

# Ron's Homeowner News™

Courtesy of Ron Mitchell ☞ Macdonald Realty Ltd. ☞ (604) 617-9642

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## 10 Ways to Save on Gas

The price of gas has been climbing steadily in recent months, and they show no signs of slowing down. Since most of us can do nothing about this, all we can do is try to reduce the amount of gas we use on a daily and weekly basis. Here are a few ideas:

**Check your tire pressure regularly.** Underinflated tires cause the car to burn more gas. How much? For every pound under the recommended level you could be getting up to 5% worse fuel economy. So if your tires are underinflated 5 pounds, you could be using up to 25% more gas. Underinflated tires will also wear out prematurely, which means you will also waste money by having to replace them sooner.

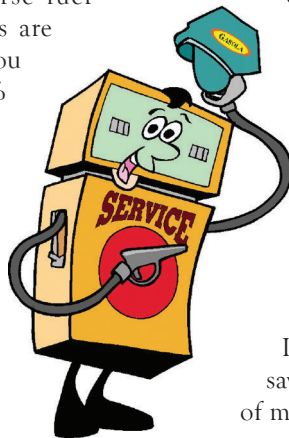
**Keep your engine well-tuned.** Out of tune engine wastes gas, and again your fuel economy could be up to 25% worse than it should be.

**Is premium gas really necessary?** I know many people who use premium gasoline believing that it's better for their car. But if the car manufacturer recommends lower octane gas for your vehicle, there's no need to waste money – the car will run just fine, and you can actually save money. See what your car manual says.

**Use cash.** Some gas stations charge more if you pay with a credit card. This should be posted on the pump, but if it isn't,

check the price on the display after you've swiped your credit card against the price posted on the sign.

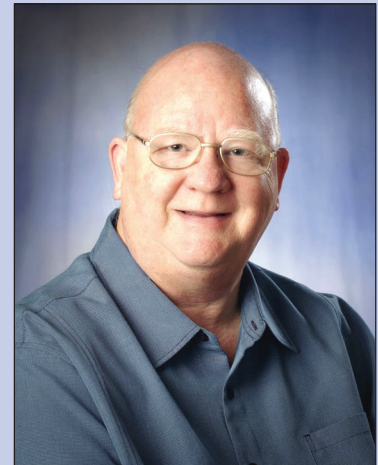
**Obey the speed limit.** Your fuel efficiency drops dramatically the faster you go. For example, going 120 km/h requires up to 30% more gas than going 80 km/h. Speeding also means speeding tickets, and those don't save you money either.



**Go easy on the accelerator and brakes.** A car uses more gas when speeding up than it does when maintaining a constant speed. Speeding up, then having to brake when approaching a slower car, then speeding up to pass, then slowing down again – fairly typical style of driving. It is wasteful, and it doesn't save you more than a couple of minutes when commuting.

**Use air conditioning smartly.** Turning on your air conditioner will increase the gas consumption. However, that doesn't mean you should never use it. When going fast, keeping the windows open decreases the aerodynamics of your car increasing the wind drag. The result is that the engine has to work harder and use more gas. In this case, rolling up the windows and using the A/C is a better option. When going slow, keeping the windows open does not affect the aerodynamics much, so it's cheaper to turn the A/C off and let the

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Friends don't let friends buy or sell a home alone. They refer them to a good REALTOR. And a good REALTOR provides guidance, local knowledge and a caring attitude to make sure that your friend's real estate transaction goes as smoothly as possible. Do you know of someone planning to buy or sell a home soon? Refer them to the one agent that you know will handle the transaction with care, expertise and utmost professionalism. It's what friends do!

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# What Exactly is Home Staging?

Walk into any successful retail store and you immediately notice that the owners have spent a lot of time creating an ambience designed to get you to buy, buy, buy. In the world of home sales, the term for this is “staging.” Many homeowners assume they know what staging is, but misconceptions abound. This article will clear up some of those misconceptions and give you a clearer picture of what it is and how you can use staging to sell your home for top dollar.

