



NW REporter

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Northwest MLS brokers say bidding wars, escalating prices, and buyer fatigue are widespread

KIRKLAND, Washington (April 7, 2021) – Brokers with Northwest Multiple Listing Service (NWMLS) added 10,562 new listings to inventory during March -- the highest volume since September when they added 11,210 properties to the selection. Even so, demand continued to outstrip supply, keeping inventory depleted.

The latest statistical summary from Northwest MLS shows double-digit price hikes were widespread across the 26 counties included in the report for the month of March.

Brokers logged 10,863 pending sales last month. That volume of mutually accepted offers marked a 22.3% increase from a year ago and a 40.6% surge compared to February.

“There’s no April fooling when it comes to how hot the housing market is right now,” commented J. Lennox Scott, chairman and CEO of John L Scott Real Estate. “In King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap counties, the current spring market we’re seeing is one of the best on record.”

James Young, director of the Washington Center for Real Estate Research at the University of Washington, agreed, noting March marked the first post-COVID/pre-COVID comparison. “It is very difficult to compare year-on-year results once lockdown started in late March 2020,” he stated.

“The drop in the number of active listings between now and last year is extraordinary,” Young exclaimed. NWMLS statistics show a 55.9% decline in total active listings, shrinking from 9,418

at the end of March 2020 to 4,153 at month end. Young noted the decrease is even more pronounced in “peripheral counties.” Six counties (Clallam, Clark, Island, Kittitas, Mason, and San Juan) experienced year-over-year declines of 69% or higher, according to the latest report from Northwest MLS.

“This collapsing active listing volume in the face of high demand is telling. As this was occurring, the number of pending transactions year-over-year increased markedly. Double digit price increases throughout the region are the natural result,” said Young.

Median prices system-wide surged 19.5% compared to a year ago. The median price for the 7,803 sales that closed during March was \$548,199; a year ago it was \$458,900. Prices rose in every county served by NWMLS, with seven counties reporting YOY price hikes of 25% or more.

Last month’s median price on closed sales of single family homes and condos (combined) was up 7% from February’s figure of \$512,000.

Excluding condos, the median price on single family homes rose nearly 21% from a year ago, from \$470,000 to \$567,250. Compared to the previous month (February), prices were up 10% OR more in seven counties (Cowlitz, Douglas, Jefferson, Ferry, Island, King, and Pacific).

In King County, the median prices for single family homes that sold last month in the Queen Anne/Magnolia area and every MLS map area on the Eastside topped \$1 million.

Scott noted the local market is “nearly sold out all the way up into luxury price ranges,” adding it is not due to a lack of new listings, but because of high buyer demand. “We’re seeing more luxury listings, which means there are more buyers entering into the market in these price ranges. This translates into very strong intensity into these luxury price ranges.”

A check of NWMLS statistics confirms Scott’s point. From January through March this year, brokers reported 400 sales priced at \$2 million or more. That’s more than twice the highest number reported for the first quarter of any of the previous five years. (Last year, brokers reported 178 sales at \$2 million-plus during the first quarter.)

John Deely, a member of the NWMLS board of directors and vice president of operations at Coldwell Banker Bain, described the numbers as “truly astounding related to price appreciation and inventory on hand.” As an example, he pointed to Snohomish County, where there is only about one week of inventory and where median prices for single family homes are up nearly 22%.

Condominium prices rose 5.2% year-over-year on closed sales that increased 16% (from 1,015 closings a year ago to last month’s total of 1,179). The volume of new listings (1,528) was

similar to the year-ago total (1,455), while the number of active listings (total inventory) dropped 23% YOY. Pending sales of condos surged nearly 43% from a year ago (from 1,101 to 1,574).

“While the data suggest housing sales overall may be slowing, that is related directly to a lack of inventory,” Deely emphasized.

