RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

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THE AURORAN • www.theauroran.com
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Senior Account Executive
ZACH SHOUB
zach@lpcmedia.ca

Account Executive
KAREN NEMET
karen@lpcmedia.ca

Senior Account Executive
DIANE BUCHANAN
diane@auroran.com

Art Director
SARAH DIDYCZ

Published By:
LP LONDON PUBLISHING

MARCIA WALTER + ASSOCIATES

Marcia Walter | Broker

Mobile 416-707-5285
Office 905-939-2000
marcia@marciawalter.com

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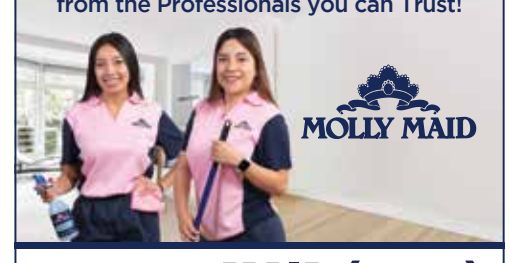
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What buyers can do to improve chances their offer is accepted

The real estate market can be highly competitive. When inventory is limited and prices are high, prospective buyers must be ready to pounce and make an offer before the competition kicks up and the home is off the market.

The ability to move quickly with an offer can help buyers land a home in a competitive market, but that decisiveness may not be enough to ensure an offer is accepted. Buyers accustomed to the home buying process know there's no guarantee an offer will be accepted, but they can take steps to improve their chances of standing out in a competitive market where sellers may be fielding multiple offers at once.

• Use recent sales data to inform your offer. Though there are places with non-disclosure laws that do not mandate property sales prices be made public, such data is readily available in many areas. That information can be invaluable to home buyers in competitive real estate markets because it gives them a strong idea of how much homes have been going for in towns and even specific neighbourhoods they're targeting with their search. That data also tends to be relied upon when sellers list their homes. Sellers may see how much a neighbour's home sold for and use that to set the price of their own homes. With that knowledge in hand, buyers can tailor their offers to reflect recent sales figures.

• Obtain a mortgage preapproval. Bank of America notes that a mortgage pre-qualification estimates what buyers might be able to borrow based on a credit check and information they provide, such as income data. Once that information is provided, prospective buyers may obtain a preapproval if a lender deems them creditworthy. A preapproval is important because it shows sellers that a buyer has the credit and financial backing necessary to follow through on an offer. Many sellers ask if bidders are preapproved because the preapproval facilitates a quicker sale.

• Increase your earnest money offer if you're truly committed to buying a particular home. Fulton Bank advises buyers to offer more earnest money, which is akin to a good faith deposit toward the purchase of a home. A typical earnest money deposit may be somewhere between 1 and 3 percent of the purchase price, but an earnest money offer of 5 percent may indicate to sellers that you're a committed buyer. But Fulton Bank notes that buyers who rescind their offers may or may not have their earnest money offer refunded.

• Speak to your agent or realtor about including an escalation clause. It's always best that buyers work with a real estate agent or realtor when looking for a home. When you find a property that interests you in a competitive market, discuss with your real estate representative if an escalation clause might boost the chances that your offer is accepted. Rocket Mortgage notes that an escalation clause is part of a real estate contract that indicates a buyer is willing to automatically raise their offer on a home if the seller receives a higher offer. The escalation clause indicates the most a buyer is willing to offer. The inclusion of an escalation clause is a big decision, which is why it can be so helpful to speak with your representative before deciding for or against including one in your offer.

It can be hard to compete in the real estate market. But there is much buyers can do to increase the chances their offers are accepted.