## Common Misconceptions

The first misconception I'll address is that staging is equivalent to preparing your home for sale. Preparing your home for sale is like cooking a meal. Staging is like arranging the look and aroma of the meal so that people can't wait to eat it. Preparing your home for sale is about making needed repairs, cleaning it thoroughly, painting and removing clutter. Only after you've done these things can staging begin. Make no mistake, a thorough cleaning, de-cluttering and touching up is essential. It's just that the task doesn't end there.

Another misconception is that you should arrange things to attract folks with your tastes. The truth is, your home should have broad appeal. If your tastes are eclectic and eccentric, that's wonderful, but perhaps not conducive to attracting as many qualified buyers as possible. This is best achieved by de-personalizing your home and making it as neutral as possible. Buyers should easily be able to envision turning your home into theirs.

## Staging Tips

Staging is all about creating an atmosphere that affects the feeling buyers get the moment they pull up to your curb, as they walk all the way through your home, and as they sit in their car unwilling to drive away. What is that feeling? I want to live here! How can you create this feel-

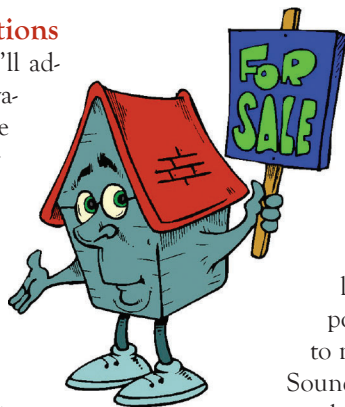
ing? A well-staged home will accomplish this by making use of the senses. For example:

**Sight:** Objects and surfaces should sparkle and shine. Everything from kitchen cabinets to windows should emit a warm glow. Furniture should be tastefully arranged. Plants and flowers should add freshness and attractive coloring. Light, spacious and airy should be the words that come to mind.

**Smell:** Every room should be lightly fragrant. Strong odors, like pets or spicy cooking, are a definite no-no. On the other hand, cabinets that have been rubbed with orange oil and kitchens that smell of cinnamon and chocolate-chip cookies have the power to make buyers want to move in immediately.

**Sound:** What do most people want their home to be? A refuge, a respite from the rough and tumble of the outside world. A quiet and peaceful home makes people feel relaxed and calm, exactly the feeling they would want to have in their home.

There are many more exciting ways to showcase your home, and I will be happy to share my expertise in this area with you. Feel free to give me a call for a free, no obligation consultation.



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wind cool you. When using the air conditioner, you may want to turn it off 5 minutes before you reach your destination. There should be enough cold air in the car to keep you comfortable for the rest of the ride, and you'll save a little bit of gas.

**Plan your route better.** Use an online map service or GPS, and you might find yourself taking a shorter way that takes longer to travel due to more traffic lights and traffic. Stop, go, stop, go – you'll be visiting a pump sooner.

**Rent a smaller car.** Going on vacation or a business trip? Smaller cars are less expensive to both rent and operate than the big gas-guzzlers.

**Use your car less.** Yeah, right, I know. But there are at least three ways to do this. The first obvious way is to carpool. I know a lot of folks think that this is too inconvenient, but you don't have to do it every day – a couple of times a week shouldn't be too bad. The second way is to – bring your lunch from home. You save money by not eating at the restaurant and by not using your car to drive there. And the third is to try to combine your errands into one trip. A little bit of pre-planning for the week ahead can reduce the number of times you have to use your car.

## Free Special Report Available

**The Seven Expensive Mistakes Sellers Frequently Make** is a four-page special report that no seller should be without. If you are thinking of selling a home soon, arm yourself with the knowledge that can help you avoid expensive mistakes too many people have made. Request this report today – there is no cost or obligation.

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# Maximizing Kitchen Storage on a Minimal Budget

No matter how big a kitchen is, it never seems big enough. The number one complaint is the lack of storage space. But, you don't have to break the bank to solve this problem. Here are a few economical ideas for adding storage space and simplifying your life:

✓ Rollout shelves are a growing trend in kitchen storage and for good reason. All too often things can get "lost" in the dark depths of cabinets, and much of the hard to reach space is wasted. A drawer-like shelf allows you to utilize your cabinets more efficiently and more conveniently. Oh, and they are not very hard to install.