Area-wide, NWMLS figures show there is only about two weeks of inventory (0.53 months of supply) of single family homes and condominiums. Only six counties have more than one month of supply. The supply of single family homes is even more depleted (0.47 months), Condo buyers fare slightly better with 0.86 months of supply. With demand outstripping supply, prices tend to rise.

NWMLS director, Meredith Hansen, owner/designated broker at Keller Williams Greater Seattle, noted the Seattle area ranked second nationally in home price appreciation for the past 12 months. (Phoenix led all cities in the latest S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller Indices.)

“If no new inventory came on the market, we are at 2.19 weeks of inventory, leading to bidding wars, escalating prices, and severe buyer fatigue,” Hansen remarked.

Windermere Chief Economist Matthew Gardner also commented on the imbalanced market. “There was a significant increase in new listings between February and March, but despite this, total active inventory was lower. This is a clear indication that the market remains very bullish, and homes are selling lightning fast across all price points, even in the luxury market.”

“I think a lot of the urgency from buyers is due to rising mortgage rates and the fear that rates are very unlikely to drop again as we move through the year, which is a safe assumption to make,” added Gardner.

Despite exhibiting a sense of urgency, buyers are doing due diligence to win the sale, reported Dean Rebhuhn, owner at Village Homes and Properties. “They are doing pre-inspections, including strong pre-approval for financing and deciding what price works for them. Many purchasers are considering the list price as the opening bid and making price decisions that work to their advantage,” he explained.

Escalating prices are found throughout the Northwest MLS service area.

“Most of the rapid price increases follow the familiar trend of late where the I-5 and I-90 corridors outside of King County are showing exceptional levels of house price growth,” observed Young. “Median house price growth in Skagit County (27.3%), Kittitas County (43.8%),

Thurston County (21.2%) and Whatcom County (20.8%) all outperformed King County at 14.7%," he noted.

Kitsap, Snohomish, and Pierce counties also outgained King County's price growth.

Competition for the limited supply of homes is intense in Kitsap County, according to Frank Wilson, Kitsap regional manager and branch managing broker at John L. Scott Real Estate, Poulsbo. Inventory in that county is down more than 64% from a year ago, and like many counties, pending sales are outgaining new listings.

"The real story is about the pent-up demand of buyers who are jumping at each new listing that comes on the market," Wilson reported. With COVID-related limitations on open houses, he said each open house is bracketed by many showing appointments. "It is not unusual to have 30 showings and half a dozen offers during the short time a home is on the market."

Wilson estimates half the buyers in Kitsap County already live there and are just relocating. The other half are new to the area and are inclined to move there to leave more congested areas. Others are changing lifestyles now that they can work from home more, a military move, or simply to be closer to family and friends, according to Wilson.

Both local and national industry-watchers detect rising optimism for the spring housing market.

"We are certainly seeing a return to optimism in our market as businesses continue to open up, more residents become vaccinated, and we all look forward to getting back to a more 'normal' way of life," said Mike Grady, president and CEO of Coldwell Banker Bain.

Grady pointed to a recent national jobs report as one reason for surging confidence. That report showed broad-based employment gains, including significant growth in areas hit worst by the pandemic, such as the leisure and hospitality sector. As the labor force continues to grow, Grady said, "We can expect the real estate market to continue to benefit."

Grady acknowledged buyers will still face challenges. "We're seeing mortgage rates and inflation start to increase, along with lumber costs, which will affect the costs of new construction."

Other pressure may come from the migration of tech workers in our area, suggested Grady's colleague, John Deely. He cited a new report from CBRE that shows the Seattle/Bellevue region now ranks #1 in technology office space leases, eclipsing San Francisco for the first time since 2013. "For the foreseeable future, buyers will need to bring their patience, a qualified and experienced broker, and a realistic outlook on the financial implications of this market as they search for homes."

James Gaines, former chief economist at Texas Real Estate Research Center, noted the housing industry has been one of the country’s primary economic drivers during the pandemic “and not just because of low mortgage rates.” Pandemic lockdowns meant millennials’ spending for travel and entertainment was curtailed enabling them to save. “More than 40% of U.S. home purchases in 2020 were by first-time buyers,” he noted, but said he anticipates getting back to “more normal rates of increase” marked by smaller growth in home prices and sales.

