

home/GARDEN

FALL 2019

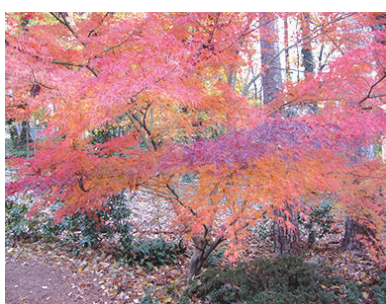


Outdoor living

*Sharon and Gerald Parks
enjoy their expansive outdoor
kitchen year-round. Page 5.*

To-Do

*Take steps now to
help garden plants
survive the cold.
Page 2.*

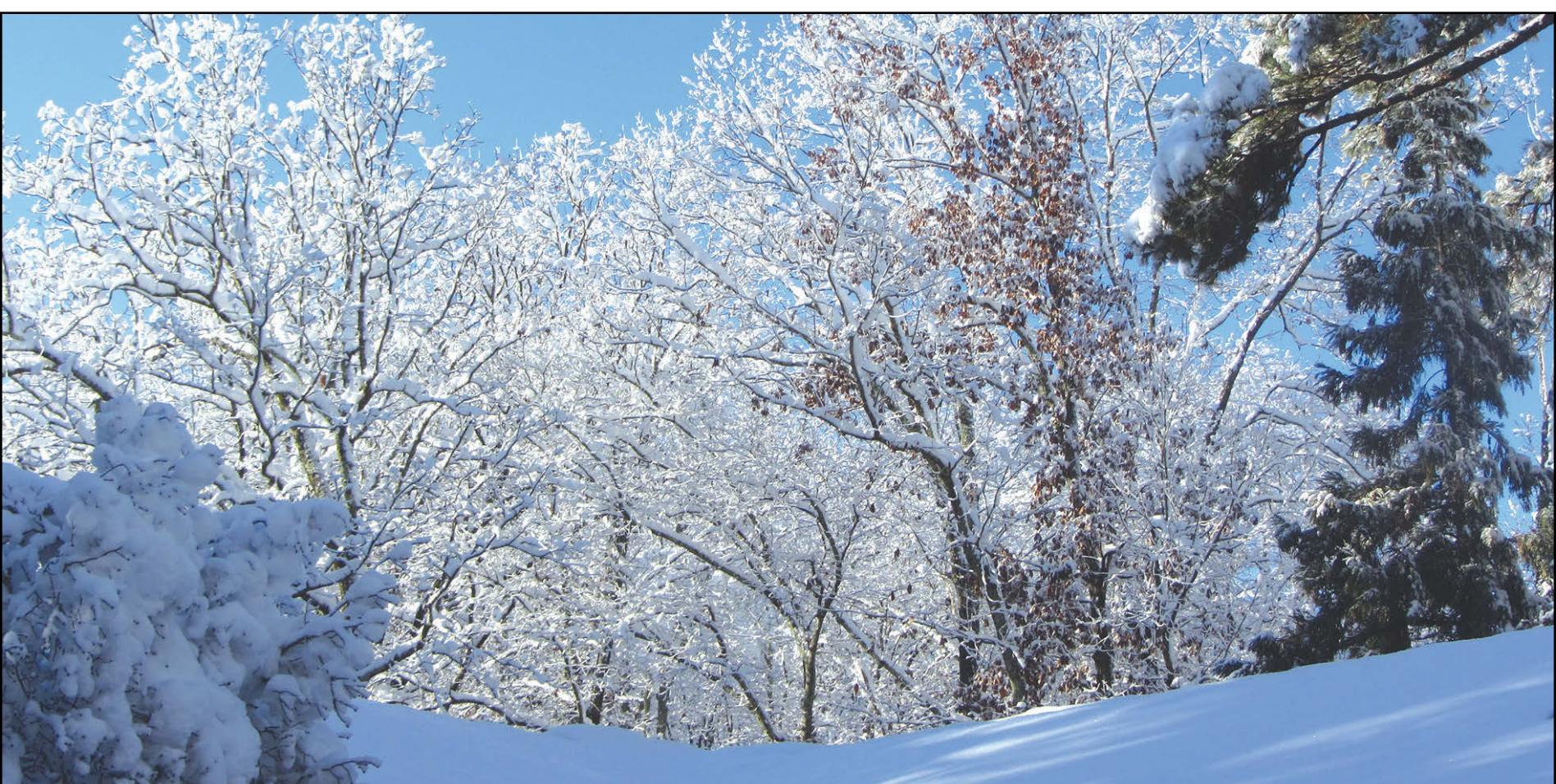


FALL TRENDS

*Fantastic fabrics and
where to find them.
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THE SOUTHERN GARDENER



Prepping for WINTER

Take steps now to help garden plants survive the cold

BY SHERRY BLANTON

Special to The Star

Autumn, the intermission between summer and winter, can be long or short depending on the weather, despite the dates on the calendar. Fall can bring an extension of summer's heat, or it can bring an early winter complete with snow.

Fall days make a wonderful time to clean away the remains of the summer while preparing the gardens for what is around the corner: the cold, and ultimately next spring.

From our perch in the kitchen window we can gaze out the window at a neat garden ready for new planting and the changing of the seasons.

Gardeners do not rest on their laurels in the fall; they see the future and tackle the present. Some may take a brief pause during the hot and dry days of early September, when summer flowers are so faded it is depressing. But that feeling of sadness is momentary.

Even in the fall we are always close to our hoses. For those who play in the dirt, watering is a four-season responsibility. We do water plants in the winter, especially new ones, if Mother Nature does not provide the necessary moisture.

The following garden tasks, whether they are considered fall cleanup or preparation for winter, are good steps to a healthier garden, a happier gardener and an easier spring.

