

SPRING HOME

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WHAT'S INSIDE



What's going on at your local garden club?
— Pages 2 & 3

Gardener Pam Duthie's perennial picks
— Page 4

Getting specific about home 'staging'
— Page 6

Professionals offer advice to do-it-yourself homeowners
— Page 8

And much more...

Correction: The caption for the Winter Home 'Dream Kitchen' story Feb. 4 omitted that MAC Custom Homes won Best Kitchen in last year's Parade of Homes.

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Spiffing up your home for sale goes to the next 'stage'

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM
Special to the Record-Eagle

Are you getting ready to sell your home? If so, one of the most important jobs you'll be facing on your to-do list is how to prepare your home to make it as attractive as possible for potential buyers.

You might call it dressing your house for success, though the hot new term is "staging." Much like preparing a production to present for an audience, how you "stage" your home for showing can prove to be critical in not only selling your house, but doing it in as quick a period of time and getting the best price for it as possible.

George Beeby, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Schmidt in Traverse City, says that talking to sellers about sprucing up their home can sometimes be a sensitive topic, but one that deserves serious attention.

"Sometimes, it's the little things, not always the big ones, that can make or break a sale," said Beeby, "and how you present your house, both inside and out, can really play a role in that."

"It's important from the moment you bring a buyer to the house. We call it curb appeal, and it's a very real thing," Beeby continued. "There have been situations where there's been a showing, the client was in the car and then you drive up to the house and see an uncared-for lawn, unpainted house and a messy garage. Unless you can make a good first impression, you may not even get someone in the front door, but you also need to attend to what's in the house, as well."

When Dr. Brad Goodwin and his wife, Dana, were

planning to sell their historic Seventh Street home in Traverse City recently, they went through a thorough checklist of home improvement projects that not only made the home a more pleasant place to live until they did move, but were critical to selling the house quickly and at their asking price.

"We probably went above and beyond, but we were motivated to sell and because it was a historic home, we wanted to showcase it in the best possible light," said Dana Goodwin. "Everything we did not only improved the value, but added to the general character of the house. All the work was worth it in the end, though we did wonder if we really wanted to sell it after we got everything accomplished."

The Goodwins put on a new roof, redid the front porch, painted a number of rooms, installed new hardwood floors and a furnace, and made major improvements in the bathrooms and kitchen.

"We got enjoyment out of it for the time we were there, and then were proud to pass it on to the new owners so they could pick up where we left off," said Goodwin. "It was only on the market for 2 ½ weeks and in the end, the buyers had two houses in the same price range, but ours had more work done, which I know made the difference. We got a lot of satisfaction out of being stewards of our home and making those improvements."

So what are some of the most important tips when it comes to preparing your house for showing?

Start with the outside. Keep the lawn neatly cut, place trash containers and

like items out of sight, and make sure trees and shrubs don't obscure views or windows. Faded or chipped exterior paint should be dealt with, and while a new paint job isn't always an ultimate fix, it can be a good way to add appeal and increase market value. Be sure to make your front entrance accessible, clean and attractive. Windows should also be clean, with no streaks.

Inside the house, concentrate on removing as much clutter as possible and perhaps even putting some

See **SPIFFING**, Page 6▶



Washington Post/Timothy Bell

Buyers often decide if they like a home within the first five minutes, say many real estate agents, because potential buyers see what is there, not the possibilities. If home-sellers swap personal tastes, like replacing red wall-to-wall carpet with soft beige for a model-home look, it can help boost a sale.

Gardening in a new zone

BY ADRIAN HIGGINS
The Washington Post

The idea of milder winters after this miserable season might seem foolish, but for residents of many densely populated regions, winter is getting warmer.

The finding is embodied in the nation's new plant-hardiness zone map, a horticultural bible for gardeners who want to figure out what plants will grow in their yards.

Compiled by consulting meteorologist Mark Kramer for the American Horticultural Society and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the map is the USDA's second revision since the original was first printed in 1965. The first updated map was published in 1990, using 13 years of records from 6,000 weather stations in every state. The new one draws on data from 7,000 weather stations over a period of 16 years and shows marked changes in zone boundaries. The old one consisted of 11 zones. The new one has four more to map the tropical climate of Hawaii.

