



From the Broker's Desk Nancy C. Rowe



You hear on the news or read in a printed article about our real estate market being either a buyer market or a seller market. Just what does this terminology mean to the consumer? In a buyer's market, the housing inventory exceeds the number of available buyers so buyers have more inventory for selection and can negotiate more aggressively. This usually equates to a six month supply of available housing. The opposite is true for a seller's market where there are more buyers than available inventory and sellers are more likely to obtain at or close to list price. This usually equates to only a three month supply of available housing. During the recession and as we emerged from it, there was a backlog of inventory and a large number of foreclosures so we had several years of a buyer's market. As the economic outlook brightened and unemployment decreased, buyers became more active

and available inventory became depleted. Even the re-appearance of new constructions the last few years hasn't addressed the housing shortage so we have found ourselves in a seller's market. Each geographical area has its own distinctive market based on its economy so don't rely on national statistics but those of your own area. If you are a buyer in a seller's market, it is recommended that you start by being pre-qualified and obtain a lender letter. You will then know the price perimeters to work within and the lender letter is a good asset when negotiating begins. Know your market by researching local sales or speak with your local Realtor so you will be prepared to make a realistic offer when you find that perfect house. Low offers just don't work in a seller's market so be prepared to offer close to or over list price as bidding wars are not uncommon in a seller's market. If you just had to try that low offer and lost out to another buyer, learn from your mistakes and make better

choices the next time. Like the buyer that offers a low bid, some sellers in a seller's market think that they can overprice their house but it only adds marketing time. It is better to price at fair market value or slightly under as you will obtain an offer quicker and might create a bidding war with a final price above the list price. The real estate market fluctuates so perform your due diligence before selling or buying. The 2017 forecast indicates a slowing in the increase in house prices but house prices have already risen to a point where many earning the median income can no longer buy. We are hearing that many of the financial regulations in the Dodd-Frank Act may be removed which will create more credit availability to the consumer. Interest rates increased twice in 2016 and the forecast is for three increases in 2017 but the interest rate should remain at a rate not to exceed 5%. It's a great time to realize your real estate goal so if you have been contemplating buying or selling, contact a WILLOW Realty Agent today to discuss how we may assist.

Great Soil Enhancers

Excerpts © Marie Iannotti/TheSpruce.com

Few people start off with perfect garden soil and even great soil becomes depleted of nutrients and organic matter, after a few growing seasons. The best way to maintain productive soil is to constantly amend and replenish it. Fortunately there are a few free or nominally priced soil enhancers. You probably have a few around your yard or kitchen. Let's take a look at what each does for your garden.

Used Coffee Grounds-They can be used as mulch, they add a bit of nitrogen to the soil, they seem to attract worms, and can even deter slugs, although studies are ongoing about whether it is the abrasiveness of the grounds or the caffeine that does in the slugs. Don't worry about the acidity of coffee affecting the soil's pH. Studies have shown that as the coffee decomposes, the pH neutralizes. A bigger concern is what happens when you apply a very thick layer of coffee on top of the soil, about 2 inches or more. As the coffee dries, it forms a crusty shell that does not allow water to pass through. Use your coffee grounds sparingly. Put the excess in the compost. And don't forget about those paper coffee filters. They can often be composted, too.

Used Tea Leaves-Sprinkle your used tea leaves around the base of acid loving plants, including your tomatoes and roses. Tea leaves contain all the big three nutrients, N-P-K, as well as some trace minerals. Sprinkle the used leaves on the soil and gently scratch them in. Another clever way to make use of used tea bags is using them to cover the drainage holes in containers. They hold the soil in while allowing the excess water to drain. Some of the



Red, White & Blue Mashed Potatoes.

© FoodTV.com/Sunny Anderson

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2 lbs red new potatoes, quartered | 1/4 cup heavy cream, room temp. |
| 2 cloves garlic, smashed | 1 tbs butter, room temp. |
| 5 to 6 strips bacon | Salt and ground black pepper |
| 1/4 lb Gorgonzola cheese, room temp. | |



Add potatoes and garlic to a medium pot and fill with enough cold water to cover the potatoes by an inch. Season with salt and bring water to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook until potatoes are soft, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, fry bacon in a skillet until crisp. Set aside on a paper towel to drain. Roughly chop and reserve. Drain potatoes and garlic and place them back in the pot with the cheese, heavy cream, butter and chopped bacon. Roughly mash, adding more cream if needed. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

nutrients will wash out with the water, but you could still get a bit of that benefit in the container soil, too.

Pine Needles-Pine needles, or pine straw, as it is sometimes called, doesn't add much in the way of nutrients, but it is still a great form of organic matter and it can work wonders for loosening up heavy soils. The older needles naturally drop from evergreen trees in the fall. Since they are already dry, you can simply rake them up and spread them around your plants and garden beds. They won't mat and decompose the way grass clippings do. If you are worried about pine needles raising the pH level, rest assured that the affect is minimal and, as with coffee grounds, temporary. You would always use them around acid loving plants, like azaleas and blueberries.



Straw Animal Bedding-Straw makes a wonderful mulch. It's easy to put down, lightweight, spiders love to live in it, water passes through it, and it's easy to move aside when you need to plant. It is also unattractive, which makes it a better choice for the vegetable garden than a flower bed. While straw is relatively inexpensive to purchase, you can sometimes get the straw bedding cleaned out of horse and livestock stalls for free, if you have the means to trek it home. Straw bedding will come with some manure and urine mixed in, so you don't want to add it to your garden until it's had a few months to compost. So set up a pile near your compost, and away from open windows where the scent might blow in, and keep replenishing your supply.

Newspaper and Cardboard-We all have plenty of newspaper and cardboard piling up. Rather than taking it to recycling, use it as a base under organic mulches. Both are wonderful at suppressing weeds and holding in moisture. You could even spread a thick layer of newspaper or a sheet of cardboard over existing grass and then cover with soil, to create an instant planting bed.



Chipped Bark-If you have access to a chipper, you can create mulch from all the branches you prune in the spring. Even if you can't do your own chipping, check with your town landfill. More and more of these facilities are creating compost and chipping piles that they offer to anyone who can cart them away. Be wary of the compost, unless you know what has gone into it. It could include weed killer and other chemicals you don't want on your plants. However the chipped wood is usually safe to use. It's worth asking. Take a look around at other seemingly waste products, like wood ash and saw dust. If they are organic based and have not been exposed to chemicals, they are probably good for your soil.



Diversity: the art of thinking independently together. ~ Malcolm Forbes