- Remove objects used to prop up plants, especially anything used in the vegetable garden (trellises, tomato cages, flower stakes). Clean them to kill any diseases that may remain; bleach and water does a good job.
- Houseplants should be brought in when nighttime temperatures start dropping into the low 50s.
- Give those houseplants a nice spray bath before their entrance so no unwanted pests or diseases come into the house with them.
- Wash and store terra cotta or breakable pots so winter freezes do not fracture them.
- Non-producing vegetable plants should be removed as soon as they quit bearing.
- Remove all dead or decayed plants. Some gardeners like to leave the heads of seed-bearing flowers for the birds; in that case, remove old foliage.
- Compost only plant material that is healthy and free of disease.
- Plant a cover crop for a vegetable garden. Cover crops enrich the soil and

keep down weeds.

- Keep the falling leaves from collecting on your lawn. Raking is great exercise.
- Build a compost pile and put all those leaves to good use.
- Take stock of what worked in your garden and what did not; keep notes. We can develop amnesia in the spring.
- Avoid pruning shrubs and trees during fall as it will encourage new growth, which can get bitten with the first freeze. However, tree limbs that are dead, diseased or can cause a safety issue can be removed 12 months of the year.
- Put down a new layer of mulch (about 2 inches) to keep the soil and roots protected from extreme temperature fluctuations.
- Take clippings before the first frost from any plants you would like to propagate.
- Plants in containers that will not survive the winter should be moved to a protected place, such

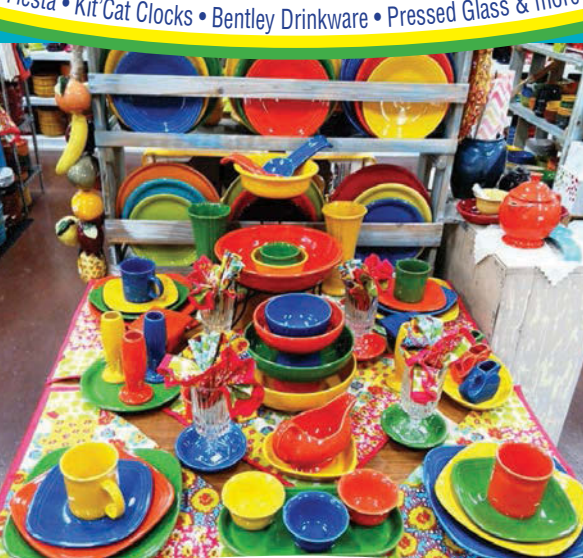
as a garage. Those growing in the ground that are very tender can be transplanted to a container and saved until spring arrives.