MARKET UPDATE – JULY 2026

AURORA

AVERAGE SALES PRICE
$1,301,811
AVERAGE 57 DAYS ON MARKET

NUMBER OF SALES
62
163 NEW LISTINGS

SALE TO LIST RATIO
95%

YEAR OVER YEAR % CHANGE
-4.57%

KING

AVERAGE SALES PRICE
$2,028,099
AVERAGE 71 DAYS ON MARKET

NUMBER OF SALES
20
88 NEW LISTINGS

SALE TO LIST RATIO
94%

YEAR OVER YEAR % CHANGE
-5.23%

*The statistics provided were obtained from the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board's Market Watch JULY 2026; Summary of Existing Home Transactions for All Home Types, JULY 2026 + Focus on the MLS Home Price Index for Composite, JULY 2026 for York Region's Aurora and King

The York Region market continued to gain momentum in July as conditions became more competitive for buyers. Across the GTA, home sales were only slightly lower than last July, but new listings dropped much more significantly, giving buyers fewer homes to choose from and tightening overall market conditions. As a result, well-priced homes are seeing strong interest, and if this trend continues, average selling prices could stabilize through the second half of the year.

For buyers: While you still have more choice than during the peak market years, quality homes are moving quickly. Being prepared and ready to act when the right property comes along is becoming increasingly important.

For sellers: Buyers are active but selective in their searches. Homes that are priced strategically, marketed professionally, and show well are continuing to attract serious interest and strong offers.

Whether you're planning to buy, sell, or simply curious about your home's value, understanding today's market can help you make confident decisions. The Key Advantage Team is always here to provide trusted advice and guidance.

– Provided by Key Advantage Team Royal LePage RCR Realty
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* Not intended to solicit buyers or sellers currently under contract.

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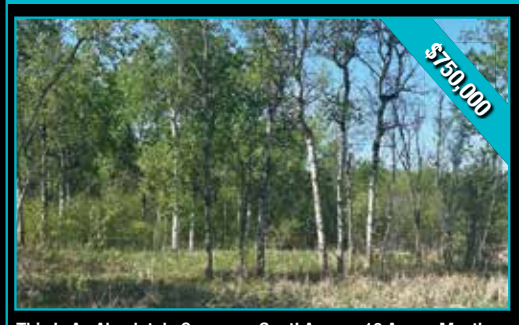
This is the one you're looking for! Fabulous renovated 4 bedroom sprawling bungalow with exquisite renovations in the absolutely stunning gourmet chef's kitchen and 3 spectacularly reno'd washrooms!! Hardwood Floor floors throughout & two bonuses – gorgeous greenhouse style family room & special separate building beside the house for an artist studio or a craft shop or more! Stunning interlocking & forest trails! Minutes to Newmarket/Sharon!

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DOWNSIZING WITH CONFIDENCE:

Turning home equity into a more comfortable next chapter

For many long-time homeowners, the family home represents more than four walls. It holds years of memories, milestones, and hard work. But there comes a time when the home that once fit perfectly may no longer support the lifestyle you want now.

Too many stairs, unused rooms, rising maintenance costs, yard work, repairs, and the day-to-day responsibility of managing a larger property can become overwhelming. For many homeowners in King and the surrounding communities, downsizing is not about giving something up. It is about creating more freedom, more comfort, and a better plan for the years ahead.

One of the biggest realities facing today's downsizers is this: many homeowners are equity rich but cash poor. They may own a valuable home, often with significant equity, but still feel limited by monthly cash flow, rising expenses, taxes, maintenance, utilities, and the cost of everyday living.

That can create a difficult feeling. On paper, the homeowner has wealth. In daily life, they may not feel financially comfortable.

This is where a thoughtful downsizing plan can make a meaningful difference.

Selling a larger home and moving into a property that better fits your current needs may allow you to unlock equity, reduce expenses, and create more flexibility. The proceeds from the sale can potentially be used to support income, improve lifestyle, reduce financial pressure, help with future care needs, or assist family members. The key is to make those decisions with the right professional advice.

Downsizing should never be treated as simply selling one house and buying another. It is often a major financial, legal, emotional, and lifestyle transition. Done well, it can create a more secure and comfortable next chapter. Done without planning, it can feel rushed, stressful, and leave important details overlooked.