National experts believe housing activity could slow due to rising mortgage rates.

A recent report by Bloomberg noted the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rose to 3.17%, the highest level in more than nine months, after falling to an all-time low of 2.65% in January.

Northwest Multiple Listing Service is a not-for-profit, member-owned organization that facilitates cooperation among its member real estate firms. With more than 2,500 member firm offices and 32,000 brokers across Washington state, NWMLS (www.nwmls.com) is the largest full-service MLS in the Northwest. Based in Kirkland, Washington, its service area spans 26 counties and it operates 21 local service centers.

Single Fam. Homes + Condos	LISTINGS		PENDING SALES	CLOSED SALES			MONTHS OF INVENTORY	
	New Listings	Total Active	# Pending Sales	# Closings	Avg. Price	Median Price	This month	Same mo., year ago
King	4,117	1,769	4,054	2,956	\$928,617	\$740,000	0.60	1.15
Snohomish	1,594	336	1,631	1,192	\$651,568	\$607,475	0.28	0.98
Pierce	1,686	444	1,861	1,251	\$512,728	\$470,000	0.35	1.09
Kitsap	445	143	456	338	\$553,568	\$450,000	0.42	1.30
Mason	137	53	148	88	\$391,369	\$325,900	0.60	1.91
Skagit	208	106	206	158	\$539,720	\$485,550	0.67	1.98
Grays Harbor	154	104	156	125	\$344,900	\$280,000	0.83	2.66
Lewis	127	75	151	132	\$371,353	\$348,000	0.57	2.24
Cowlitz	122	46	148	109	\$378,484	\$358,000	0.42	1.21
Grant	136	85	145	96	\$286,649	\$245,177	0.89	2.87
Thurston	522	138	558	371	\$463,428	\$424,947	0.37	0.95
San Juan	34	56	44	24	\$692,975	\$501,250	2.33	9.25
Island	168	54	167	121	\$619,243	\$479,500	0.45	2.20
Kittitas	86	44	83	48	\$693,805	\$517,500	0.92	2.58
Jefferson	63	54	54	41	\$490,227	\$468,000	1.32	2.93
Okanogan	43	64	43	35	\$402,645	\$258,500	1.83	4.69
Whatcom	377	232	375	282	\$543,038	\$492,250	0.82	2.24
Clark	91	27	100	78	\$466,445	\$408,500	0.35	2.08
Pacific	69	48	91	55	\$329,747	\$274,500	0.87	5.07
Ferry	8	17	9	5	\$274,880	\$320,000	3.40	5.67
Clallam	77	40	83	78	\$462,442	\$399,000	0.51	2.45
Chelan	103	63	102	71	\$451,183	\$410,000	0.89	2.89
Douglas	62	32	64	44	\$434,841	\$420,000	0.73	2.71
*Adams	10	16	10	16	\$236,153	\$228,498	1.00	2.44

*Walla Walla	62	40	60	47	\$395,957	362,500	0.85	7.00
*Columbia	4	6	5	4	\$181,250	190,000	1.50	N/A
Others	57	61	59	38	\$405,012	\$357,450	1.61	3.62
Total	10,562	4,153	10,863	7,803	\$678,786	\$548,199	0.53	1.40

**Adams, Walla Walla and Columbia counties are added as separate rows this month; previously, statistics for these counties were included in the row for "Others/Out of area."*

4-county Puget Sound Region Pending Sales (SFH + Condo combined)