- Dig up any bulbs, such as caladiums, when nighttime temps reach the low 60s. Dry and store where the temperature is about 65 degrees.
- Cover outside faucets as the first hard freeze approaches.
- Remove all weeds in the garden by their stems and roots. Invasive weeds should be pitched in the garbage and not composted.
- Take a soil test and take note of your results. However, fertilizers should not be applied in fall when plants are actively growing, especially if the cold is close. Fertilizer is good for empty places that will eventually be gardens.
- Plant, plant, plant! Fall is the best time to add shrubs and trees to the landscape (with early

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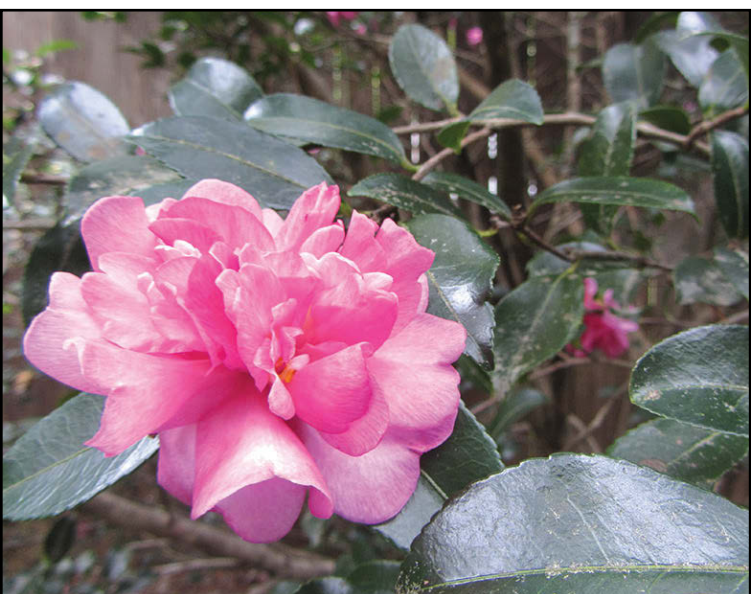
Continued from Page 2

winter as the second best time). Keep new plants watered if the weather is dry.

- Add winter annuals (pansies and snapdragons) to color beds and containers.
- Pick and preserve herbs before the first freeze.
- Clean and sharpen tools.
- Run any remaining gas out of lawnmower.
- Healthy plants will stand winter's cold better than unhealthy ones. Planting a plant in the right place is the first step in growing a robust plant.
- Plants with good nutrition (and well-drained and amended soil) throughout the year will have a better chance of survival during the cold.
- When considering the cold and its effects on plants, a very important factor is how long the severe cold lasts, as opposed to brief drops in the temperature.
- When I see cold coming and I have not moved my containers, I might mulch around them or move them close together and then separate when the cold snap passes.
- Consider a winter vegetable garden. Publications on the Alabama Cooperative Extension website will tell you how and what and when.
- After the first frost, go wild with planting daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs. Their precious faces can do a lot to chase the midwinter blues away.
- Listen to Frank Sinatra's "Autumn Leaves" at least once: *The falling leaves drift by the window / The autumn leaves of red and gold.*
- Enjoy fall no matter what surprises it brings.

Sherry Blanton, "The Southern Gardener," writes about gardening for *The Anniston Star*. Contact her at sblanton@annistonstar.com. Follow her on Facebook at *Southern Gardener-Anniston Star*.