A strong downsizing strategy starts with understanding your full picture. What is your current home realistically worth in today's market? What repairs, updates, staging, or preparation will help maximize the sale price? What type of next home will truly support your lifestyle? Are you looking for a bungalow, condo, townhome, retirement community, or something closer to family and amenities?

Just as important, what will the financial impact be after the sale?

Many downsizers benefit from speaking with financial professionals about how to turn home equity into income in a way that supports their monthly lifestyle. This may include investment planning, tax planning, cash-flow planning, and conversations about how much money should remain accessible for future needs.

Legal planning is also an important part of the process. Homeowners should understand how their assets are structured, how their estate plan is set up, and what steps may help reduce unnecessary probate costs so more of their money goes to the people and causes they care about — rather than being lost to avoidable fees or delays. These decisions should always be made with qualified legal and financial professionals, but they should not be ignored until the last minute.

There are also practical considerations. What should be sold, donated, stored, or passed down to family? How much space will you actually need? What furniture will fit? What belongings are truly meaningful? For many people, the emotional side of downsizing is just as important as the financial side.

That is why having the right team matters.

Michele Denniston understands that downsizing is not just a real estate transaction. It is a life transition. Through trusted professional collaborations with top-notch specialists — including financial, legal, organizing, staging, moving, and real estate professionals within trusted companies such as The Co-operators and RBC — Michele helps ensure all the important bases are covered. The goal is to make the process smoother, less overwhelming, and focused on the best possible outcome: helping you move into a more comfortable next chapter with confidence.

If you are starting to wonder whether your current home still fits your life, the first step does not have to be a sign on the lawn. It can simply be getting informed.

To request your **FREE copy of our 32-page comprehensive Downsizing Guide**, contact **Michele Denniston, Broker, Century 21** at **416-433-8316** or **michele@micheledenniston.com**. This valuable resource is designed to help you understand your options, avoid common mistakes, and start planning your next chapter with clarity.

Real Advice. Real Options. Real Estate.

WRITTEN BY: The Michele Denniston Real Estate Team

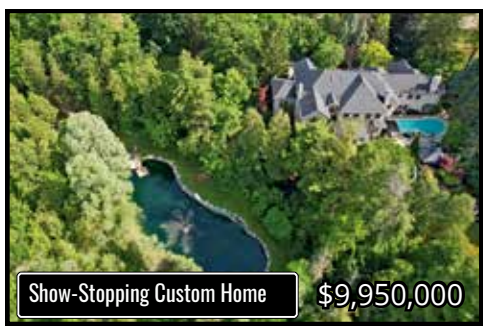
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• ARMOUR ROCK • WET BAR & SAUNA


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• HEATED FLOORS • RESORT-STYLE INDOOR POOL


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• GOURMET KITCHEN OPEN TO FAMILY ROOM


Move-in Ready Family Home $898,000
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• NEARBY BARRIE'S WATERFRONT • KITCHEN WALKOUT

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How to make a real estate listing stand out

The real estate market is notably competitive. While the competitive nature of real estate is often discussed in terms of buying, sellers might face some stiff competition when trying to make their properties stand out.

The popularity of real estate listing websites like Zillow, Trulia and Redfin has made it easier than ever for buyers to find properties for sale. But those sites feature so many listings that it's not always easy for sellers to make their properties stand out. With that in mind, homeowners can work with their real estate agents or realtors to tailor a listing that's sure to draw the attention of buyers.

• IDENTIFY WHAT MAKES YOUR PROPERTY UNIQUE

Homeowners can take a tour of their properties with their real estate representative to identify what makes their homes and grounds unique. Details like the number of bedrooms and bathrooms and the total square footage certainly draw the attention of buyers, but neighborhoods tend to feature similarly sized properties. But an emphasis on unique features, whether it's a fully finished basement or a recently remodeled outdoor living space, can make a listing stand out.

