

Spring Home & Garden  
**WAUKESHA**  
County  
Special Edition

# HOME



**Your Guide to Homes, Home Improvement, Lawn & Garden and MORE!**

A publication of the Waukesha Freeman and Oconomowoc Enterprise • April 2021

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Home sellers celebrate,  
buyers fret



Simple steps to get  
the weeds out

## NARI to hold spring show May 21-23

MILWAUKEE — NARI Milwaukee is planning its 59th annual Spring Home Improvement Show to run May 21-23 at State Fair Park in West Allis.

Front-line workers in the pandemic will get free admission, as will active and retired military personnel and those 17 and younger.

Exhibitors run from design/build firms to specialized contractors for all areas of the home, including roofing, gutters, windows, doors, HVAC, electrical and more.

Tickets are \$10 in advance (online only at [NARIMilwaukeeHomeShow.com](http://NARIMilwaukeeHomeShow.com)); \$12 at the door; adults 60 and up pay \$8 at the door.

For more information, visit [NARIMilwaukee.org](http://NARIMilwaukee.org) or call 414-771-4071.

# Making a good first impression

Selling a home?  
Declutter, adopt  
neutral tones,  
experts advise

By Eileen Mozinski Schmidt  
Special to Waukesha County Home

It is a fast-moving real estate market, but the experts say there are still some steps to take when listing a property.

First impressions remain critical, according to Nancy Kurtz Hamm, of Kurtz Realty LLC.

"You want as many people as possible to have a good first impression," she said, noting that there may be only about 30 seconds of time to capture a viewer's interest with photographs in an online listing.

Attractive pictures of the property are important and so the advice of a staging company can be helpful, Hamm said.

"It helps buyers envision what they can do with your house," she said. "Often it helps it look bigger or helps buyers figure out spaces. You are giving buyers information with staging."

Home showings are typically being slated for just half an hour in the current market, according to Hamm, who said due to the pandemic it is considered better to not have showing parties overlap.

"There is a shorter amount of time to make an impression on a buyer," she said. "You want buyers to walk in and immediately feel comfortable."

With buyers poised to make a major financial decision, Hamm said sellers need to help interested parties become attached to a property and then make a serious offer.



Submitted photo

A view of the living room after staging in a photo by James Meyer Photography. Katie Knitter, co-owner and lead stager at Becoming Home, LLC, said professional stagers can assist in furnished homes by identifying personal items that could distract buyers at the property.

**"You minimize, you declutter,  
you make it the market's home**

— Marc Weisz,  
Benchmark Real Estate in Waukesha

"Anything you can do to help them envision living there is worth it," she said.

Hamm advised removing family pictures and personal items like trophies or collections and knick-knacks.

"You want them to focus on the house and not focus on your life," she said, adding that removing

items with political or religious connections is also recommended.

Realtor Marc Weisz with Benchmark Real Estate in Waukesha said a seller with a furnished home could work on their own version of staging.

"You minimize, you declutter, you make it the market's home," he said, also recommending depersonalizing the space. As to exteriors, Weisz said he tells his clients "the more curb appeal the better."

He said a seller should consider the time and money involved in the sale and what is most impor-

tant. Those aiming for top dollar for a property may want to put extra effort into its appearance.

**'Show it at its best'**

At Becoming Home, LLC, a Waukesha-based business owned and operated by mother and daughter team Amy Monroe and Katie Knitter, there have been more calls for occupied property staging consultations recently.

Due to the busy market, some sellers are "under the impression that their house and every other

**See IMPRESSION/Page 4**





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## Reduce your plastic footprint

(StatePoint) — Plastic contributes to climate change and is a major pollutant, harming wildlife and people. Here are a few tips for reducing your plastic footprint at home that will also contribute to a healthier planet.

### 1. Start a garden

From cartons of berries and tomatoes to individually-wrapped cucumbers, it can be difficult to avoid plastic in the produce aisle of your supermarket. By growing your favorite fruits, vegetables and herbs at home, you may avoid some of this waste and reduce your carbon footprint at the same time, as foods found in the store are often shipped from distant places.

### 2. Keep your produce green

When you do have to grab a staple that's not in your garden, bring some reusable produce bags with you. Stick to the loose fruits and veggies not already wrapped in plastic.

### 3. Green your hydration

Bottled water contains microplastics and is a significant part of the global plastic waste problem. Use a water filter pitcher. To shop or learn more, visit LifeStraw.com, Target.com, or CrateandBarrel.com.

### 4. Rethink garbage collection

Plastic garbage bags may seem necessary, but there are reusable alternatives available. For example, Bagito makes durable, washable, water-resistant garbage can liners from 100% post-consumer recycled plastics.

