



What Comes with the House?

From Janet Wickell, Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

Home Buying Essentials

Everything about the house you just looked at is perfect. The location is great. The layout is ideal, and the square footage is more than adequate. There's a built-in spa on the back deck and a charming weathervane on the roof. You're ready to make an offer—and you want to do now, before another offer comes in.

Slow down just a bit, because you have many things to think about before you put an offer in writing, and one critical decision involves items that you want to find at the property when you take possession.

What Are Fixtures?

Fixtures, items that are permanently attached, usually convey with a house. However, you should never assume that sellers plan to leave any item behind. The weathervane is a fixture, but it could be a gift they won't part with. And it may seem odd that a seller would go to the trouble and expense of removing a built-in spa, but I've seen it happen.

Don't take chances—decide which items should stay or go and make sure the seller agrees with you.

Make a List of Items to Stay

Walk through the house again, making a list of items you feel should be part of the purchase price. If the property is listed with an agency, the Multiple Listing Sheet should include items that are intended to convey with the house. That's a starting point for your list. Common items you'll want to include are the range, refrigerator, microwave, and perhaps the washer and dryer.

How about a large mirror over a fireplace mantel, or even the mantel itself if it appears to be unique or removable? I was involved in one transaction where the seller made it clear from the beginning that an heirloom mantel would not remain. But what if the seller forgot to mention that to her agent? Seeing it listed on an offer to purchase would trigger her memory.

Other items to consider adding to the list are:

- Outdoor storage buildings
- Window treatments
- Garage door openers
- Portable air conditioning units
- Chandeliers and other light fixtures
- Ceiling fans

List Items You Want to Disappear

You should also list items you want to make sure the sellers remove, such as an unused oil storage tank or an old car that doesn't appear to run.

Pricing

You are making an offer on the house based on its current condition and with the items you expect to remain (or go). If the seller doesn't agree with your list, he'll cross off items, making changes to the offer.

When that happens, the offer is no longer valid until you agree to the changes, giving you an opportunity to reconsider the price based on the alterations made by the seller.

Where to Put the Lists

There may be space for your list within the offer to purchase. If not, make the list on a separate sheet of paper and attach it as an addendum to the contract, where it must be signed by all parties. An attorney or your real estate agent can help if you're unsure how to proceed.

Final Walk-Through Check

Take your list along for a final walk-through on the day of closing. If an item is missing, you'll have more clout to get it back or negotiate a price reduction if you bring it to everyone's attention before the papers are signed.

Bottom Line

Even though most sellers are honest, you should never rely on an oral agreement regarding any aspect of a real estate transaction. The contract should state clearly what stays and what goes, leaving no doubt as to what each party has agreed to.

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