• READ A LISTING AS IF YOU WERE A PROSPECTIVE BUYER

In addition to emphasizing the unique features of your home, you can read a draft of your listing to see if it would appeal to you if you were a buyer. Does the listing adequately convey what makes your property special? Is there enough information about the property? Does the listing get into specifics or is the description generalized? Buyers will look at an assortment of listings, and it can be easy to confuse one with another. Concise but detailed characterizations can increase the chances buyers remember your listing.

• EMPHASIZE KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN BULLET POINTS

A listing that's too wordy may not be read in full, but work with your real estate representative to identify points of emphasis and even list those as bullet points to make the listing more reader-friendly.

• BE HONEST

Buyers come from all walks of life, but none want to read a listing and then feel as if they've been misled upon visiting a property. While it may seem as though everyone wants a move-in ready home, many buyers will not scoff at a listing that notes DIY potential. At the same time, if a home is indeed move-in ready, emphasize that so buyers who don't want to swing any hammers know they won't have to if they buy your home. An honest characterization will attract buyers, while a misleading description of the property will come across as a red flag that will make buyers wonder what else sellers might be hiding.

• HIGHLIGHT THE AREA AS WELL

Buyers aren't just investing in a home, they're investing in a place to set down roots. Consider the town where you live and use the listing to highlight its strong points. If your town is a walkable locale with a thriving local shopping and food district, emphasize that in your listing. If the town boasts a top-notch school system, be sure to allude to that in the listing.

Sellers and their real estate representatives can employ various measures when writing a property listing to make it stand out.

Renovations with the biggest bang for your buck

While many renovations add value to a home, some offer more value than others. When allocating dollars to renovations, particularly when finances are tight, homeowners may want to direct their efforts to those projects that will offer the highest rate of return on investment. Each year Zonda Home, in conjunction with Remodeling magazine, puts together a list of high-return projects. Exterior projects drive the most value for owners who are selling their homes, and they consistently top the list of high-ROI improvements. Here are five projects offering a strong ROI that homeowners may want to consider.

1. **GARAGE DOOR REPLACEMENT:** A garage door replacement is part of the curb appeal improvements homeowners can consider. At an average cost of $4,672, it offers a recouped cost of 267.7 percent according to the 2025 Zonda report.

2. **STEEL DOOR REPLACEMENT:** Also boasting an ROI north of 200 percent, a steel door installation is a wise choice for homeowners who want to drive up the value of their homes.

3. **MANUFACTURED STONE VENEER:** Manufactured stone veneer is a manmade masonry product that looks like natural stone but is lightweight and easier to install. It can offer a recouped cost of 207.9 percent on the $11,702 investment.

4. **FIBER-CEMENT SIDING REPLACEMENT:** Homeowners in the market for new siding can consider fiber-cement siding, which will see the investment recoup slightly more than 100 percent of its cost.

5. **MINOR KITCHEN REMODEL:** Kitchens are the heart of a home, and a minor remodel offers a 113 percent return. Inside the home the golden rule is to keep things simple. Minor remodels tend to offer a better rate of return than major ones. Buyers will pay for move-in ready and updated, but sellers likely will not recoup the costs for luxury upgrades or over-the-top renovations.

It's important to note that 2025 was the first time a practical backup generator made the list of top improvements. Falling into the number seven spot, the generator averaged a return of 95.3 percent, which underscores how homeowners are gearing improvements toward the changing climate and unpredictable weather.

Those remodeling primarily to increase equity for future sales may want to consider exterior projects and basic kitchen improvements.


3404 VIVIAN ROAD, WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE
$4,199,000


107 WINDHAM TRAIL, AURORA
$1,899,000


70 MILLCLIFF CIRCLE, AURORA
$1,035,000


33 BAY STREET #904, TORONTO
$735,000


510 KING STREET E #804
$599,000



Cleaning tips for a healthy home

(NC) Many Canadians won't wait for winter to wind down to tackle a major cleaning. It can give a real feeling of a fresh start and a sense of ownership and pride in your space. Whenever you get around to deep cleaning your home, here are some safety tips to keep in mind:

READ AND FOLLOW SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

Many cleaning products--even some labelled eco-friendly or organic--contain ingredients that can harm your health if not used properly. Always read the label before using a new cleaning product to be aware of the hazards and understand the precautions you should take during use. Never mix different cleaning products together. Combining bleach with ammonia, for example, can create a toxic gas.

