



Avoid a Lemon: Know What to Look for when Buying a Home

Whether you are considering buying a house or selling one, conducting a rundown of property items could make all the difference in the world. Although not all things will require costly repairs, some might, which is why it's important to be prepared. Before you head out to look at homes or before you put your home on the market, check out these items to ensure they are in proper working order:

Look for settlement cracks on the wall, floor, or ceiling. Every home, at one time or another, will get a settlement crack, so if you find a few, there's no need to panic. However, if you notice major cracks, this could be a sign of structural problems. Mark down the location of where you find cracks and make sure they are pointed out to the inspector to determine the degree of damage. If they are small cracks, they can easily be filled with plaster and repainted.

- Look for any leaks. If you notice any water damage marks on the walls, floors, or ceilings, this could simply be from a bathtub or toilet that might have overflowed, or, it could be serious and be due to a leaky roof or poor plumbing. Also, check the tile in the bathrooms and kitchen for any indication of behind the wall leaks, such as mildew or loose tiles.
- Open and close all the doors and windows. Listen for squeaks or sticking. In most cases, this is simply a matter of spraying some lubricant such as WD-40, but it could also be another indicator of settlement.
- If there is an outside deck, check for rotted wood, which could be a sign of termites or it might just be old wood needing to be replaced.
- Check all of the electrical outlets. You can simply take a working nightlight with you to plug in. This will tell you if any of the outlets are not working properly.
- Check the garage doors, if applicable. Make sure they run smoothly on the track and that the openers are in good working order.
- Look for pests such as termites or ants. The best place to look is around the foundation, wiring, pipes, and doors or windows.
- Look at the grading of the yard, both front and back, to ensure that run-off water flows away from the house.
- Look at the gutters to ensure they are properly installed and that water flows out adequately.
- Check the driveway to look for crumbling concrete, pockmarks, or holes that would need to be fixed.
- Have the roof looked at by a professional. Make sure the shingles are installed correctly to eliminate any leakage and that no portions of the roof need to be fixed or replaced.
- Carefully check out the heating and cooling systems. These can be high dollar expenses so it's important that they are running properly. Often, these items are covered under a warranty so if there is a problem, see if you have warrant coverage.
- If there are any fireplaces or wood-burning stoves, make sure that the chimneys are clear of debris and that the flues are working properly.

- Caulking and weather stripping are important as well. Improper coverage will cause air leaks into the home, raising utility bills and causing unwanted drafts.

The good thing is that everything can be fixed. The bad part is that some items are costly, which is why it's so important to ensure you keep operating systems of the home in good working order. If you are buying a house, a good inspector should find all of these items and work with the seller to ensure most or all are taken care of.

If you are selling your home, having these things working properly will put you in a much better position of getting a good price out of your home.