(totals include King, Snohomish, Pierce & Kitsap counties)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2003	4746	5290	6889	6837	7148	7202	7673	7135	6698	6552	4904	4454
2004	4521	6284	8073	7910	7888	8186	7583	7464	6984	6761	6228	5195
2005	5426	6833	8801	8420	8610	8896	8207	8784	7561	7157	6188	4837
2006	5275	6032	8174	7651	8411	8094	7121	7692	6216	6403	5292	4346
2007	4869	6239	7192	6974	7311	6876	6371	5580	4153	4447	3896	2975
2008	3291	4167	4520	4624	4526	4765	4580	4584	4445	3346	2841	2432
2009	3250	3407	4262	5372	5498	5963	5551	5764	5825	5702	3829	3440
2010	4381	5211	6821	7368	4058	4239	4306	4520	4350	4376	3938	3474
2011	4272	4767	6049	5732	5963	5868	5657	5944	5299	5384	4814	4197
2012	4921	6069	7386	7015	7295	6733	6489	6341	5871	6453	5188	4181
2013	5548	6095	7400	7462	7743	7374	7264	6916	5951	6222	5083	3957
2014	5406	5587	7099	7325	8055	7546	7169	6959	6661	6469	5220	4410
2015	5791	6541	8648	8671	8620	8608	8248	7792	7179	6977	5703	4475
2016	5420	6703	8130	8332	9153	8869	8545	8628	7729	7487	6115	4727
2017	5710	6024	7592	7621	9188	9042	8514	8637	7441	7740	6094	4460
2018	5484	5725	7373	7565	8742	8052	7612	6893	6235	6367	5328	4037
2019	5472	4910	7588	8090	8597	8231	7773	7345	6896	6797	5788	4183
2020	5352	6078	6477	5066	7297	8335	8817	9179	8606	7934	6122	4851
2021	5216	5600	8002									

NWMLS spring meeting covers service, system and legal updates

In opening comments at the spring general membership meeting of member-brokers (held virtually), Northwest Multiple Listing Service President and CEO Tom Hurdelbrink noted the date coincided with the one-year anniversary of Governor Inslee’s first stay-home directives to curb the spread of COVID-19. Those mandates led to a series of frequently changing restrictions affecting open houses and broker interactions with buyers and sellers.

The MLS president also introduced the recently installed officers. This year’s leaders include Chairman Randy Fischer from Coldwell Banker 360 Team in Oak Harbor; Vice Chair Stuart Heath

from Bellmark Real Estate in Bellevue; Treasurer Chris Millsap from RE/MAX Advantage in Chelan; and Secretary Jeff Pust from Van Dorm Realty, Inc. in Olympia.

In other updates, Hurdelbrink highlighted the biennial member satisfaction survey and the expansion of the NWMLS coverage area.

Brokers were urged to participate in the member satisfaction survey, which yields feedback on existing services and helps gauge interest in new products and services. “It’s good to know where we are staying strong, and where we need to improve,” he remarked. Results will be reported later in the year.

Earlier this year, Northwest MLS announced the expansion of its coverage area as a result of a decision by the Walla Walla Association of Realtors® to merge with NWMLS. With the addition of those 24 offices and 150+ licensees – whose members work primarily in Walla Walla, Columbia, and Umatilla (Ore.) counties -- the MLS expands its service area to 26 counties across the state.

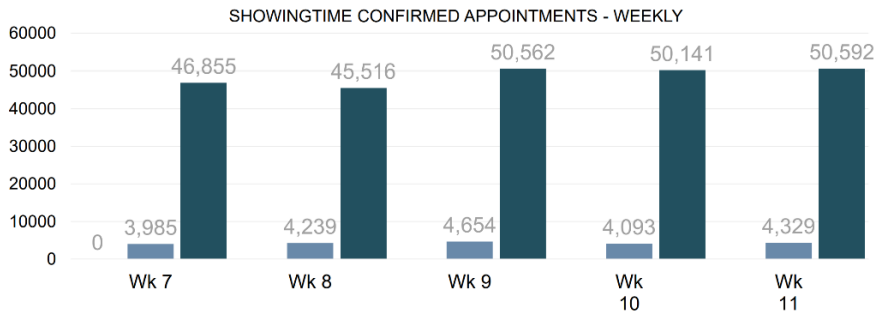
To continue with updates on systems and services, NWMLS Business Analyst Devin Bacon discussed the addition of Walla Walla Realtor listings in Matrix, as well as the addition of a “State” field, primarily to accommodate the listings in Oregon’s Umatilla County. With the recent additions and changes, Bacon demonstrated how members can search in up to eight counties simultaneously. (Tax and property information is now available in the Matrix Public Records search and in the Realist tax database for every county in Oregon and Washington.)