LEARN THE HAZARD SYMBOLS

Hazardous cleaning products include safety information on the label. Look for hazard symbols on the front of the product to give you information about the danger.

There are three types of hazard labels you should know about:

- **A FLAME:** the product is flammable
- **SKULL AND CROSSBONES:** the contents are poisonous
- **A BONY HAND:** the product is corrosive.

The frame of the hazard symbol is also important:

- **A TRIANGLE:** symbolizes that it is the container that is dangerous
- **AN OCTAGON:** symbolizes that the contents inside are dangerous

Teaching children from an early age to stay away from containers with hazard symbols can help keep them safer.

GEAR UP

Reading the label will tell you if you need to wear protective equipment like gloves when using certain products. In other cases, you'll want to wear clear safety glasses or goggles to protect your eyes. You should also remove your contact lenses if you wear them before starting cleaning to prevent irritation from contact with chemicals or particles in the air.

SAFE STORAGE

Always leave cleaning products in their original containers so everyone can read the safety information on the label. If you have young children in the house, all cleaning products should be stored in a locked cupboard or on a high shelf that's out of their reach.

By taking some simple steps, you can enjoy a sparkling clean living space and keep yourself safer. Find more safety information at canada.ca/healthy-home.

RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

4 simple HOME *refreshes* that make your space feel new



(NC) With the cost of living on the rise, many homeowners are skipping big renovations and opting for smaller, smarter updates instead. A few DIY refreshes can make your home feel brand new, create a great space for hosting and even add value, all without breaking the bank.

Something to note: Some major updates can affect your home's replacement value, so you should check with your insurer before starting. Some providers, such as Belairdirect, have apps that let you review your coverage, get a quote in minutes and make updates easily, all from your phone. That way, you can move forward with confidence and get straight to the fun part:

1 GIVE YOUR SPACE AN INSTANT FACELIFT.

You don't need a full renovation to make your home feel fresh. A coat of paint or swapping outdated cabinet hardware, door handles and light fixtures can make a big visual impact and are easy to do yourself.

2 SET THE MOOD WITH SMARTER LIGHTING.

Good lighting changes how a space looks and feels. You can get brighter, longer-lasting light at a lower energy cost by replacing incandescent bulbs with LEDs. Outside, solar pathway lights or string lights can instantly create a warm, inviting atmosphere, perfect for that casual summer get-together.

3 CREATE YOUR OWN BACKYARD RETREAT.

Pick one area and make it feel like an extension of your home. You can add shade with a canopy or umbrella, bring in comfortable seating, lay down an outdoor rug to define the space and add planters or flowers for a pop of colour.

4 KEEP THE COOL AIR IN.

Check windows, doors and doorframes for small gaps that let cool air escape. Weatherstripping or caulking is a simple, affordable fix that helps keep your home comfortable year-round. A programmable thermostat can also help manage heating and cooling automatically when you're not home.

With a little creativity and a weekend or two, you can make your home feel like new again. Find more home tips at belairdirect.com.

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RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

Your house is not a Costco hot dog





By Julien Laurion
Real Estate

There are very few things in life that have managed to resist inflation, market swings, interest-rate changes, and general economic chaos.
The Costco hot dog is one of them. Your house is not.

And yet, when it comes time to sell, homeowners can become remarkably attached to a number they have in their head. Maybe the neighbour got $1.6 million three years ago. Maybe an online calculator suggested a magical number. Maybe a friend at a barbecue said, "You'd definitely get at least…" Dangerous words.

Real estate markets move, sometimes quickly. What a buyer was willing to pay in 2021, 2022, 2024—or even six months ago—doesn't automatically tell us what they'll pay today. That doesn't mean your house suddenly became worse. It means the market changed.

