

# Shopping for a Home in the Winter

Many potential home buyers decide to buy in the winter. This seems like a bad idea to many people, but sometimes it is very wise to look for your next home when the snow is falling.

Why? Well, the top reason is that you face less competition among potential buyers. Most people spend the winter preparing for the holidays, celebrating and staying inside where it is warm. When you look for a home in the winter, there is no doubt that you will be shopping among fewer buyers than you would if you were looking in the spring or even summer.

Here are some of the advantages to home shopping in the winter:



## People Who Sell in the Winter are Generally in a Hurry to Sell

Most sellers prefer to offer their home in the best possible conditions and when buyers will be looking for homes in droves. However, sometimes situations require that the seller list the home during the winter. These sellers almost always need to sell the home for relocation or financial reasons, or because they have already purchased a new home.

This puts you, the buyer, at a significant advantage. Although you will find fewer homes from which to choose, you will also find less competition when you place your offer.

Does having fewer homes to choose from really present a problem? For some potential homebuyers, the answer is yes. For everyone else, it does not present much of a problem, because if they don't find what they want during the winter they can usually wait until the spring.

A seller who lists a home in the winter needs to sell. That makes the seller more willing to provide assistance with closing costs, negotiate over necessary upgrades and repairs, and possibly accept a bid below the asking price.

## Realtors Have More Free Time

Scheduling is one of the most difficult balancing acts during the home-buying process. However, in the winter realtors work with fewer clients and therefore have more time to devote to you. Realtors earn their income when people buy and sell homes. Since sellers and buyers may be in short demand over the winter months, realtors are more willing and able to offer their services to help you find the home of your dreams.

## You May Be Able to Take Advantage of Special Mortgage Programs

Since fewer people want to buy homes in the winter, lenders often offer special introductory rates, zero-closing-cost programs, and even no-down-payment programs for borrowers who might otherwise be required to pay three or four percent of the home's purchase price up-front. These benefits can help you

save thousands of dollars on the purchase of your new home. Who doesn't like savings?

Additionally, lenders are not as busy during the winter months. This means that you, as a buyer, may be able to receive your pre-approval or loan approval much faster in the winter than during busier times of the year.



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Naturally, there are exceptions to every rule. In general, the advantages described above apply to potential homebuyers in locations where winters are severe. Those purchasing homes in warmer areas where winter does not mean inches of snowfall and sub-zero temperatures may find that only a few of these advantages apply in their situation. However, it is generally accepted that people do not sell or buy homes during the holidays.

When you decide to shop for your new home in the winter, you will probably experience the worst that the home and location have to offer. This can definitely educate you, as the buyer, about what their life will be like should you choose to purchase a particular home.

Here are some of the things that you will need to keep in mind when you are shopping for your home during the winter:

### **Weather Considerations**

Realtors are required to warn home sellers ahead of time when they are going to show their homes, but road crews operate on their own schedule. Although the seller may have time to light candles, run the vacuum cleaner and load the dishwasher, the roads used to get to the home may be snow-covered, wet or even icy.

If you are looking for a home far from where you currently live, seeing the conditions of the roads that you will potentially travel may give you insight into how the neighborhood is maintained. Obviously, the road crews are busy when snow is falling. However, if the snow stopped falling hours or even days before you venture out to visit a potential home, you should expect the roads to be passable. Impassable road conditions might be a red flag for some homebuyers, particularly in hilly areas.

## **Home Heating Systems Must be Functional in the Winter**

Although many spring and summer homebuyers discover that the home's heating system is sub-standard only through home inspections, when you view a potential new home during the winter you may be able to see the warning signs of trouble yourself.

Realtors advise sellers to keep their home comfortably warm during the winter months in order to make potential buyers more comfortable. Even if the thermostat is normally set to 65 degrees, it will probably be much warmer while you are looking at the home.

If you visit a potential new home that is not as warm as you might like it to be, check for drafty areas and feel the vents or radiators to determine whether they are all functional.

This can also be a good time to determine the quality of the home's insulation. An exterior wall should never feel cold. If it does, assume that the home is not well insulated. Often home inspections will note whether insulation is present in the home and you can use this information to evaluate whether the insulation is effective against winter weather.

## **Landscaping is Not a Priority During the Winter Months**

Homebuyers who shop for a new home during the spring and summer almost always find walkways lined with brightly colored flowers and shrubs. In the winter, at least in most locations, it is impossible for sellers to maintain the lawn and gardens as they would during the blooming seasons.

For this reason, you need to take a close look at the landscape, or at least what you can see of it. You will have to use your imagination to visualize what the area will look like in the spring and summer.

If the advantages of buying during the winter appeal to you, or if you must buy a home during the winter, then it is wise to understand the pros and cons of winter home shopping. As mentioned earlier, realtors will be more available to assist with your home search in the winter. Most realtors will be more than happy to sit down with you and discuss other potential issues to be considered when purchasing a home in the winter months, so call to schedule an appointment today.