Bacon also reminded brokers of the availability of classes, trainings, and custom workshops on a variety of topics such as Realist Property Records or Farming in Realist and Matrix. As part of his remarks, Bacon highlighted important Best Practices for ShowingTime, which are discussed in more detail in an hourlong webinar.

Noteworthy statistics Bacon presented included a graphic showing impressive year-over-year changes in ShowingTime confirmed appointments.

ShowingTime Scheduling Service

- Heavily used and effective tool, particularly during the pandemic



Other updates and demonstrations covered “MyNWMLS” office features, Down Payment Connect, and a reminder that 69.5% of current NWMLS listings are eligible for down payment programs. “It’s a good tool for increasing leads,” Bacon suggested.

Justin Haag, general counsel at NWMLS, provided a synopsis of recent forms revisions and additions, along with an explanation of the process, which includes coordination with Washington Realtors and industry attorneys. “Lots of eyeballs are on the forms before they are published,” he remarked.

Forms that underwent substantive revisions included Purchase and Sale Agreements, Financing Addendum, Inspection Addendum, and Escalation Addendum. (Several other forms were revised to include minor clarifications and updates to outdated vernacular.)

Among recently added forms were an Inspection Waiver Addendum, an Escalation Addendum Notice, and Lease/Rental Notice.

As part of the process, and in an effort to familiarize members with the changes before the implementation date, Haag conducted virtual training classes, reaching more than 4,500 brokers. He reminded the audiences at the spring meetings of Legal Bulletin 219, published in early February, that summarizes the latest revisions.

Continuing the discussion on legal updates, Haag was joined by Chris Osborn from Stoel Rives, LLP, and the longtime outside legal counsel to NWMLS. Their discussion covered best practices pertaining to offer review dates, evolving COVID-19 restrictions, recent industry acquisitions, the recent NAR/DOJ settlement, pending class action lawsuits around the country, and other concerns.

In the final legal update, Haag and Osborn reminded brokers about issues pertaining to copyright, the do-not-call registry, and fair housing. When hiring third party photographers, brokers should always use a very broad license agreement – similar to the agreements published by NWMLS. “It’s low-hanging fruit to eliminate that risk of copyright infringement claims by using the correct license,” Osborn emphasized. Brokers also need to be vigilant in checking the do-not-call registry which includes robo-calls and robo-texts.

Compliance with fair housing protections is also essential. NWMLS recently inserted a fair housing provision into its listing agreements to ensure sellers are aware of applicable laws prohibiting discrimination “based on sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, creed, color, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, families with children status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a support or service animal by a person with a disability.”

To close the member meetings on a lighter note, Hurdelbrink conducted instant polls on topics ranging from preferences on virtual versus in-person meetings, when listing inventory might improve, whether NWMLS should remove the optional map/grid field from input/search options (an overwhelming percentage said yes), and whether the Mariners will make the playoffs this year.



Washington repeats as Best State

Washington finished first in this year’s Best States rankings by U.S. News & World Report, retaining its top spot from 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the media company postponed publishing new rankings during 2020 to focus its editorial coverage more directly on that public health issue.

The “Best States” rankings, based on 71 metrics across eight categories, “seeks to inform citizens, business leaders, and policymakers about what’s working and what isn’t in each state.”