This is probably one of the hardest conversations I have with sellers because our homes aren't just financial assets. They're personal. We remember the renovations, the new roof, the kitchen we spent six months arguing over, the landscaping, the hardwood floors, and the contractor who somehow disappeared for three weeks halfway through the bathroom. We know what we spent. Unfortunately, buyers don't care nearly as much as we do.

A $100,000 renovation does not necessarily add $100,000 to the sale price. Sometimes it adds more. Sometimes less. And occasionally that custom feature you absolutely love causes a buyer to stand there quietly wondering how expensive it will be to remove. That's real estate.

The biggest mistake sellers can make in a changing market is pricing based on what they want the house to be worth instead of paying attention to what buyers are actually doing. The market gives us clues: How many comparable homes are available? How long are they sitting? Are they selling under asking? Are buyers competing? What condition are the homes in? And, most importantly, what did the most recent sales actually achieve—not the ones from two or three years ago that make everyone feel warm and fuzzy?

Here's the part that sometimes sounds backwards: pricing higher doesn't necessarily result in getting more money. In fact, it can do the opposite.

The first couple of weeks a property hits the market are usually when it gets the most attention. Buyers who have been watching the neighbourhood see it immediately. Agents send it to their clients. Everyone takes a look. If the price feels disconnected from reality, many buyers don't negotiate. They simply move on.

Then two weeks becomes four. Four becomes six. Eventually the price gets reduced, and suddenly everyone starts wondering what's wrong with the house. Usually, nothing is wrong with it. It was just priced wrong. And that's where sellers can end up chasing the market downward instead of meeting it where it is.

None of this means you should give your house away. Quite the opposite. Good pricing is about extracting the strongest possible result from the market that actually exists. There's a big difference between pricing aggressively and pricing unrealistically. One creates interest. The other creates lawn-sign longevity.

As both a Realtor and someone who spends a lot of time renovating houses, I probably look at value a little differently. I'm always thinking about what a buyer sees, what needs updating, what adds value, and what simply makes the home nicer to live in. Those aren't always the same thing.

Sometimes a relatively small investment before listing can create a meaningful return. Fresh paint, lighting, repairs, decluttering, landscaping, or finally fixing those little things you've stopped noticing because you've lived with them for ten years can make a major difference. Other times, spending $80,000 renovating a kitchen three months before selling makes absolutely no sense. The trick is knowing the difference.

So if you're thinking about selling, try to forget the number your neighbour got during the frenzy. Forget what someone at the golf course told you your house is worth. Start with what buyers are telling us today.

Because while I admire Costco's commitment to keeping that hot dog at the same price forever, unfortunately the housing market has never agreed to the same deal.

Julien Laurion
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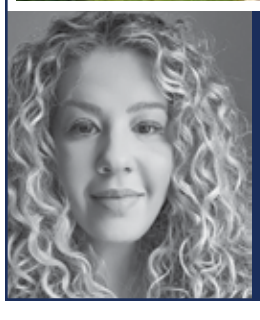


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RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

Low maintenance landscape features

Outdoor entertaining spaces have come a long way over the last several decades. While a simple deck or patio might once have been the norm, outdoor entertaining spaces have now evolved into multi-purpose spaces featuring full kitchens, living rooms equipped with televisions, and areas to gather around a fireplace or built-in firepit.

While hardscaping garners considerable attention when planning an outdoor entertaining space, landscaping should not be overlooked. Many homeowners want to enjoy their outdoor entertaining spaces without having to spend too much time tending to the surrounding grounds, which can make these low-maintenance landscape features the perfect fit.

NATIVE PLANTS: Native plants are low maintenance because they are naturally adapted to the local climate. That means homeowners won't have to expend extra effort and energy watering plants or amending the soil. Non-native species may provide some bold colors, but that comes at the cost of additional maintenance. There's also an environmental cost when planting non-native species, as the United States Environmental Protection Agency warns that non-native species typically displace natives, which can adversely affect the local ecosystem.

