

CATERING TO AN AGING POPULATION

As the population continues to age, there's a growing demand for housing that meets the unique needs and preferences of older adults.



From specialized design elements to enhanced accessibility features, several factors appeal to an aging demographic in the housing market.

Boomers, who number nearly 76.4 million according to the U.S. Census data, are well into their retirement years and Gen X is getting ready to join them. The Alzheimer's Association reports that nearly 6.7 million people over the age of 65 have Alzheimer's. All of this demographic has special housing needs. When these needs are met, they are able to stay in their homes longer and not have to move to a facility as early.

Architectural firms are responding to these needs by creating homes and communities with such things as memory gardens, game rooms and safety features.

Incorporating universal design principles into homes ensures that they are accessible and usable by people of all ages and abilities. This includes features such as zero-step entrances, wider doorways and hallways, lever-style door handles and open floor plans that allow for easy maneuverability with mobility aids like wheelchairs or walkers.

Accessibility is a top priority for many older adults when choosing a home. Features like grab bars in bathrooms, walk-in showers with bench seating and adjustable countertops and cabinets make daily tasks easier and safer for aging residents. Additionally, single-story layouts eliminate the need to navigate stairs, reducing the risk of falls.

Good lighting is essential for older adults, especially those with vision impairments. Homes with plenty of natural light and well-designed artificial lighting help enhance visibility and create a sense of warmth and comfort. Installing task lighting

in key areas such as kitchens, bathrooms and reading nooks improves functionality and safety.

Many older adults prefer housing options that are located near essential amenities such as grocery stores, medical facilities, pharmacies and public transportation. Easy access to these services reduces reliance on driving and promotes independence and social engagement.

Communities that offer amenities catering to older adults' social and recreational needs are highly attractive. This includes features like community centers, fitness facilities, walking trails and social activities tailored to older residents' interests. Access to these amenities fosters a sense of belonging and encourages an active lifestyle.

Maintenance-free or low-maintenance housing options are appealing to older adults looking to simplify their lifestyles. Features such as exterior maintenance services, landscaping assistance and snow removal services alleviate the burden of home upkeep.

Safety and security are paramount concerns for older adults, especially those living alone. Homes equipped with features such as security systems, gated entrances, well-lit outdoor areas and emergency call systems provide peace of mind and enhance residents' sense of security.

Flexibility in home design allows older adults to adapt their living spaces to changing needs and preferences over time. Features such as adaptable rooms that can serve multiple purposes, adjustable shelving and cabinetry and technology-enabled home automation systems enhance convenience and functionality.

Real Estate Trends



Buying rural or urban? Know the differences!

The decision to move is a very personal choice that is typically reached after considering a number of variables. Career opportunities, a better climate, superior schools, or a desire to be closer to family compel millions of people to move each year, and those factors underscore how unique each individual move can be.

Steinway Moving & Storage contends that the average American moves 11.7 times. No move is a small undertaking, and when such a move involves relocating to an entirely new setting, there are some things buyers should know. Here are some differences between purchasing a home in a rural or urban location.

URBAN

A vibrant lifestyle and proximity to employment draws many people to urban living. Home prices tend to be higher in cities than in other areas, and the cost of living in urban areas tends to be more expensive due to the conveniences associated with city life. Buyers may expect to pay more for contractors, food and transportation. Property taxes are another consideration for urban buyers. Taxes tend to be higher in urban neighborhoods than rural locales.

Proximity to nightlife and restaurants attracts many people to live in cities. Urban buyers need to expect more congestion in cities than in rural areas. Having a car in the city may be a luxury instead of a necessity. In fact, many urban dwellers opt for public transportation rather than paying for parking or trying to find spots.

Noise may be another thing to think about. More people living closer together brings more noise and artificial light. Nature lovers may have to sacrifice proximity to wildlife and access to star-filled skies if they choose to live in cities.

RURAL

Being able to spread out and enjoy private property is a major advantage of living in the country. Rural living comes with much larger home footprints at more affordable prices.

Potential buyers will need to account for distance to jobs and stores when opting to live in rural areas. Commute times can eat into fuel budgets. Those who work from home may need to investigate if there is reliable internet service where a home is located, as some rural locales still have spotty mobile service and internet coverage.

Additional things to think about involve the maintenance on the home and utilities. Some rural homes are not connected to municipal water systems. That requires usage of well water and having to do one's own water testing. It's also key to have a septic system tested to ensure it is in good working order.

Rural residents may need to grow accustomed to slower repair times should electricity go out, so a backup generator might be necessary. Also, snow removal may fall on the homeowner, so buyers should look closely at driveway size and road access before buying.

Nature and vast starry skies draw some to live in rural areas. Sitting outdoors enjoying the sounds and smells of nature can be intoxicating. But homeowners must consider that insects and animals may be frequent companions in these areas. Those accustomed to urban living may be unacquainted with animals living so close to their homes.

Both rural and urban areas can be great places to live. Individuals should consider the pros and cons of each before buying a new home.