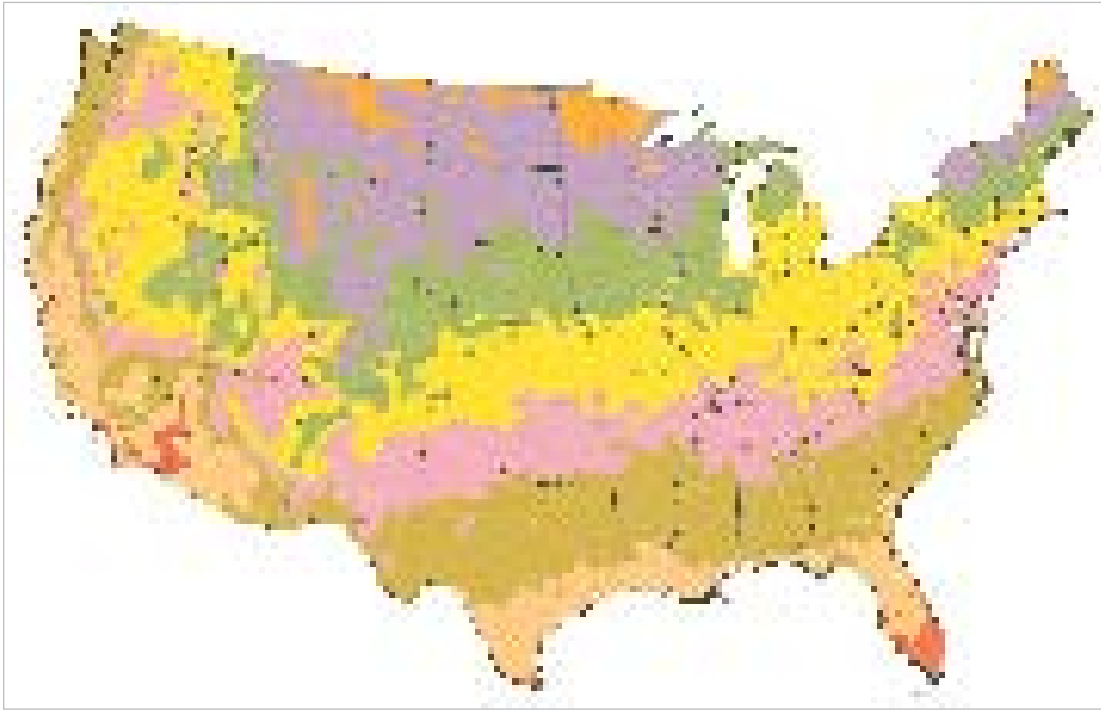
Beyond the map's basic mission as a guide to which plants will survive where, it has taken on the role of defining one's garden in

the way that names identify people, and it is also a point of reference for gardeners in different regions.

The warming creep is seen throughout much of the Midwest. The lower half of Michigan, virtually all of Ohio and even much of Indiana and Illinois now bask in the glow of Zone 6. Balmy zone 10 (30 to 40 degrees) has crept a third of the way up the Florida peninsula, and Miami and environs are in decidedly subtropical Zone 11, where winter minimums, on average, never drop below 40 degrees.

Kramer cautions against using the new map to prove global warming, which is measured by comparing year-round average temperatures at a fixed location away from urban heat islands. The cold hardiness map essentially measured the coldest night of the year each winter between 1986 and 2001 at weather stations and then averaged them.

Many parts of the country were unchanged, he said, and areas that were on the margin before can be pushed into the next zone by small changes in temperature. Kramer compiled the map with CarrieAnn Paukowitz, both of



Courtesy of the American Horticultural Society

This graphic details the nation's new plant-hardiness zone map, a horticultural bible for gardeners who want to figure out what plants will grow in their yards.

Meteorological Evaluation Services Co., of Amityville, N.Y.

Still, the map does show warmer winters in many areas, and this may encourage gardeners to try plants they have previously failed with or considered too tender.

Marc Cathey, project coordinator for the American Horticultural Society, said the map does show how the growth of cities and suburbs in the 1990s has enlarged heat islands. Paradoxically, these hot spots might be caused by controversial factors — development sprawl and loss of tree canopy, for example — but can broaden the palette of plants that gardeners can use.

Among the cities with the most pronounced warming

are Chicago, where the city and environs shifted from Zone 5 to Zone 6; St. Louis, Zone 6 to 7; and Phoenix, Zone 9 to 10.

Kim Kaplan, spokeswoman for the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, said these hot spots are also showing up because the map can track them in a way that the old ones couldn't. The new map is computer generated and of much-higher resolution so it will pick up heat and cool islands "just a couple of pixels big," she said.

The new one is also principally an electronic document and will have layers of information available, including local conditions by Zip code. Cathey plans to launch what is being called a map preview this

weekend at an event called Washington Blooms, organized as part of the National Cherry Blossom Festival, but it will take about 30 days of review before it becomes an official government document, said Kaplan.

Look for it to appear on the Web sites of the American Horticultural Society (www.ahs.org) and the Agricultural Research Service (www.ars.usda.gov) over the next few weeks. The data were collected through the winter of 2001, so this year's winter is not reflected in the map.

However, Kramer said that for all the cold and snow that visited the East Coast in recent weeks, the season was not abnormally frigid.

"Even though it was a cold winter, persistent, it

Temperature (F)	Zone color, number & name
Below -50	1. Goldenrod
-40 to -50	2. Cornflower
-30 to -40	3. Carrot
-20 to -30	4. Violet
-10 to -20	5. Apple
0 to -10	6. Buttercup
10 to 0	7. Rose
20 to 10	8. Moss
30 to 20	9. Peach
40 to 30	10. Poinsettia
50 to 40	11. Peppermint
60 to 50	12. Melon
70 to 60	13. Bluebell
80 to 70	14. Orchid
80 & over	15. Papaya

didn't have record-breaking" low temperatures for his part of metropolitan New York.

The same was seen in Washington. In January, for example, the mercury dropped on the coldest night to 11 degrees at Reagan National Airport, but the monthly average minimum was a hair under 25 degrees, according to the National Weather Service. Compare that to February of 1899, for example, when the temperature got down to minus 7 on the 9th, and then fell over the next two nights to minus 8 and minus 15. Too cold for crape myrtle and pretty much everything else now routinely grown.