✓ A close cousin of rollout shelves is the ever popular Lazy Susan. Also easily installed, it offers a great place to store your pots and pans in the corner area of your cupboards which are often inaccessible or hard to reach.

✓ A spice rack installed on the inside of a cabinet door at eye level is a simple way to organize your spices and keep them from cluttering up your cupboards. Or store your spice containers horizontally in a shallow drawer near the stove. This keeps them easily accessible and they are not taking up valuable countertop or shelf space.

✓ If you have a big enough kitchen, adding a center island can be a great way to add more storage space. Not enough room for it? Consider replacing your kitchen table with the more versatile island—the top can serve as the eating area or work area, and the bottom, of course, for storage.

✓ Baking sheets, cutting boards, pizza pans, or anything thin or shallow is best stored vertically. Install vertical dividers in a lower cupboard for convenience and easy access.

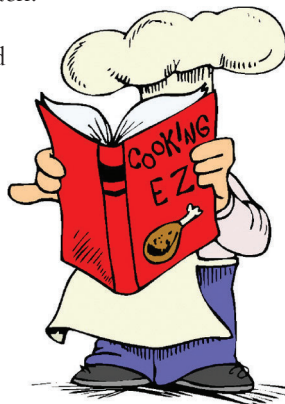
✓ Organize according to frequency of use. Keep frequently used things within an easy reach and near areas where you use them. Seldom used stuff can be stored on top shelves, or even in another room (empty chest or armoire in the living room maybe?).

✓ Use Tupperware-style stackable containers for dry goods. The original packaging is usually too bulky and takes up too much space. Cereal boxes, for example, are often needlessly large.

✓ Free up counter space with built-in appliances, such as an under-the-cabinet microwave or can opener.

✓ Install a pull-out storage tray behind the false drawer in front of your sink or cook top. Sure, it's narrow and can't hold a lot of stuff, but it can keep frequently used utensils from cluttering up your countertop.

✓ Get rid of some stuff. Just like you go through your closets once a year and sell or donate clothes you no longer need, "unloading" unneeded kitchen things will free up space for more useful stuff.



**Ask an Expert**

**Q:** A friend who sold her home recently had the property inspection performed before even putting it on the market. Is this common?

**A:** A property inspection is usually thought of as something that the buyer needs and pays for, so why would a seller want the house inspected before it is even listed? Most sellers don't go through this extra expense, but a seller's inspection is certainly not a bad idea. For starters, it offers the seller a chance to find out about any potential problems ahead of time. Since the home is not under contract yet, there are no looming deadlines, and the seller can get the necessary repairs done at a more leisurely pace. The seller also gets more time to obtain estimates and avoid overpaying for those repairs. Sometimes when a problem is discovered buyers can get spooked and back out the deal. A seller's inspection solves this, too. The only drawback is the cost. A property inspection can cost between \$300 and \$500, depending on the size and age of the house, but it may be worth it in order to avoid unpleasant surprises later.

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**Greater Vancouver housing market sees typical spring activity in April**

Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows saw a typical, solid month of residential home sales on the Multiple Listing Service in April, in contrast to the near record pace of the previous months.

The Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver reports that residential property sales of detached, attached and apartment properties in Maple/Meadows reached 168 in April 2011, a 16.8 per cent decrease compared to April 2010.

The decline in April sales can be attributed to a less active detached home and townhouse markets and there were more condominium sales this April compared to last year.

New listings for detached, attached and apartment properties in Maple/Meadows totalled 359 in April 2011. This represents a 17.8 per cent decline compared to April 2010 when 437 properties were listed for sale, a 7 per cent decline. "There's considerable variation in activity within the communities in our region. This is causing home price trends to differ depending on the area, your local REALTOR is a valuable resource for obtaining the most accurate, up-to date market evaluation."