Photos by Sherry Blanton/Special to The Star



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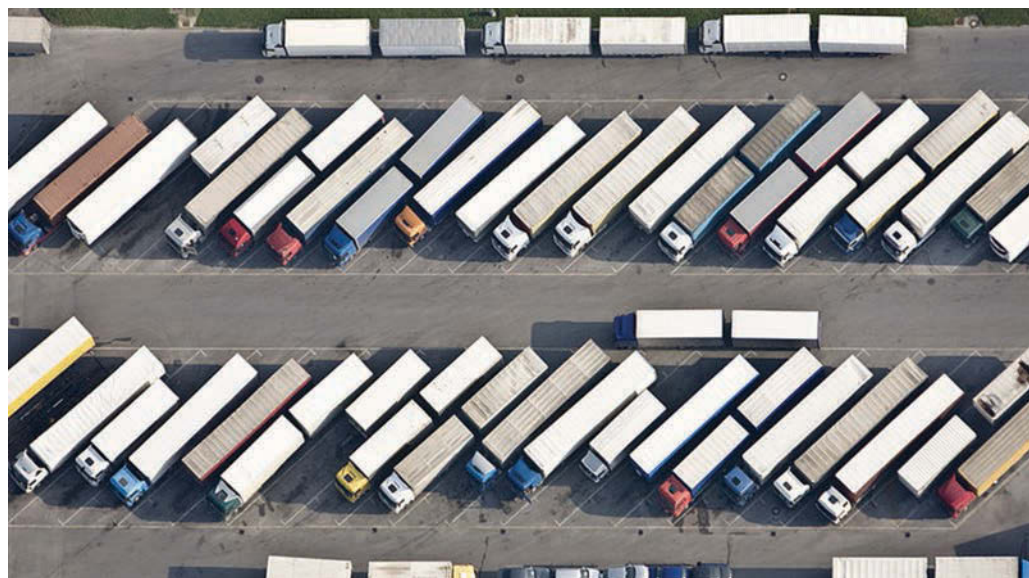
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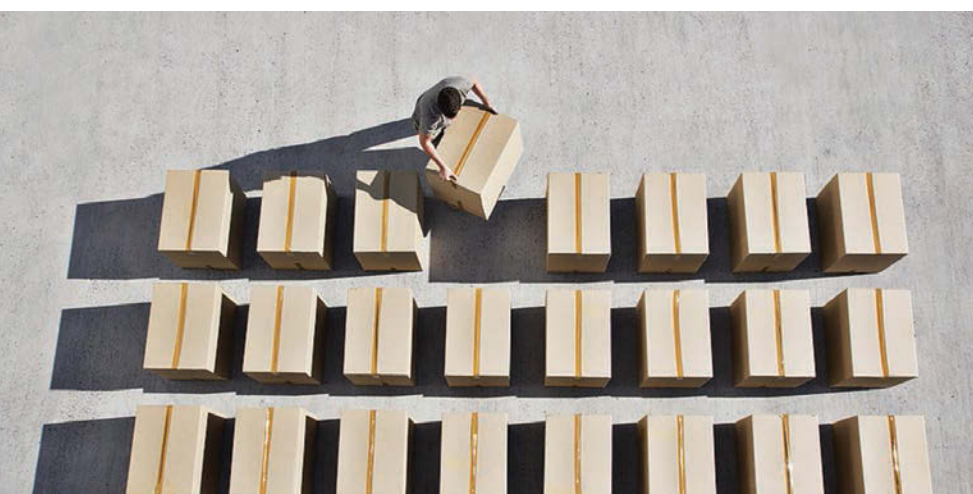


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Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Outdoor LIVING

Sharon and Gerald Parks enjoy their expansive outdoor kitchen year-round

BY LISA DAVIS

ldavis@annistonstar.com

At the Oxford home of Sharon and Gerald Parks, there's a row of rocking chairs on the front porch. But that's not where the couple goes when they want to be outside.

They're more likely to be out back in their expansive outdoor kitchen.

The Parks home sits on four acres, surrounded by a 180-acre farm. A small creek runs through trees behind the house. Cows graze in the fields. Frequent visitors include a flock of turkeys,

three deer and a groundhog.

This is the backdrop for the couple's 800-square-foot outdoor living space, which features a full kitchen, ceiling fans, a gas fireplace, a big-screen TV and seating for up to 25 people.

They like to call it "a room without walls."

Gerald, age 85, worked for many years as an international union representative. Sharon, 71, worked for Wakefield's department store for 44 years.