Washington earned its first-place ranking in part due to finishing in the top 10 in five of the eight categories, and despite having no #1 rankings:

Best States 2021 – Ranking Performance

Category	Washington’s ranking	#1 rated state
Health Care	8	Hawaii
Education	4	New Jersey
Economy	4	Utah
Infrastructure	3	Nevada
Opportunity	25	Iowa
Fiscal Stability	6	Alaska
Crime & Corrections	19	New Hampshire
Natural Environment	15	Hawaii

The Evergreen State’s lowest ranking, at #25, was in the “opportunity” category. It measures poverty, housing affordability, and equality for women, minorities, and people with disabilities.

Despite being the only state with two #1 rankings in the eight categories, Hawaii was deemed the 25th best state. Low rankings in the economy (#46), fiscal stability (also #46), opportunity (#34), and infrastructure (#33) were factors in their middle-of-the-pack finish.

In calculating the rankings, each of the eight main categories was assigned weightings based on the average of three years of data from an annual national survey that asked nearly 70,000 people to prioritize each subject in their state. Based on the weightings, health care, education and economy were the top three, with crime & corrections, and natural environment mattering less to the citizens who responded to the survey.

U.S. News & World Report used “extensive and reliable governmental and private sources” along with proprietary data to determine the rankings. Among the eight main categories for the rankings were 20 subcategories encompassing more than 70 metrics. For each set, researchers used the most recent data available as of January 2021.

New this year, U.S. news compiled data related to the coronavirus pandemic and explored how badly it has damaged states’ economies and budgets. The findings underscored the “significant challenge” and “profound impacts” the COVID-19 pandemic has had. The COVID-19 data compilations are available in dashboards, but they were not included in the rankings.

In prior year surveys, Washington ranked sixth (in 2018) and fifth (in 2017).

Rounding out this year's top five list of "best overall states" were Minnesota (#2), Utah (#3), New Hampshire (#4) and Idaho (#5).

Representatives from U.S. News say its Best States' highly interactive platform enables users "to explore thousands of important benchmarks and easily draw state-to-state comparisons," and to discover what states can learn from one another.

U.S. News launched its Best States project in 2017, contributing to its reputation as the leading provider of civic journalism, expert consumer advice, rankings, and data analysis. The publication claims 42 million unique visitors each month.

Fully vaccinated? Don't toss the mask and start partying yet

For the fortunate number of people who have had their last dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, AARP's health experts and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have published 10 specific guidelines to follow, keeping in mind the majority of Americans have yet to be vaccinated.

"Precautions continue to be necessary to protect yourself and the people around you," cautioned health writer Michelle Crouch in a report for AARP. Fully vaccinated people could still catch COVID-19 (but the vaccine will prevent dying and hospitalizations), and they could infect non-vaccinated individuals (research is ongoing). The virus can't mutate if it is not spreading.

A return to normal hinges on herd immunity, the health experts emphasize. Among other recommendations are continued mask wearing and keeping your vaccine card handy. Not only does the card confirm when and which vaccine you received, it is also the go-to record in case a booster dose is required.

Gathering with others who are fully vaccinated is okay, but the CDC recommends avoiding medium-size and large gathers, and still discourages travel.

In explaining why travel should be avoided, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky stated, "Every time that there's a surge in travel, we have a surge in cases in this country. We know that many of our variants have emerged from international places, and we know that the travel corridor is a

place where people are mixing a lot. We are really trying to restrain travel at this current period of time, and we're hopeful that our next set of guidance will have more science around what vaccinated people can do, perhaps travel being among them."

CDC will continue to evaluate and update public health recommendations for vaccinated people as more information, including on new variants, becomes available.

For AARP's list of "10 things the fully vaccinated need to know," [click here](#).

REALTORS® present 82nd First Citizen Award to "community treasure" Tomio Moriguchi and Family



Tomio Moriguchi and Family were honored as the 82nd recipients of the prestigious Seattle-King County First Citizen Award during a virtual ceremony last month.

The event committee had hoped to honor "Tomio & Family" at a civic banquet -- a traditional part of the recognition -- during 2020 when they were named First Citizens, but rather than postpone the celebration indefinitely due to the coronavirus pandemic, a virtual event was held. One of the tributors, Dr. Constance Rice (the 1993 First Citizen) said if a banquet could

have been held, the audience would probably fill a stadium “because there is so much love for him.”

