

5 Things to Consider Before Buying a Home in Los Angeles During the Drought

Los Angeles real estate agents have advice on finding a home that can weather the drought.

By [Emily Manthei](#) | Contributor Oct. 15, 2016, 9 a.m.



Homeowners are being asked to do their part by cutting water use, which may affect some homebuyers. (GETTY IMAGES)

Five years into a severe drought that prompted the governor to declare a state of emergency in 2014, Californians are making some lifestyle changes. Los Angeles gets most of its water from melted snowpack in the Sierra Nevada range and from the Colorado River. However, these sources are limited, and there are other cities – and states – vying for the same resources.

Homeowners have been asked to do their part by cutting their water use by 25 percent. These restrictions could affect buyers who may find themselves needing to upgrade their new homes. Though, local governments are offering special programs to help homeowners use water more efficiently.

According to some of the top real estate agents in Los Angeles as identified by OpenHouse Realty, a real estate technology company (and a U.S. News partner), here's what you need to know about buying a home in Los Angeles during the drought.

Water prices will affect condo buyers. If you're looking to buy a condo (or even a town house), you should be aware of the higher homeowners association fees that come with higher utility costs.

HOA dues cover electric and water charges for any community green spaces or pools, and these rates have been steadily increasing.

"Of course it's still cheaper to be in a condo than a house in terms of outdoor water expenses," says Stephanie Vitacco of Keller Williams, but buyers should be aware that they simply don't have as much control over water use as they would in a single-family home. Buyers should be sure to check whether each unit has a separate water meter, or if indoor water (or hot water) use is included in the HOA, which can contribute to higher costs.

"It's a little bit scary because you're relying on your neighbors to all use water responsibly, too," Vitacco says.

Xeriscaping is popular, whether you like it or not. Many buyers seek a home with a pleasant and relaxing outdoor space. But in the wake of the drought, what that looks like is changing.

"Vintage homes often include mature landscaping and trees that provide a lot of shade, but when people rehab an old home, they strip everything away except its shell, and you lose some of the shade and plants," says [Tracy Do](#) of [Compass Real Estate](#). That's an inescapable result of the drought.

However, this might not be such a bad evolution. In place of large trees and plants, you can expect to find many homes with xeriscaping, or landscaping that reduces the need for supplemental water. Richard Schulman of Keller Williams Realty says, "You can use things like mulch, decomposed granite and succulents to create a pleasant-looking space that is environmentally green rather than visually green."

A lower water table could affect plumbing. It's important to consider what's happening under the yard of a potential home just as much as what is happening above ground.

"When a buyer does their home inspection, an agent will encourage them to have the sewer lines checked, too," Vitacco says. "They will drop a camera down there so you can see exactly what's happening in your outdoor pipes."

Many times, homeowners will find tree roots growing into the sewer lines, bursting pipes and wreaking havoc. "Trees that aren't being properly watered are reaching for wherever the water is, and that means they're going right toward the sewer," she explains.

Drought-induced incentives are everywhere. The upside to all this doom and gloom? Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts provides rebates – and sometimes even loans – on many water-saving devices like low-flow toilets and shower heads, efficient washing machines and sprinkler systems.

Buyers shuddering at the expense of watering a massive yard can take advantage of the Cash for Grass program, which pays Los Angeles homeowners for each square foot of lawn they replace

with drought-tolerant landscaping. This is a great resource for buyers who don't mind making a few improvements after purchasing a home.

Water-saving upgrades also save money. Even better news for buyers looking in Los Angeles is that all these drought-induced upgrades will save money in the long run. In California, the more water you use, the more expensive it becomes. As a homeowner, you'll want to keep yourself in the lowest-paying tier.

Buyers should inquire about low-flow, water-saving devices in the house and yard, and perhaps even ask about grey water systems, which treat and recycle waste water. Asking about these systems and buying an extremely water-efficient house will not only help you ride out the drought, it could also make your home more valuable and cost-efficient in the long run.

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