The couple lived in the neighborhood across the street for almost 20 years, before building this home in 2014. They

built the outdoor kitchen three years ago.

The space was designed and built by Kenneth James Construction. It features cedar beams and stacked stone walls, with stainless steel appliances in the kitchen.

The centerpiece of those appliances is a high-end Fire Magic Echelon infrared gas grill with a smoker. The Parks will grill up steaks or burgers or ribs, sometimes for a crowd, sometimes just dinner for two.

The kitchen also includes a double gas burner, which has been used for a fish fry and a low

country boil.

There's a small refrigerator and a large ice maker, which can make up to 90 pounds of ice a day. (The neighbors have been known to stop by and fill up their coolers.)

There's a sink with its own small hot water heater.

Gerald and Sharon use their room without walls year-round.

In the summer, the room is shady and cool even on a 100-degree day. "There's a breeze down here 80 percent of the time," Gerald said.

In the fall, friends gather to watch football games. "We'll stay

out here sometimes till 11 o'clock or midnight," Sharon said.

In the winter, the morning sun warms up the room, and Gerald and Sharon will have their coffee outside. "Most mornings, there's a fog," Sharon said.

"We're outdoor people,"

Gerald said. "I traveled for work for 24 years and didn't get much outdoors." They're making up for it now. "It's real pretty out here," he said.

Lisa Davis is Features Editor of The Anniston Star. Contact her at 256-235-3555 or ldavis@annistonstar.com.

MORE PHOTOS OF SHARON AND GERALD PARKS' HOME ON PAGES 6-7

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"I wish I had a dollar for every hour I've spent in those swings." — Sharon Parks



Photos by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

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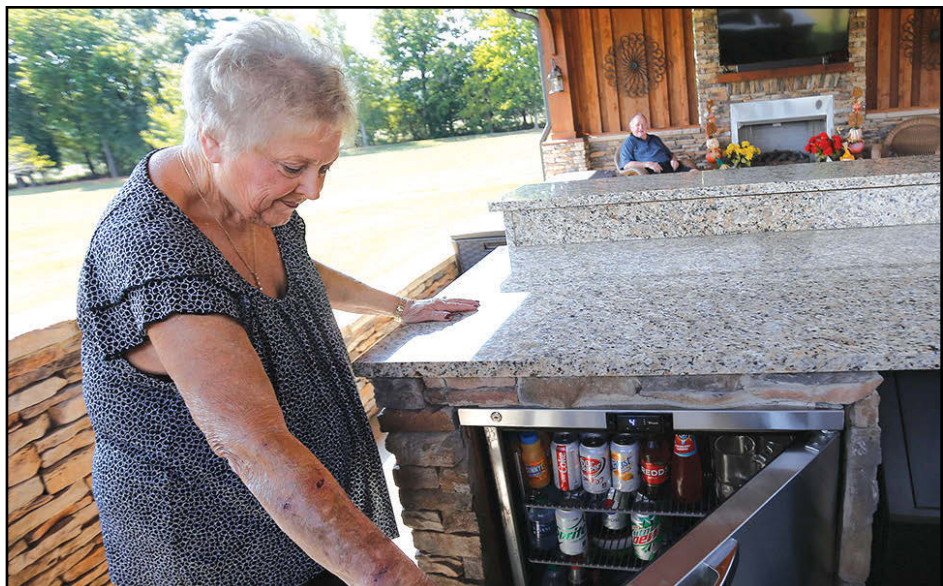
Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Gerald and Sharon Parks' 800-square-foot outdoor living space features cedar beams and stacked stone walls.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

The outdoor room sits behind landscaped gardens, and overlooks 180 acres of farmland.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

The refrigerator is stocked with drinks for parties, game-watching or just dinner for two.



Photos by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

The outdoor kitchen features a Fire Magic Echelon infrared gas grill with a smoker, a double gas burner, an ice maker and a sink with a hot water heater.