Tributes were made by **Yuka Shimizu**, founder, Bellevue Children’s Academy and Willows Preparatory School; **Tom Ikeda**, founding executive director of Densho; **Dr. Constance Rice**, a nonprofit executive and academic administrator; **Norman B. Rice**, former mayor of Seattle, author and advocate for civic engagement; **Denise Moriguchi**, Tomio’s daughter and current CEO and president of Uwajimaya; former Seattle Mayor **Charles (Charley) Royer**, and **Trish Coy** (England), REALTOR® and chair of the Seattle- King County First Citizen Committee. **Georgia Stevens**, the 2020 president of Seattle King County REALTORS®, presented the medallion and plaque.

The event also featured entertainment by Taiko drummers, a sake toast, and acceptance remarks by Mr. Moriguchi.

Click [here](#) to view a video of the event. Other details on this year’s honorees and a list of previous First Citizens are published online at SeattleFirstCitizen.org.

Raise your own veggies with a low-cost DIY raised garden bed

Whether you are an accomplished gardener or an aspiring one, you may want to check out the step-by-step guide to creating your own raised garden beds from pallets. The DIY plans are available from the [RE Store](#), a non-profit program in Bellingham that diverts reusable material from landfills.

If you don’t have time (or the confidence) to build your own DIY raised garden from pallets, RE Store has you covered. Its [Manufacturing Waste Diversion](#) program stocks some.

More than 500 million pallets are manufactured in the U.S. every year, which equate to around 20 million trees. An estimated 25 million pallets (roughly 1 million trees worth of lumber!) are discarded annually and wind up in landfills.

By repurposing pallets, you're getting great lumber at little cost, you're extending the life of valuable building materials, and you are creating a container that can help solve myriad gardening challenges. Urban farmer Nicole Faires, a best-selling author of books on sustainable agriculture and food policy, wrote a [blog](#) for Eartheasy with a list of 10 benefits of raised garden beds. (See box.)

RE Store recommends using heat-treated pallets (designated by an HT stamp on each pallet), which are safe for gardens.

To build your own raised bed from the pallets in eight simple steps (with photos), [click here](#).

If you need tips on what and when to plant, and other guidelines for becoming a green-thumbed gardener, check out the resources from Washington State University's [Master Gardener](#) program. The site includes an interactive map for finding your county's [Extension Office](#), and even [tips](#) for when to plant various types of vegetables.

The RE Store, located in Bellingham's Fountain District, was founded in 1993 and operates as a program of RE Sources, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Its retail location features salvaged and reclaimed building materials, vintage décor, and a facility to receive lightly used donated items. Its [blog](#) features other DIY projects and stores on creative reuse.

Benefits of Raised Beds

- No tilling is better for the soil.
- Your back will thank you.
- Raised beds look nicer.
- Raised beds help keep out critters.
- Raising your soil means better drainage.
- You will have fewer weeds and crab grass.
- You can plant raised beds earlier in the season.
- Raised beds can be temporary.
- Raised beds avoid contaminated soil.
- Raised beds are great for beginners

Source: Nicole Faires, Eartheasy

Second homes account for 15% of new home sales

Second homes are disproportionately represented in new single-family sales compared to their share in the existing housing stock, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). An analysis by the builders' group found an estimated 15% of new home sales are classified as second homes.

The findings were based on the NAHB Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI).

Researchers consider second homes as those sold to buyers who are not going to occupy the home year-round, but instead use it as a vacation home, investment property, or other purpose. About two-thirds (65%) of the builders indicated at least 5% of their homes were second homes, with the overall average weighted by 2020 single-family home starts.

NAHB analyzed data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, which reported there were 7.5 million second homes in the U.S. in 2018.