PERENNIALS: Homeowners looking to accent their outdoor entertaining areas with flowers can choose perennials over annuals. Perennials live for three or more years, and some species can even live for a decade or more. While they might require some seasonal pruning, perennials will not need to be replanted each year like annuals.

TOLERANT PLANTS: Plants that can tolerate the local climate generally fall under the native category. But it's especially important that homeowners who don't want to expend much effort on landscape maintenance look for plants that can tolerate drought. A recent study from researchers at UCLA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, and CIRES predict drought conditions will last longer, cover wider areas, and become more severe as the climate continues to warm. Drought-resistant plants may still require some watering if such predictions hold true. However, such plants will not require as much maintenance as those that are less equipped to handle drought. Homeowners who choose plants with drought-tolerance in mind won't have to spend as much time watering and also can protect their financial investment.

Outdoor entertaining spaces are meant to be enjoyed. And homeowners may enjoy such spaces a lot more if they opt for low-maintenance landscape solutions.



Is a sunroom right for you?

There is no denying the appeal of a sunroom. Sunrooms bring more of the outdoors inside by bridging the gap between home and yard.

Demand is shifting, with more than 61 percent of homeowners now preferring four-season insulated rooms for year-round use, according to Market Reports World. A sunroom has the potential to offer a roughly 50 percent return on investment and can cost anywhere from $22,000 to $72,000 on average.

A sunroom addition is a significant investment and a decision not to take lightly, as it changes both the interior floor plan and backyard space. To decide if a sunroom really is a worthwhile endeavor, it's important for homeowners to consider the footprint of their homes/yards, how they plan to use the space, and the amount of sun the home receives.

HOME FOOTPRINT

Professionals with the National Association of Realtors say that a sunroom should not consume more than 30 percent of the remaining backyard and urge homeowners to avoid over-developing a lot. If installing a sunroom will leave a homeowner with only a small patch of yard afterwards, the result can feel heavy and unbalanced. It also won't match the neighborhood. Another consideration is the local zoning ordinances where a person lives. The City of Los Angeles, for example, warns that most towns require a setback between the sunroom structure and the property line. It's also important to look at the home's roof and whether or not the sunroom will fall right under the eaves or if it will require an expensive tie-in to the existing roof.

UTILITY

It is vital that homeowners determine how they will use the space and when. This will dictate the type of sunroom that should be built. A three-season room is typically uninsulated with only single-pane glass. This is ideal if someone is looking for a screened-in retreat without all of the bugs and a little weather protection. Four-season rooms are fully insulated and tie into a home's HVAC system. This space will be functional all year long, but it is a more expensive undertaking as well.

LIGHT EVALUATION

The purpose of a sunroom is to benefit from the sun. The value of the space will depend entirely on which way the room faces. North-facing sunrooms have soft light with minimal heat or glare that likely can be used all day. Morning people can appreciate an east-facing sunroom while drinking coffee or reading, and the space will cool down in the afternoon. South-facing rooms will be bright most of the day and may need high-end HVAC hookups or shades to stay comfortable, even in cooler months. West-facing sunrooms are great for watching sunsets, but the hot afternoon sun must be considered. UV-rated glass to prevent floor fading and even sunburn likely will be needed.

It is important to work with a company that specializes in sunrooms. Such firms are experienced in helping homeowners design and ultimately build these spaces to avoid common pitfalls, advises Champion, a window, sunroom and home exterior company.

In general, a sunroom is not a DIY project since it typically involves a major structural change. It can be a viable addition to a home when built correctly to remain durable through every season.

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RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

How to brighten INTERIOR spaces



If spring and summer are seasons when homeowners focus their renovation energy on outdoor living spaces, that attention shifts back inside upon the arrival of fall.

People tend to spend much more time indoors than outside come late fall and throughout the winter. The ambiance inside in fall and winter is notably different, as fewer hours of daylight can darken interior spaces. Finding ways to brighten home interiors can make spaces more inviting in late fall and throughout the winter.

