

When Buying a Home Be Sure to Check Out Possible Landscape Hazards

by Phoebe Chongchua

Landscaping is something most of us think about from the perspectives of what pleases our eyes and what will give us privacy. But the American Society of Home Inspectors, (ASHI) is encouraging homebuyers to consider how a property's landscaping may affect the home.

"Sometimes people tend to look at the house briefly and then go inside and then start looking at where they will put their furniture or just kind of enjoying the layout of the house," says Frank Lesh, President of ASHI.

What ASHI wants is for homebuyers to make sure they give a property a good look from both far and close up. That's why Lesh says it's a good idea to drive around the neighborhood.

"You want to know if you're in a valley, on a hill, on the side of the hill, is there a river or a creek nearby or a lake -- or a retention pond -- really you want to know what kind of water is around your house or what kind of water could be around your house," says Lesh.

He recommends that buyers pull up across the street from the home they're interested in and take a good hard look at the trees and foliage. Lesh says look to see if trees are touching the house, if power lines are too close to the roof, or if there is anything else that could pose a risk.

After you do that, Lesh says it's time to walk the property and inspect for uneven surfaces. Look to see if the driveway is heaved or cracked near a tree.

"That could show that there are roots pushing up against the sidewalk and that could be a trip hazard or it could be a maintenance nightmare; if water gets in there under the sidewalk or the driveway it could undermine it. If you live in an area where it's cold, the water could turn to ice which would lift up the sidewalk or the driveway -- those are all problems that could be re-occurring," cautions Lesh.

Check grading within a few feet of your house. Check the level of homes to the left and right and the front and rear. "How are those houses situated compared to yours? If you're the lowest one, chances are when it rains; you're going to get some water coming toward your house," explains Lesh.

"Water intrusion is one of the biggest headaches everybody has in their homes and we want to eliminate that from being a problem right off the bat," says Lesh.

What's most important is that you don't simply fall in love with a home without first see the overall picture.

"Looking at the carpet and maybe the size of rooms are all good to do, but you need to know about other things too," says Lesh.

Inspecting those other areas will help determine if the landscaping is adding to or detracting from the property. Paying close attention will give you an idea of what types of investments you'll have to make in the property in the future.