News In Brief

- **Longview and the Anacortes-Mount Vernon area are two of 144 cities that the federal government is proposing to downgrade from the metropolitan statistical area designation, and it could be more than just a matter of semantics.** Officials in some of the affected cities worry that the change could have adverse implications for federal funding and economic development. Under the new proposal, a metro area would have to have at least 100,000 people in its core city to count as an MSA, double the 50,000-person threshold that has been in place for the past 70 years. Cities formerly designated as metros with core populations between 50,000 and 100,000 people, like Longview and Mount Vernon, would be changed to "micropolitan" statistical areas instead. Wenatchee and Walla Walla are the two other cities in Washington that could be sent to the same fate. A committee of representatives from federal statistical agencies recently made the recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget, saying it's purely for statistical purposes and not to be used for funding formulas. As a practical matter, however, that is how it's often used. Several housing, transportation and Medicare reimbursement programs are tied to communities being metropolitan statistical areas, or MSAs, so the designation change concerns some city officials. If the proposal is approved, it could be the first step toward federal programs adjusting their population thresholds when it comes to distributing money to communities, leading to funding losses for the former metro areas. In a separate proposal, the U.S. Census Bureau is considering a change to the definition of an urban area. The proposal made public last month would use housing instead of people for distinguishing urban from rural. An area will be considered urban if it has 385 housing units per square mile, roughly the equivalent of 1,000 people per square mile, under the new proposal. The current standard is 500 people per square mile. The Census Bureau says the changes are needed to comply with new privacy requirements that aim to prevent people from being identified through publicly released data and it offers a more direct measure of density. Some demographers aren't sold on the idea of changing the definition of a metro area.
- **The Seattle Department of Transportation has completed work to lower speed limits to 25 mph on most major city streets.** Nearly 2,500 new speed limit signs have been

installed throughout the city, covering 415 miles of arterial streets. The safety improvements are one of several efforts proposed by Mayor Jenny Durkan to achieve the city's [Vision Zero Initiative](#) to prevent crashes and save lives. Case studies have shown a 20% to 40% decrease in crashes on streets where Seattle lowered speed limits. The department is also looking at traffic signal safety for pedestrians. SDOT is working with the state Department of Transportation to lower speed limits on state-managed highways as well.

- For the second year in a row, Washington has been ranked as the best state in the nation by [U.S. News & World Report](#).** "Washington's low-carbon energy system and robust secondary education system continue to rank among the nation's best, as does the state's economy, the fastest growing in the nation," the web-based news magazine reports. It's the first time since the rankings began that the same state has been named No. 1 for two consecutive years. As in previous years, [U.S. News ranked all 50 states](#) based on data within 71 metrics across eight categories, such as education, health care and opportunity. But the Evergreen State also has its shortcomings, according to U.S. News. These include high living and labor costs that stifle opportunity for the state's residents. Unemployment also remains high, due to the effects of the pandemic on the economy. Minnesota was ranked as the second-best state, followed by Utah at No. 3, New Hampshire at No. 4 and Idaho at No. 5. The five lowest-ranked states were Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, West Virginia and Alabama. One of the many changes society has undergone in the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the number of workers who are now avoiding their daily commutes by working from home. Now one site has gone through and calculated just how much time those workers might have saved by swapping their drive downtown with a walk to their downstairs office. **In Seattle, it worked out to just under 10 days!** [MakeALivingWriting.com](#) used Census data to find an average Seattleite's round-trip commute time -- turns out it's just a fraction under an hour (59.2 minutes). They also found workers average about 242.8 days in the office a year accounting for weekends, holidays, average vacations and sick time use. Taking away that hour a day stuck in their cars adds up to 9.98 days over the course of a year! That's more than the average national saving of 8.6 days.

Calendar of Events

DATES	EVENT	TIME	LOCATION	CONTACT
4/8	Affiliate Council	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
4/16	WR Director Caucus	12 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
4/19-23	WR Spring Conference		Zoom	425-974-1011
5/3-14	NAR Mid-Year Conference		Zoom	425-974-1011