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se·cret  (sē krīt)

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adj.

1.

a. Kept hidden from knowledge or view; concealed: *a secret identity; a secret passageway.*

b. Not expressed; inward: *secret desires.*

2.

a. Given to keeping one's thoughts and activities unknown to others; secretive: *"Scrooge ... was secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster" (Charles Dickens).*

b. Not revealing a secret or not given to revealing secrets: *"She boasted ... that he did tell her. But he didn't. He was secret as the grave" (Ruth Praver Jhabvala).*

3.

a. Operating in a hidden or confidential manner: *a secret commission; a secret agent.*

b. Containing information, the unauthorized disclosure of which poses a grave threat to national security.

4. Not much visited; secluded: *a secret hiding place.*

5.

a. Known or shared only by the initiated: *secret rites.*

b. Beyond ordinary understanding; mysterious: *"like Pan, calling out with his flute to come join in on the secret chaos of the world" (Rick Bass).*

n.

1. Something that is kept out of the knowledge or sight of others or is known only to oneself or a few: *wanted to have no secrets between them.*

2. Something that remains beyond understanding or explanation; a mystery: *unlocking the secrets of the atom.*

3. A method or formula for doing or making something well, especially when not widely known: *The secret of this dish is in the sauce.*

4. **Secret** A variable prayer said after the Offertory and before the Preface in the Mass.

Idiom:

in secret

Without others knowing.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *sēcrētus*, from past participle of *sēcernere*, to set aside : *sē-*, apart; see **s(w)e-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots + *cernere*, to separate; see **krei-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

se cret·ly adv.

Synonyms: [secret](#), [stealthy](#), [covert](#), [clandestine](#), [furtive](#), [surreptitious](#), [underhanded](#)

These adjectives mean deliberately hidden from view or knowledge. *Secret* is the most general: *The desk has a secret compartment. The spies conduct secret negotiations.*

Stealthy suggests quiet, cautious deceptiveness intended to escape notice: *"The males of each community formed temporary parties that regularly patrolled their borders and sometimes made stealthy incursions into the territory of their neighbors" (Jane Goodall).*

Covert describes something that is concealed or disguised: *Students protested the covert actions undertaken by the CIA.*

Clandestine implies stealth and secrecy for the concealment of an often illegal or improper purpose: *"The gold was becoming so routine that he'd stopped being clandestine about it" (Jennifer Egan).*

Furtive suggests the slyness, shiftiness, and evasiveness of a thief: *I took a furtive glance at the papers on the desk.* Something *surreptitious* is stealthy, furtive, and often unseemly or unethical: *"She takes surreptitious sips from a flask in her bag as she waits in the cold"* (Mary V. Dearborn). *Underhand* implies unfairness, deceit, or slyness as well as secrecy: *The politician achieved success by underhand methods.*

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

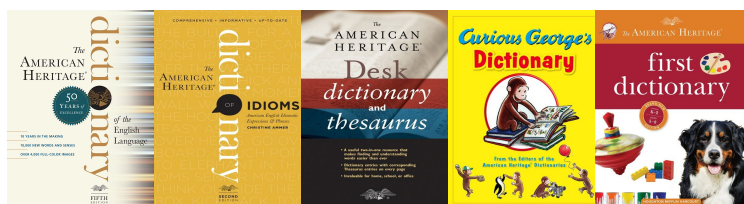
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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