Sales of detached properties in Maple/Meadows on the MLS in April 2011 reached 186, an decrease of 32 per cent from the 131 detached sales recorded in April 2010. The benchmark price for detached properties decreased 3.1 per cent in April 2011 to \$474,500

Sales of apartment properties reached 26 in April 2011, a .04 per cent increase compared to April 2010. The benchmark price of an apartment property decreased 9.4 per cent in April 2011 to \$210,000.



Attached property sales in April 2011 totalled 56, a 21.7 per cent increase compared to the 46 sales in April 2010. The benchmark price of an attached unit decreased 2.8 per cent in April 2011 to \$311,368.

May 2011

ARCHITECTURE CORNER

**THE BREAKERS**

A summer cottage. That's what Cornelius Vanderbilt II, one of the wealthiest Americans of his time, called his 130,000-square-foot palace. A *cottage*. (I wish I had a 130,000-square-foot cottage.) In 1885 Mr. Vanderbilt, who was a grandson of the railroad and steamship baron Commodore Vanderbilt, purchased the original Breakers. The wooden two-story house located in Newport, Rhode Island, burned to the ground in 1892, and the following year Cornelius Vanderbilt II commissioned the building of a new palace that would serve as his family's summer residence. He insisted that the new residence be fireproof, so not a single stick of lumber was used in the construction of the new, magnificent palace.

The construction of the new Breakers was finished in 1895. It was the most opulent home of its time, costing a then-mindboggling \$7 million to build. The Breakers is an Italian Renaissance palazzo with many Victorian elements. Limestone, Italian and African marble were used for the façade, and the roof is terra cotta tile. The property sits on 13 acres in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods on the U.S. East Coast, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

The home features 70 rooms. Sparing no expense, Mr. Vanderbilt's architects purchased entire rooms in France, then shipped them to the U.S. and "installed" them in the Breakers. Each room has its own style, with many being gender-specific (based on their intended uses). Rare wood and mosaics from around the world were used for room interiors. The grandest room of all is the Great Hall, which was used for receptions and special occasions. It was created to look like an open air courtyard in the Italian Renaissance style, complete with columns, arches, and a blue sky painted on the ceiling.

Upon the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt, their youngest daughter, Gladys, took over the Breakers. But the property was expensive to maintain, and in 1948 Gladys leased the Breakers to the Preservation Society of Newport County for \$1 per year. Several years later the palace was sold to the same non-profit organization which still owns it. Today the Breakers is a U.S. registered National Historic Landmark. It is open to visitors, and is said to be the most popular attraction in Rhode Island.



# Cheddar-Topped Cauliflower

PREPARATION TIME  
20 minutes

COOKING TIME  
10 minutes

PERFECT PARTNER  
roast pork loin



Cauliflower is usually a winter vegetable and is the least expensive in the colder months.

Save money and time during other seasons by purchasing frozen cauliflower florets.

## SHOPPING LIST

- cauliflower • Cheddar cheese
- salad seasoning

## ON HAND

- salt • pepper • dry mustard
- mayonnaise

# Cheddar-Topped Cauliflower

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium head cauliflower
- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon salad seasoning

SERVES 4



- Using frozen cauliflower florets will save time by allowing you to begin with recipe step 3.
- A well-greased baking dish speeds cleanup by making baked-on cheese easy to remove.

## Make Ahead

Cooked cauliflower may be kept in the refrigerator for a day, or prepare this dish up to baking 4 hours ahead.

## VARIATION

For a pretty and tasty variation, use half broccoli florets and half cauliflower florets.

- Preheat oven to 375°F. Wash cauliflower; remove leaves and trim stems. Cut into bite-size pieces.



- Add water to a large saucepan; place cauliflower in pan. Cook, covered, until tender, about 10 minutes; drain.

- Spray a medium baking dish with cooking spray. Layer cauliflower in dish. Sprinkle salt and pepper over top.



- Combine mustard and mayonnaise in a small bowl; mix well. Spread over cauliflower. Sprinkle Cheddar and salad seasoning on top. Bake until bubbly, about 10 minutes.