

welcome to



talk of the town

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Spring Cleaning

Natural cleaning products are just as good for cleaning as antibacterial products full of chemicals, and do not pose health risks to us, our children, and our pets, and they are better for the environment, too!

Baking Soda

- A lot of your household cleaning can be done with baking soda. In your bathroom and kitchen, sprinkle baking soda on non-scratch surfaces, such as countertops, sinks, cutting boards, refrigerators, and more. Scrub the surfaces with a damp cloth or sponge (remember to wash your sponges in the dishwasher with your dishes).
- This can also be used to clean out appliances. Create a paste with baking soda and water and coat the inside of the appliance with the paste. Allow to sit overnight, and scrub out the next day.
- Cleaning out your plugged up drains can also be done with baking soda. Pour half a cup into the drain, and follow with two cups of boiling water.
- Use one cup of baking soda for a medium sized room, and sprinkle on your carpets as a deodorizer. Allow to sit for half an hour, and then vacuum.
- Mix a quarter cup of baking soda with one cup of vinegar and pour into your toilet bowl. Let it sit for a few minutes and scrub.

White Vinegar or Lemon Juice

- Use for stains, mildew and grease. Spray on, and then scrub to remove.
- Use two tablespoons of white vinegar (or undiluted lemon juice) mixed with one litre of water to spray your windows and mirrors. To reduce streaking, use newspaper to wipe off.
- To clean wooden floors, mix a quarter cup white vinegar with four cups water. Spray onto a cloth or towel until damp, and use to wipe floors and restore shine.

Soda Water

- Soda Water can also be used in place of vinegar or lemon juice for cleaning glass.
- Use for spills on carpets. Remove any solid matter from the spill, then pour on the soda. Blot up with a rag.

Plain Old Soap

- For a chemical free disinfectant, mix together two cups of water, three tablespoons of liquid soap, and 20-30 drops of tea tree oil.
- For carpet spot cleaning, mix a quarter cup of liquid soap with a third of a cup of water in your blender until foamy. Scrub the spot, and rinse with vinegar.



Using these cleaners that most of us already have in our homes will help reduce the chemicals in your home, save you money, and reduce your rubbish output.

Spring cleaning, here we come!

10 Easy and Quick Tips for Seed Sowing Success

- 1 Fill your punnet or container with seed raising mix, gently tap it down so it is nice and firm but not compacted, remember your seeds need to be able to put their roots down into the mix when they germinate.
- 2 Moisten your tray with water and leave to drain if it has become saturated.
- 3 Sprinkle your seeds over the top evenly and not too thick – remember most of the seed will germinate, so you want to give each seedling a good start to life by not over crowding too many seeds in one tray.
- 4 Most seeds need to have a covering of mix to help them germinate. Gently sift seed sowing mix over the tops of the seeds to a depth of twice the seed diameter. Water the seed tray after sowing. Containers with very small seeds should be watered from below by being placed in a basin of water.
- 5 Place the seed tray on the prop bench.
- 6 Cover shallow sown or surface seed with glass to reduce the chance of the seeds drying out.
- 7 Regularly monitor seeds and water when necessary. Never allow the mix to dry out or let it become too wet. If the seed trays become too wet the seeds will rot and die. If you notice green moss appearing on the tops of the tray it's a sign that the tray is too wet.
- 8 Harden off seedlings once they have germinated by leaving them outside or opening the glass house doors to help them adjust to the transplanting stage.
- 9 Transplant or prick out when seedlings have 3 to 4 leaves into the garden or into pots once all the frosts have finished.
- 10 Lay salt and/or egg shells around your new seedlings to avoid the slugs getting to your plants before you can enjoy them.



Professionals Mid Winter Christmas Charity Auction Supporting Brave Kids with Cancer

Forget the mulled wine and faux holly, this year the Professionals celebrated mid-winter Christmas in a different style - with an exciting online charity auction for child cancer.

Bidding began on Tuesday 19th August with all sorts of great items including art, accommodation and breakfast packages, spa treatments, sports memorabilia and household items going under the hammer on Trade Me.

Many of the goods and services, generously donated by local individuals and companies, were in hot demand and fetched some high prices on closing day Monday 25th August.

The most sought after item was a special accommodation package for the The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, which included two night's accommodation and golf package for two, pre-dinner drinks, dinner and breakfast.

Overall the online event was a great success, raising more than \$10,000 to the ongoing service of the Child Cancer Foundation Sunshine Lodge holiday homes, proudly provided by Professionals, located in Taupo and Queenstown. These homes give children living with cancer and their families a chance to enjoy much needed time and rest together. A resounding thank you to everyone who contributed and indeed bought on the day!

Professionals has been proud supporters of the Child Cancer Foundation since 1995, donating contributions from property sales, supporting the National Annual Appeal, and organising other fundraising activities throughout the year.



To date, the Professionals has raised over \$2.9 million for the Foundation, helping to purchase and maintain two Sunshine Lodge Holiday Homes in Taupo and Queenstown and to establish a Family Place in Wellington as well as in Auckland. Recent donations have gone towards acquiring a National Centre to house the Child Cancer Foundation.

Real Estate Agents Bill Finally Passed into Law

The Real Estate Agents Act of 1976 has finally been overhauled.

"The new Act is welcomed by Professionals Real Estate Group", says it's Chairman Andrew Mark.

"Many of the changes reflect practices that our members had already adopted in the interests of best practice and consumer service and protection. For most of us it will be business as usual and our clients will not be disrupted or inconvenienced by unnecessary change in how real estate is transacted."