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Fantastic FABRICS

Downing's General Store in Anniston specializes in textiles and trims

BY DANIELLE STALLWORTH

dSTALLWORTH@ANNISTONSTAR.COM

Stepping through the door of Downing's General Store in Anniston is like stepping into a library. But instead of books, there's a plethora of fabrics, tassels, trims and hides in all colors, patterns and textures. Rolled up and tucked away on what seems like hundreds of shelves, these fabrics are a Downing's specialty.

The store opened in 1963 as a paint shop owned by Tom and Lois Downing, and was converted into a general store when they bought the adjacent fabric store and added a seed rack. It is now owned by Robert "R.D." Downing, their son. He said the store caters to a variety of people. "We've been here since 1963, so we've got a pretty loyal following," Robert said. "It's neat that we serve people from different walks of life. We kind of cater to everybody. Poor folks, rich folks, everybody in between."

The fabrics sold at Downing's range from

thick, rug-like materials to lightweight tulles and luxurious leather hides. Xochitl Norton, who is in charge of sales, said a lot of Jacksonville State University students go for the thicker fabrics and hides to make area rugs.

"The guys do that with the leather hides. They'd rather do that than get an actual rug. It's really funny," Xochitl said. "Local artists come in and buy them for their studios, too. They'll take pictures and send them to us."

Lewis Downing, manager of the store and Robert's son, said that the store will most likely have more business for the next few months due to the holidays.

"We don't really do seasonal fabrics because we can't buy them like that," Lewis said. "But people are definitely getting ready to decorate for the holidays so this is the time of year we get a surge of business for the next few months. It's not so much seasonal fabrics as it is trying to match their decorating style [for their event]."

Other services offered

by Downing's include scissor sharpening and foam cutting.

"People need new foam because it wears out fast," Robert said. "It comes in big 10-inch-by-7-inch sheets and different thicknesses. We'll cut you new cushions, Lewis will fit them in for you."

Though fabric is their specialty, you can tell before even walking in that Downing's is much more than a fabric store. Shelves of plants sit outside a second door, which takes you into another half of the store where an array of gardening supplies, seeds, tools and plants are housed.

"It's the end of the season for gardens, but there's so much you can grow in the fall," Robert said. "Now's the perfect time to be putting down greens and kale."

"We try to specialize in heirloom seeds and plants, so very few of our seeds are hybrid. People are more interested now in what they're eating. They're more skeptical of factory

Please see FABRIC I Page 12



Photos by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Store owner Robert Downing.

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Manager Lewis Downing shows off some fall fabric.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Sales associate Xochitl Norton shows off some fall fabric.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Owner Robert Downing on the garden shop side of the store.

FABRIC

Continued from Page 10

farming and GMOs. They're trying to get back to what was used years ago because it's tried and true."

Downing's provides a strong sense of community and service that isn't replicated at a big box craft store. Patrons come inside for a chat and bring their dogs along to greet Greta, the store dog, whose official duties include security and lounging

underneath the bench at the front of the building.

"There's a desire for people to go back," Robert said. "They say, 'Hey, all this modern stuff and corporate merging is not really contributing to my quality of life. I want to go somewhere where somebody knows me and what kind of problems I need fixed.'"

"As life gets more and more complicated, people are looking to simplify their lives," Robert said. "There's a movement, you know? And that's a positive thing."