LAYER WITH SHEER AND BLACKOUT CURTAINS

The simplest way to brighten interior spaces is to allow natural light to illuminate them, but that can be difficult in homes with blackout curtains. Blackout curtains are highly effective at keeping light out, but they won't do much to brighten interior spaces in the winter. Layer blackout curtains with sheer curtains so you can still get some privacy but brighten interior spaces with natural light at the same time.

ADD LIGHTING WHEREVER POSSIBLE

The days when interior lighting was limited to floor lamps and overhead fixtures are long gone. Various types of lighting can now be used to brighten interior spaces throughout winter. Recessed lighting is a relatively inexpensive upgrade that can brighten any room in a home at any point in a day. Unlike a traditional overhead fixture where the light emanates from a single source, recessed lighting can be installed in various points in the ceiling so each corner of a room can be lit up. In addition to recessed lighting, under cabinet lighting in kitchens and on bookshelves can brighten spots that traditional fixtures typically fail to illuminate. Layering the lighting so light comes from various sources can create a brighter feel.

USE COLOR TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Color is another tool that can be used to brighten interior spaces in the winter. If homeowners are reluctant to paint walls with new and brighter colors, then accents can lend rooms a lighter feel. Vibrantly colored throw pillows, blankets and fixtures can create a lighter feel when residents and guests enter a room. Artwork with light colors also can help to brighten interior spaces.

WASH THE WINDOWS

They are easily overlooked, but dirty windows can block natural light and greatly reduce the amount of light entering a home through the windows. Clean the interior and exterior of your windows prior to winter so any grime that has built up in recent months and years is not preventing light from entering your home.

Turn your bedroom into a relaxing retreat

People who use their bedrooms as a work space may find they're compromising their well-being by introducing activities into the bedroom. The Sleep Foundation says having an office in the bedroom blurs the lines between work and personal life, which can have serious effects on sleep. Rather, people should be looking to turn their bedrooms into relaxing retreats that offer a respite from the outside world.

• **REMOVE BLUE-LIGHT EMITTING DEVICES.** Computers, tablets, smartphones, and other electronic devices emit blue light, which can compromise natural melatonin production in the body that contributes to sleep. Such devices should not be used at night in the bedroom.

• **USE A NEUTRAL COLOR PALETTE.** Neutral color palettes evoke a spa feeling. Walls can be painted white, beige or a light shade of gray. This can help the room feel calming and welcoming.

• **DECLUTTER THE ROOM.** A sense of calm can be achieved simply by removing excess clutter. There is some evidence that the brain is more calm near an empty dresser, desk or clothes hamper. Therefore, removing excessive items from the room is a first step to making a nice retreat.

• **ADD SOFT LIGHTING.** Adjust the intensity and the color of the lighting in the bedroom. It should be subtle and warming. Dimmers enable homeowners to adjust lighting as needed.

• **INSTALL AN ELECTRIC FIREPLACE.** There is something to be said for the relaxing effects of gazing into the flames of a fire. A crackling (faux-wood) fire is an added layer of indulgence in a bedroom.

• **ADD AN AREA RUG.** Even in rooms with carpeting, an area rug under the bed can further define the perimeter of the bed and add extra plushness underfoot.

• **INVEST IN AROMATHERAPY DIFFUSERS.** Certain smells can create a relaxing mood. These may be sandalwood, lavender or jasmine. Utilizing their preferred scents, homeowners can employ reed diffusers in their bedrooms to enjoy the aromas of natural oils.

• **USED CLOSED STORAGE.** Open shelves and visible closet interiors may not hide a mess. Exposure to clutter can contribute to feelings of anxiety. Store items that shouldn't be on display behind closed doors or drawers.

• **BRING IN LUXURY LINENS.** Homeowners should not skimp on comforters, sheets, duvet covers, and pillows for their beds. A cozy bed to dive right into can serve as the centerpiece of a bedroom retreat.

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c 416.271.4100
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