The new legislation offers greater protection to buyers and sellers. The real estate industry will no longer be allowed to police itself and new protections have been put in place for the benefit of both house buyers and sellers. Agents will not be required to be REINZ members. Therefore no longer will the Real Estate Institute have control over the country's 18,000 Agents. An independent authority will be set up.

An independent Complaints Board will be put in place within 14 months to investigate and deal with grievances. Currently home owners and sellers are not eligible for compensation when things go wrong, and the maximum fine Agents can incur is \$750. Under this new regime, they may get up to \$100,000 in compensation. The Board will not start hearing complaints until the law comes into force 14 months after being signed off by Royal assent (the Queens' representative). It will not cover complaints filed prior to then.

Under the new law there will be no cost to consumers to lodge a complaint. The Authority will be able to represent consumer cases that are referred to the Disciplinary Tribunal and the Board will be able to investigate Agents without a complaint even being laid. There is scope under the legislation for actions of Property Managers to be monitored.

There will be a public register of Agents and salespeople which will record breaches of industry standards.

The new law ushers in big penalties:

- Agents can be fined up to \$40,000
- Companies can be fined up to \$100,000
- At present, the maximums are just \$750 and \$5000

Offences subject to the new fines include:

- Having no license to operate
- Employing unlicensed Agents
- Giving false or misleading information
- Failing to disclose conflict of interest
- Rendering false accounts

Further information is available on the official Government website:

<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/real+estat+Agents+bill+passes+law>



State of the Market

The July recovery in the New Zealand residential property market proved premature with the latest August figures showing a significant drop in sales and in the national median price, according to the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand (Inc).

The market had staged an unexpected recovery in July – but this month the trend was well and truly reversed with sales down to 4,220, the lowest in 26 years since the Institute began compiling figures and the national median selling price was down from \$340,000 in June and July to \$330,000 for August.

This now represents a 5.71 per cent drop on the August 2007 national median price of \$350,000, whereas the year to date decrease to July was just 1.44 per cent.

"It looks as if the leading economists are on the money with predictions of a 5 to 10 per cent decrease in the market, followed by a period of stability at the end of this year or early in 2009," REINZ National President Murray Cleland said today.

"Much will depend on the Reserve Bank's decision tomorrow on the official cash rate and the expected decrease will take the pressure off mortgage costs.

Mr Cleland said that the drop in sales was a concern because, 'history tells us that the market normally recovers from the winter blues from September 1, so all I can say is there is a lot riding on spring.'

However, two things in this month's figures give a little hope, the first being a drop in days to sell nationally from 58 in July to 55 days in August, which suggests that market liquidity might be improving a little, despite the painfully low sales figures for the month, through a combination of less selling pressure and slightly more confidence among buyers.

The second factor, Mr Cleland said was the performance of Auckland, traditionally the leading barometer of the market.

"The Auckland median improved from \$421,000 to \$423,500 in August and their days to sell fell from 52 days to 48 days, which is perhaps surprising given the exact opposite was the case in Auckland in July.

Auckland was one of just three out of 12 regions to record increased medians in the latest statistics, along with Wellington, up from \$371,000 to \$375,000 and Southland, up from \$172,000 to \$190,000, with a number of smaller regions the hardest hit.

However, Mr Cleland warned that with such low sales figures median prices were often not indicative, "Some previous month figures can skew trends and equally the current month contains some median price changes that can only be attributed to the low sales."

Mr Cleland cited the Gisborne median price as an example, having fallen to \$212,000 in July on 31 sales; it appeared to recover dramatically to \$290,000 in August on just 29 sales – which is well down on the sales volume of August 2005 when 72 sales took place.

Around the regions, Northland experienced a fall in its median price, having recovered to \$315,000 in July; it was back down to \$285,000, while Waikato and Bay of Plenty was similarly affected, down from \$325,000 to \$316,000.



The Auckland median price recovery was significant, according to Mr Cleland because it was driven by increased medians across Auckland, with North Shore up from \$483,500 to \$508,000 and Waitakere City up from \$355,000 to \$374,000.

Auckland City itself was up from \$443,000 to \$467,500 which in turn drove the Metropolitan Auckland median up from \$425,000 to \$430,000.

Hawkes Bay was down from \$282,000 to \$265,000 after big falls in the Hastings and Napier medians, while Manawatu and Wanganui was down from \$233,750 to \$231,000.

Across Cook Strait, Nelson and Marlborough saw its median down from \$330,000 in July to \$328,000 in August, while Canterbury Westland was down from \$300,000 to \$290,000.

The always unpredictable Central Otago Lakes area was down on low turnovers from \$565,000 to \$465,000 and Otago was down from \$240,000 to \$230,000.

In percentage annual decrease terms, Northland is now 10.23 per cent lower than a year ago and Auckland is down by 5.88 per cent.

Waikato and Bay of Plenty is down 2.76 per cent year on year, while Hawkes Bay is down 3.63 per cent.

Manawatu and Wanganui remain in positive territory, up 7.44 per cent, but Taranaki is following the national trend, down 2.91 per cent.

Wellington is down 1.58 per cent, Nelson Marlborough is down 1.79 per cent but Canterbury and Westland shows one of the larger falls, down 6.45 per cent over the year.

Central Otago Lakes is off 2 per cent and Otago down 3.36 per cent while Southland is still up 7.95 per cent.

The price band trends show that the majority of sales are under \$400,000 at 2,746 out of the total of 4,220. This compares with 3,907 sales in August 2007.

Sales of properties worth \$400,000 to \$599,999 are down to 950 compared with 1,549 a year ago, and sales of properties worth \$600,000 to \$999,999 are down from 736 in August 2007 to 421 in the latest period.

Sales over \$1 million are almost half of those a year ago down from 202 in August 2007 to 103 in the latest period.

Source: REINZ