

GARDEN PARTY

Making plans for May flowers and herbs

"This is for people who want a little garden in their hearts." —Abby Zabar

"Where a garden is, friends walk." —Anonymous

Did you know that... Companion planting not only means that certain plants benefit by the proximity of other plants...

New... "Fairy Tale" Eggplant. An All-American Winner, "Fairy Tale" is not only early (50 days from trans-

plant), but also can be picked when small or left to double in size. Fruit is elongated, violet-white-and purple and is sweet, not bitter.

Plant Summerlong Basil. It's prolific, and just keeps coming, even in the heat. Pick it all season. Burpee (800-888-1447) and other companies carry seeds.

Herb of the month Sorrel. An easy perennial to grow, sorrel is the first

herb to break through the snow after a northern Michigan winter. Beloved by the Romans and a sure sign of spring, the first leaves add a lemony piquancy to salads.

Sorrel Sauce is versatile and delicious on fish. Recipe: Wilt two cups of chopped sorrel leaves and a minced shallot or small spring onion in 3 tablespoons of butter for 3-4 minutes.

Memorial Day Plant a pot of red, white and blue flowers for your porch. Fly Old Glory in your garden, too.

Old Timer's Garden Lore As soon as the soil can be

crumbled in your hand, it's time to sow seeds of beets, broccoli and cabbage. In fact, some hardy vegetables like broccoli and the cabbage family benefit from light frosts.

Garden bench reading "Green Prints: The Weeder's Digest" \$19.97 a year. To subscribe by mail: P O Box 1355, Fairview, NC 28730 or call 800-569-0602.

will save old issues for years because the content of "GreenPrints" is timeless.

Short season gardening Fashion a large cage or chicken wire fence around a tomato plant. Invert a black plastic trash bag over it. Cut out the top (the former bag bottom). This guards against northern Michigan's winds, and the black bag stores warmth.

Definition Double digging: Loosening the soil by digging a hole in the row; putting the dug out soil aside to the left, then digging the next hole to the right and putting that soil into the first hole and continuing down the row.

BY SALLY D. KET... Or, double digging you el. Or, when double with dig that sar because it when you t "Garden by Sally D. long garden northwest lake effect most every or dreams

Local real estate good for starter and high-end second h

BY HEATHER JOHNSON DUROCHER Special to the Record-Eagle

Here's some good news for homebuyers and home-sellers: the local real estate market is making a turn for the better.

"I've done more business so far this year than I did all of last year," said Rodger McCain, a Century 21 Pearson-Cook Realtor.

Other area realtors agreed, crediting the shift to interest rates remaining low, the election year being over and an overall sense that the economy is stabilizing.

"It definitely is starting to take off," said Carol Franklin, also of Century 21 Pearson-Cook, of the market which she said flat-lined in recent years, after a boom that lasted through the 1990s.

Northern Michigan's real estate market has been more of a buyers' market — listings outnumbering buyers — but that's changing slightly, especially in some of the more in-demand areas, according to several area Realtors.

Even as market activity increases, Realtors advise

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Al Jordan, Exit Hometown Realty

both buyers and sellers to remain flexible; sellers should price their homes accordingly and be willing to negotiate.

"There's a lot out there to choose from, the interest rates are wonderful. It's a good time to buy or sell," said Lynda Herkner, a Realtor with Mike Street & Company in Traverse City.

Some trends in the local real estate market:

Starter homes are easier to sell. Homes priced from \$100,000 to \$175,000 tend to sell fast.

"I don't think there are ever too many of these homes," said Herkner, a 24-year real estate veteran who four years ago began a business partnership with her son Myron Boone.

When these homes are well-maintained and are in good location, "they're bought up immediately," she said.

"They're just more affordable," agreed Al Jordan, associate broker and part

owner of Exit Hometown Realty in Kalkaska.

Which is why new construction in this range is popular in some areas.

"Builders have figured out that keeping it under the \$160,000 price range is going to sell it reasonably quick," McCain said. "It's not rocket science — the higher the price is, the fewer people who can afford it."

Pricing right is critical. Sellers sometimes have a tough time pricing their home to sell because they want to get the most out of the sale. But in this market, with buyers having much to choose from, pricing accordingly is key.

"Sellers need to realize that there's a glut on the market and be more realis-

tic at setting their value," Jordan said.

"It's still a tough market if you price your home too high. It'll sit," Franklin said.

In some areas, especially where there's new construction or a plethora of other pre-existing homes nearby, buyers just might overlook your home, she said. This is especially true for the mid-range priced homes — between \$225,000 and \$325,000 — because there are plenty of these on the market.

"If you have it priced too high, buyers have too much

to choose from. They won't even offer a low-ball offer. They'll go on to the next one," Franklin said.

The sad part, she added, is that in some areas "a lot of sellers are really begging for any kind of offer."

High-end houses are gaining ground as second homes, while sales of homes priced in the \$600,000 to \$1 million range have slowed in recent years, some realtors say that's starting to change.

"I'm seeing more people looking in that area, and a lot of it is as a second

home," Herkner said. These second homes are more about investment home, which is a good thing that the economy is stabilizing.

Heather J. Durocher is a freelance writer

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