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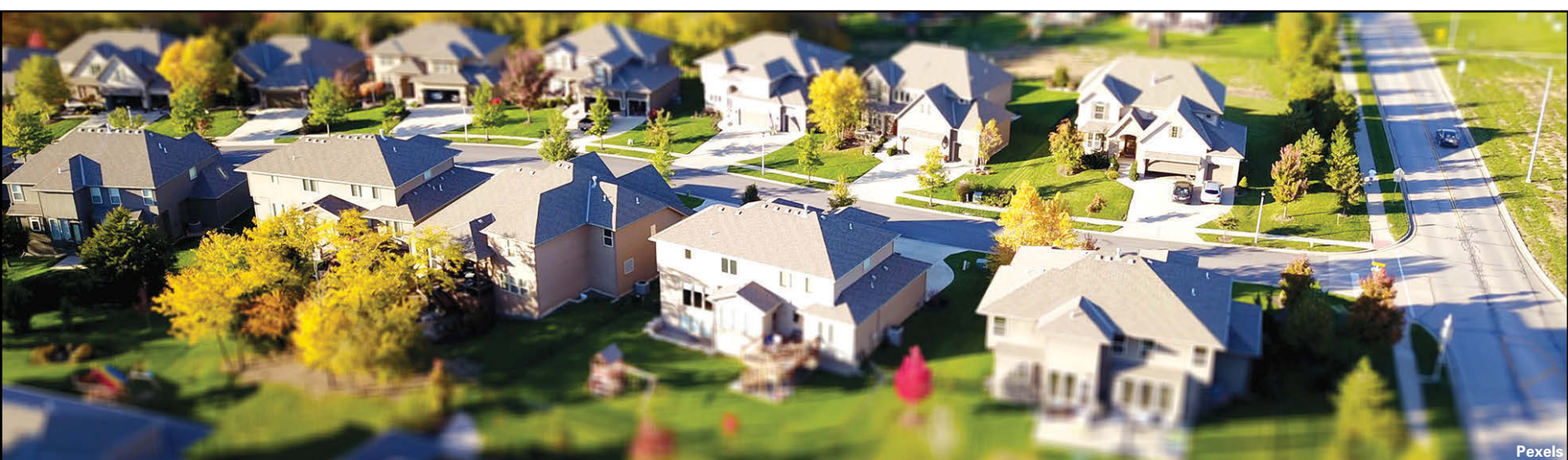
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Looking to sell your house?

Local real estate agents say now is a great time

BY DANIELLE STALLWORTH

dSTALLWORTH@ANNISTONSTAR.COM

When it comes to real estate, Calhoun County is currently in a seller's market. This means there are more people looking to buy houses than sell them, so sellers have the upper hand. But for first-timers and experienced sellers alike, preparing your house to go on the market can be a daunting task with no foreseeable end. Local real estate agents gave some tips for setting your home up for a successful sale.

Amy Angel, Keller Williams Realty, Jacksonville



ANGEL

Is this a seller's market?

Basically, there is less inventory than there are buyers. That means that sellers are at an advantage. When we put a house

on the market and it's priced well, been taken care of and is somewhat modernized, they sell immediately. About six years ago, it was the other way around. There were more sellers than buyers, so when you put

your house on the market, you were competing with a bunch of other houses and you had to underprice them to move them, whereas now you'll pretty much get your price.

Important improvements: I'm always really cautious about looking for exterior things like flaking paint or soft wood, things that would prevent your home from qualifying for certain government loans. As far as the "fun stuff" that people want to talk about when upgrading your house and getting it ready to sell, it's going to be the bathrooms and kitchen. That's where your best money is spent, updating your kitchen.

Take quality photos: Right now, more so than ever, people are shopping on their phones and iPads. People fall in love with your pictures way before they ever go into your house. So if you have amazing pictures, someone will probably love it and want to buy it before they've even gone inside.

Avoid seasonal decor: We're very cautious about decorating for the season. People don't want to see Christmas trees or too much seasonal decor when a home is on the market. It's better to just keep it simple and neat.

Don't underestimate a good cleaning job: Clean. That is going to be the best thing you can do for yourself. We sell houses all the

time that are not updated or modern. We just sold a house that was full of paneling and original flooring, but it was so clean and well-kept that we got several thousand above the listing price because of how clean and neat it was. The baseboards, backsplashes. They even washed the walls! You don't want it to smell like you're masking odors, you just want it to smell clean.

Tom Slick, Freedom Realty, Oxford



SLICK

Is this a seller's market?

My company does a lot of foreclosures so we're on a different spectrum than most other agents in town. We lost value for several years

during the housing fall and now we're gaining value back finally. Now, 80 percent or 90 percent of my listings are getting multiple offers on them. Some of them are selling well above what they're listed for. That's the true sign of a seller's market. It took a long time but the market has reset and we're on an incline, and I think that's great for sellers.