  
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# Impression

From Page 1

house is going to sell immediately,” Monroe said. “Sometimes the case depends on where the house is located and also how updated the house is.”

The goal of staging, she said, is to “try to elevate the home to show it at its best.”

With vacant properties, the research shows only about 10% of the population is able to visualize what it could look like if furnished, according to Monroe, who noted that updated furniture and decor can effectively mask other aspects about a property that are not updated.

As to sellers with a furnished property, a stager can help bring a fresh set of eyes and an objective perspective to the marketing process.

Knitter noted that even as a professional stager, she still might miss the personal items that could distract a buyer around her own home if she was

“Try to eliminate shocking bright colors.”

— Amy Monroe,  
Becoming Home, LLC

preparing to sell.

“I think it is helpful to have someone come in. You really want to make sure you’re depersonalizing,” she said.

As to color schemes, Monroe recommended sticking to neutrals.

“Try to eliminate shocking bright colors,” she said, with the exception of “maybe a nice spa-like color” in the owner’s bedroom.

Throughout the house she said “unchanging color from room-to-room is the most soothing on the eye.”

Both Knitter and Monroe are each certified in home staging and although it is a physically demanding job, both said they enjoy seeing the results of their efforts.

Making a space go from “empty to beautiful, that is really rewarding,” Monroe said.



A view of the living room in a vacant property before staging, which is shown on page 1. With vacant properties, research shows only about 10% of the population is able to visualize what it could look like if furnished, according to Amy Monroe, co-owner and lead stager of Waukesha area company Becoming Home, LLC.

Submitted photo

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# In pandemic home-buying season, sellers celebrate, buyers fret

By Jeff Ostrowski  
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Longtime real estate broker Nick Bailey has experienced his share of ups and downs in the housing market, and he's taking the real estate boom of the past year in stride.

Bailey, chief customer officer at RE/MAX, one of the nation's largest real estate brands, acknowledges that the coronavirus pandemic has skewed the usual patterns of supply and demand, while also straining affordability.

"It's an obvious seller's market, somewhat to an extreme, for many reasons," Bailey says. "Over the last year, people are realizing how much home matters."

He spoke to Bankrate about the housing market — including why he's not worried about a bubble — heading into the spring selling season.

**Q: How would you describe this intense seller's market?**

**Bailey:** There are more Realtors than there are listings in the U.S., maybe for the first time ever. Active listings as of March 1 were 42% lower than a year ago. It's just extremely tight. That's why we're seeing bidding wars. That's why we're seeing appreciation in the double digits. Inventory rates are at 1.2% of total households in the U.S., which is historically low. For home sellers, it is a great time to sell.

**Q: A great time to sell, but what advice do you give buyers?**



Vernon Bryant/Dallas Morning News/TNS

The key to success when you're in a competitive market is to make sure you have a really good real estate agent.

**A:** It's a frustrating time to buy, because of how competitive it is. The key to success when you're in a competitive market is to make sure you have a really good real estate agent. Agents are doing a lot of matchmaking. They're saying, "I've got these sellers who are ready to sell but they're waiting for something to come onto the market so they can buy." We're telling agents to communicate with your database more than you ever have. This is literally a contact sport.

**Q: How should home shoppers handle bidding wars?**

**A:** What we're seeing is the agent's ability

"The buyers who are building a really great offer on the front end are the ones that are winning. It's all about removing friction for the seller."

— Nick Bailey,  
Chief customer officer at RE/MAX

to write an offer is very important. The ones who are winning are those who know how to structure an offer. For instance, they're including an escalation clause based on price. You don't know what the other bidders are offering, so an escalation clause can help you compete. Maybe a waiver of inspections. The buyers who are building a really great offer on the front end are the ones that are winning. It's all about removing friction for the seller. Looking at very recent comparables is very important. It's not, "What did the house down the street sell for six months ago?" It's, "What did it sell for six days ago?"

**Q: Mortgage rates are rising — does that mean home price appreciation will cool?**

**A:** We saw significant price appreciation in 2020. In 2021, we'll expect to see some level of appreciation, just given the level of inventory. The refi business is already showing signs of slowing down considerably. But as rates tick up, the thing to note is we're still at this point lower than a year ago. We're sitting just over 3%, whereas a year ago, we were at 3.3%.

Real estate didn't get us into this recession, but it is one of the leading industries — if not the leading industry — that will get us out of this recession.

**Q: Housing economists increasingly use the word "unsustainable" to describe this market.**

**A:** Can appreciation continue to move at the same rate, year over year? The answer is no. But at the same time, when you have a dramatic decrease in rates, that makes a difference. Most people aren't as concerned with rates or even the cost of the home as they are with their monthly payment. As rates fell, buying power increased. Now, their buying power is decreasing. To me, that's the catalyst that will cool some buyer activity. But with millennials and the generation after them coming into the housing market, the demand for housing long-term is really, really strong.