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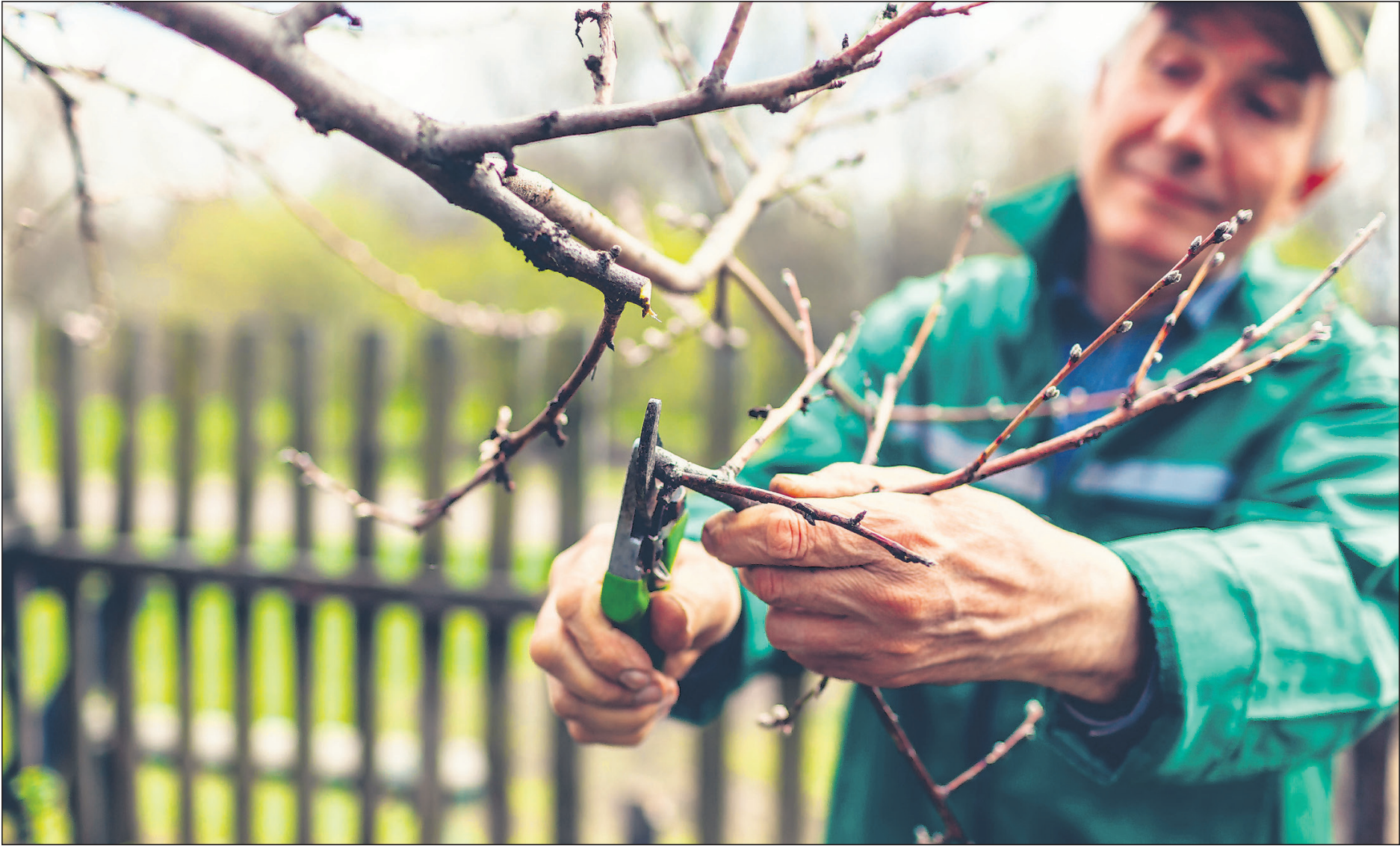
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Spring Pruning Tips



With winter receding, make smart cuts now to encourage growth.

Many perennials have foliage that provides protection during the winter, but pruning is still an essential part of their growth process. Likewise, many plants actually make stronger returns if longer branches are trimmed. Here's how to handle this essential part of spring gardening.

WHEN SHOULD I PRUNE?

The timing for pruning shrubs and trees mostly depends on when they bloom and whether those blooms are on new or old growth, according to the Farmers Almanac. Generally, plants which flower after midsummer each year should be pruned after they flower. A common worry is that over-pruning or pruning at the wrong time might kill a plant, but

garden center experts say that it's rarely fatal. Instead, you'll simply have fewer blooms or less fruit.

WHAT SHOULD I PRUNE?

Fruit-bearing trees like apple, peach, plum and cherry should be pruned in early spring, as should vines like wisteria and trumpet vine. Shrubs that flower in the spring like rhododendrons and lilacs also need pruning as soon as their first blooms fade. This helps ensure a better bloom the following year. Black-eyed

Susan, purple coneflower and globe thistle seed-heads provide a terrific food source for birds, so growers are encouraged to leave them until early spring. Mums, coral bells, hostas, turtleheads and delphiniums need their protective foliage through the winter; now is the time to cut them back.

WHAT DO I USE?

Pruning tools like shears and clippers must be kept sharp in order to do their best work. Clean cuts heal quickly, eventually strengthening the plant.

Botched cuts, on the other hand, actually weaken the plant while making it more susceptible to various diseases. Oil the moving parts before spring pruning to make sure everything works smoothly.

HOW TO PRUNE

Some plants require less aggressive pruning. Talk to representatives from your local extension service or gardening center to learn more about how much to prune a particular plant in your area. The Farmers Almanac is also a helpful guide. In general, focus on removing dying or dead branches, and sprouts that have emerged from the trunk. With trees and shrubs, remove all branches that are growing toward the center, downward or across other branches. Prune from the outside growth inward to get the most pleasing shape while promoting growth of stronger new branches.



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