Kitchens and bathrooms:

The two big things that sell homes are kitchens and bathrooms. The guys are involved, but most of the time the women are the ones deciding "we like this" or "we don't like that." They're impressed by the kitchens and baths. When an investor buys one of mine, the first thing they'll do is upgrade those. They're expensive to do, but in my opinion, you end up getting your money back on them.

Decluttering: Decluttering helps. If you have a lot of stuff, your house won't sell as quick. I don't tell my sellers to do it as much because it might be an invasion of space, but it does help them sell quicker. Most of mine are sold vacant because I do foreclosures.

Ed Kelley, Century 21 Harris-McKay Realty, Anniston



KELLEY

Is this a seller's market?

Sometimes I wonder how they come up with that term. If you've got a good credit score, interest rates are really low right now.

So if you're looking to buy a

house, now's the time to *buy*. But a seller's market is determined by what's on the market and right now, inventory is low.

A new generation of buyers: One of the things we're seeing right now is a lot of millennials wanting something that's move-in ready. They're not looking for something that can be fixed up like their parents were. Something I always try to suggest to people is to update your kitchen. You want to have updated appliances. Bathrooms are another good selling point. You want to have nice tiled floors there and in the kitchen.

Keep paint neutral: You may like that orange and blue bedroom, but buyers may not be looking for something like that. I would suggest you tone it down if you have wild colors like that. Paint the rooms kind of a neutral color, something that would go good with just about anything.

Tidy up: You don't want a house that's really cluttered. It's just like selling a car. A clean car sells a lot better than a dirty one. So you definitely want to clean your house up.

A real estate agent's goal: When I'm working with a client (buyer or seller), I need to get to know them. When you get down to it, everyone's different. My main goal is to help people reach their real estate goals.

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Winterizing YOUR HOME

Don't wait until the last minute

BY DANIELLE STALLWORTH
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Tomorrow is officially the first day of fall. We should be a week or so into sweater weather by now, but the sun is still wreaking havoc on us and our leather car seats. Although we're still in for a few 90-degree days before the temperature finally breaks for good, it's important to start winterizing your home ahead of time, rather than waiting for the first threats of snow flurries. We asked some local businesses for tips on how to get your home ready for the cold months (even though it feels like they'll never arrive).

Wayne Mizzell, owner, Mizzell Heating and Cooling

"Usually this time of year it's starting to cool off, and that's when the phone starts going crazy. Typically we would be making sure everyone's heat pumps and gas furnaces are clean and efficient for winter. Right now, you should have your system checked and make sure every-

thing is in working order. That way you're a step ahead for when winter does get here. It's usually the first cold snap when everyone thinks to turn their heater on. No one checks them before that, then everyone calls at once. Before the cold weather gets here, go ahead and turn your heater on and make sure it's actually functioning. If it's not, you can address it and you won't be caught when it gets cold. In Alabama, you never know when it'll be a day or a week before that cold snap comes."

Shawn Perez, owner, Perez Plumbing and Gas

"Most of the time, we don't start getting calls until the middle of October or November [for winter home check-ups]. As plumbers, what we mostly do is check for gas leaks and clean and dust gas logs and get them ready for people to start using for the winter. You need to make sure your chimney is clean and swept out when you're getting ready to use your gas fireplace, to keep everything to a minimal fire hazard."

Heath Burr, owner, Heath Chimney Services

"We do chimney and dryer vent cleaning and inspections. Those are the two leading causes of fires at home, so we mainly focus on those. You should get your heating units serviced prior to the cold seasons. That way if there are any issues, you'll still have some time to have them repaired if needed. Most people don't think about their dryer vents getting dirty. Cleaning them definitely helps to get your dryer operating at peak efficiency and keeps your power bill low. Try not to wait until the last minute [to prepare for the cold] because there's usually a three- to five-week wait time due to the influx of calls that we get. With any kind of service you need, be it gas or electricity or plumber, you want to make sure they're licensed and insured and, in our case, that they're a CSIA (Chimney Safety Institute of America) certified company. People will go around saying they are chimney sweeps but they're not licensed to handle that kind of work, and it really puts the homeowner at a great risk."



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