**Q: Are you worried about a housing bubble?**

**A:** A lot of people have been asking if we're in a bubble. Compared to 10 years ago, there's one dramatic difference: 34% of all homes don't have a mortgage, 64% of homes have a mortgage and positive equity and just 2% have negative equity, mainly homes that were bought with very low down payments. In many cases, we have homeowners who are cash-poor and equity rich. It's the opposite of the last boom, when people were using their homes as ATMs.

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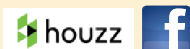
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# Taking control of the weeds in the garden

In the previous article we talked about the rebirth of gardening in the past year.

So, I figured a short course in basic care, whether for the new or experienced gardener, might be a good idea.

In the next months we will be looking at weed control, insect control, disease control and varmint control in our gardens, being ornamental or vegetable. About 90% of all questions asked of me lie in these topics.

So let's start with weeds, the scourge of the garden.

I was once told that a weed is just a flower out of place. My definition is any plant that interferes with the desired plant I'm trying to grow. We all have weeds to contend with in the garden, and I don't know about you, but I don't like to use a lot of chemicals. But they do have their uses as well. But let's take a look at some cultural practices to control weeds and at least limit our chemical use.

One of the best preventative ways to combat weeds is to provide the best possible growing conditions. Garden placement, soil conditions, proper watering and fertilizer use, all have a hand in weed control.

Since weeds have the ability to grow anywhere it seems it gives them the upper hand.

So placement of your beds is important. Pay attention to sun/shade exposure, moisture and drainage, wind and other environ-



**MICHAEL  
TIMM**

mental factors before choosing your plants. Depending on these conditions, you need to place the right plant in the right place. This allows the plants the ability to compete with the weeds. Location and healthy plants go hand in hand.

## Soil: The crucial element

The condition of your soil is crucial. Most plants like to grow in a somewhat loose, well-drained soil that still retains moisture. Weeds aren't too fussy when it comes to where they grow, like the cracks of your sidewalk or driveway. Here lies the problem; most of us don't have this perfect soil.

Fertility has to do with how much organic matter is in the soil. Organic matter is what feeds your plants and creates a living soil.



Michael Timm

Persistent weeding along with good soil help maintain a weed-free garden.

If only there was something we could do to help out both soil condition and fertility. There is. Compost, compost, compost! The more the better. Compost will improve any soil from sandy to hard clay.

Proper watering and fertilizing are also important. Water your plants on a regular basis and never let them get too dry or too wet. Find a quality organic fertilizer to use.

Organic fertilizers are best because they are less likely to be harmful to your plants and the soil. Save the chemical fertilizers for your baskets and containers where soil is changed on a yearly basis. Chemical fertilizers are petroleum based so they can kill a healthy soil fast, and even injure plants,

especially with over use. And remember, healthy soil equals healthy plants. A plant under stress will always lose out to weeds.

Now that we have healthy plants growing in a healthy environment, what more can we do? Try mulching.

Mulching will not only suppress weeds, but keeps the environment healthy. Mulching aids in water retention, reduces compaction and helps with fertility. Marsh hay, grass clippings, compost or other organic mulches can be used.

Pre-emergent herbicides also help. They keep weed seeds from germinating. There are organic ones like corn gluten for your edible gardens and other synthetic ones for your ornamental beds. You still have to deal with weeds that grow from roots, but at least you won't have to contend with those that start from seed.

Lastly, you will still have to do some hand weeding. It's simply a fact of life with gardening. But if you do it on a weekly basis, it won't seem as tedious. I do it every time I walk through my gardens.

So by creating a healthy environment, growing stress free plants and mulching, you'll control most of the weeds. Then with a little hand weeding you can tackle the rest. Happy gardening!

*(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist at Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)*

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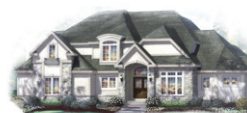
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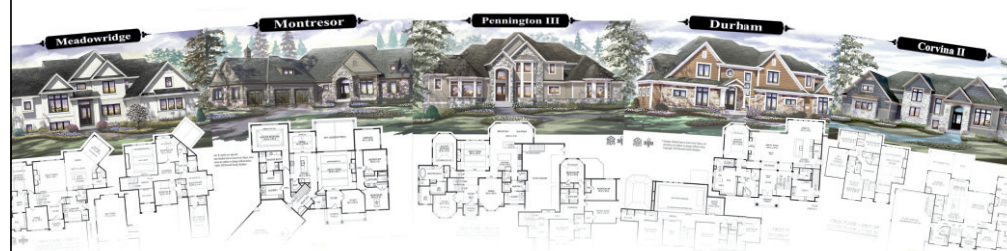
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