-inch barrel and an overall length of 35.75 inches. Chambered in 5.56mm/.223 and weighing under 7 pounds without a scope, the MMR Carbine offers shooters a lightweight rifle that's easy to manipulate in close quarters. It's incredibly easy to add optics, lasers or lights because of full-length Picatinny top rail and M-LOK attachment points, all accessories that are well suited for home defense.

***As always, the key ingredients are
planning, preparation, and training.***

Another great route without getting into mountains of paperwork and tax stamps is the AR pistol. The ultra-short setup is fantastic when defense becomes an up-close-and-personal affair, and it doubles equally well as a truck or backpack gun. With a barrel less than 10 inches in length, the pistol can be retrofitted with a number of tactical braces that help stabilize shooting, and it is extremely compact.

And finally, don't underestimate the capability of a rifle-length AR. With a barrel over 20 inches, the rifle-length gas system can get a little cumbersome to operate around doors and hallways, but that doesn't mean it can't be incredibly effective, especially if that's the only AR you own.

SELECTING AN AR PLATFORM FOR HOME DEFENSE: **AMMO SELECTION**

The main concern with any home defense ammunition is over penetration in the building materials of a home's interior. What you're looking for in an AR-15 bullet is a projectile that delivers considerable energy on target, breaks down into a few smaller fragments fairly rapidly, and dumps most of the energy into the target before exiting. Expansion and fragmentation within the initial target are ideal, as these two factors create massive trauma to soft tissue and organs but tend to avoid over penetration. Unlike frangible loads from years ago, there are now quality projectiles that won't come apart in mid-flight but will do so with lethal force upon impact.

Typically speaking, what you want to stay away from are heavy, slow moving, solid bullets like an FMJ that remain intact and carry enough energy through the target to pass through walls and potentially cause serious harm to innocent people. Instead, bullets in the realm of 55 grains that offer rapid expansion with adequate penetration, say between 6-9 inches, are ideal.

A good example is Hornady's 55-grain FTX Critical Defense load, which showcases an FTX bullet with a Flex Tip to prevent materials from clogging and stopping expansion, and is ideal for rapid expansion at lower velocities. The FTX leaves the muzzle at 3,240 fps and carries 1,282 ft.-lbs. of energy, and reduced flash propellants make it ideal for nighttime or low light shooting. A nickel-plated case makes for easy chamber checks in low light. While offering reliable expansion, the FTX is designed for limited penetration, an ideal feature for in-home use.

Other hunting-style bullets that are effective include Federal Premium's Vital-Shok 60-grain Nosler Partition, which tends to expand reliably at multiple velocities and ranges. Winchester offers a defense load in the PDX-1 Defender series that features frontal expansion of the bullet with enough rearward construction to penetrate effectively, thanks in large part to Split Core Technology.

As always, make sure you know your surroundings. It's always a fundamental rule of shooting that you keep in mind what's beyond your target or in another room.

CONCLUSION



The Mossberg 590M® Mag-Fed (12ga)

Reloading & unloading convenience using interchangeable magazines. 590M® shotguns and magazines are uniquely designed incorporating stabilizing ribs that engage the magazine directly to the receiver for a sure lock-up. The 590M® Series offers magazine-fed convenience in the legendary Mossberg pump-action tactical platform.



The Mossberg 590 Shockwave (12-ga, 20-ga, .410 bore)

Legendary Mossberg pump-action reliability in a compact 14" barreled package. The Shockwave Raptor bird's head pistol grip is uniquely shaped to minimize felt recoil. Includes all the features that have made Mossberg pump-actions the choice for millions worldwide: ambidextrous safety, dual extractors, positive steel-to-steel lockup, twin action bars, and a smooth operating anti-jam elevator.



The Mossberg MMR Carbine Rifle (5.56mm NATO)

The versatile ar-style platform configured with components desired by competitive shooters and tactical operators.



590A1 - 9-Shot Magpul Series (12-ga)

Selected by the U.S. Armed Forces after passing the rigors of MilSpec qualifications, the 590A1 is the duty weapon on choice for military and law enforcement agencies worldwide.

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