

## HOUSING MARKET OVERVIEW

The average home value in the U.S. has reached \$359,099, reflecting a healthy 2.6% increase year over year. While average 30-year mortgage rates rose to 6.56% in November, this is still lower than the rates seen a year ago, offering some relief to potential buyers.

In recent years, elevated mortgage rates and rising home prices have posed challenges for homebuyers. However, these market dynamics have kept competition relatively low, meaning there are fewer buyers driving up prices. Additionally, many would-be sellers have held off on listing their homes due to the high cost of moving, which has helped to keep the housing market from becoming oversaturated.

While the housing market has been tough for some, particularly first-time homebuyers, there's a silver lining on the horizon. As mortgage rates are expected to ease in the coming year and home price growth stabilizes, affordability should improve. This is good news for potential buyers who have been waiting for the right opportunity to enter the market.

\*source: businessinsider.com



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## WINTER FIRE SAFETY : PROTECTING YOUR HOME DURING THE RISKIEST SEASON

### 1. HEATING SYSTEM SAFETY

Your home's heating system requires special attention during winter. Schedule a professional HVAC inspection before the season begins to ensure everything works properly. Replace furnace filters monthly, as clogged filters can cause overheating. Keep the area around heating equipment clear of storage items, maintaining at least three feet of space between heaters and anything flammable.

### 2. FIREPLACE AND CHIMNEY MAINTENANCE

If you have a fireplace, annual chimney inspections and cleanings are crucial. Creosote, a highly flammable substance, builds up in chimneys over time and is a leading cause of house fires. When using your fireplace, always use a screen to prevent sparks from escaping, and never leave fires unattended. Dispose of ashes in a metal container stored at least 10 feet from your home, as embers can remain hot for days.

### 3. SPACE HEATER SAFETY

Portable space heaters account for a significant percentage of winter fires. Always plug space heaters directly into wall outlets — never use extension cords or power strips, which can overheat. Choose models with automatic shut-off features that activate if the heater tips over. Keep space heaters away from foot traffic areas, and never leave them running while sleeping or away from home.

### 4. SMOKE DETECTOR MAINTENANCE

Working smoke detectors can mean the difference between life and death. Install smoke detectors on every level of your home, inside bedrooms, and outside sleeping areas. Test all detectors monthly and replace batteries at least twice yearly. If your detectors are over ten years old, replace them entirely — their sensors can degrade over time.

### 5. KITCHEN FIRE PREVENTION

Holiday cooking increases kitchen fire risks. Never leave cooking unattended, keep flammable items away from the stovetop, and have a fire extinguisher readily accessible. If a grease fire occurs, never use water to extinguish it — instead, smother it with a lid or use a fire extinguisher rated for kitchen fires.

### 6. ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Increased power usage can strain electrical systems. Watch for warning signs like flickering lights, warm outlets, or frequently tripped circuit breakers. Avoid overloading outlets with holiday decorations, and inspect all light strings for damage before use. Consider having an electrician inspect your home's wiring if it's over 20 years old.

### 7. EMERGENCY PREPARATION

Create and practice a family fire escape plan with two ways out of every room. Keep pathways clear of snow and ice during winter to ensure easy evacuation. Install escape ladders in upstairs bedrooms and designate a meeting place outside. Store important documents in a fireproof safe or safety deposit box.

These preventive measures can significantly reduce your home's fire risk during winter. Remember that most house fires are preventable with proper maintenance, awareness, and safety practices. Make these safety checks part of your regular winter maintenance routine to protect your home and loved ones during peak fire season.

\*source: MLS

# GRANDMOTHER'S EGGNOG

\*source: allrecipes.com, Don

Prep Time:	Additional Time:	Total Time:	Servings:	Yield:
15 mins	8 hrs	8 hrs 15 mins	16	1 gallon

Ingredients:	2 quarts half-and-half cream
6 eggs	2 teaspoons ground nutmeg, or amount to taste
1 1/4 cups white sugar	1 pint heavy whipping cream
1 quart bourbon	

## Directions

In a large bowl, beat the eggs and sugar with an electric mixer until thick and pale, about 5 minutes. Gradually stir in the bourbon, rum, half and half and nutmeg.

In a separate chilled bowl, whip the cream until it can stand in a peak. Fold the whipped cream into the egg mixture. Pour into a plastic container and refrigerate overnight (if possible). Shake the container before serving.

This recipe contains raw egg. We recommend that young children, older adults, and people who are pregnant or immunocompromised do not consume raw egg.



## WHY BUYING A HOME IN WINTER IS A SMART MOVE

Winter may not be the most popular time to purchase a home, but it has distinct advantages for buyers. While the housing market typically slows down during the colder months, this can create opportunities for those looking to secure a new property.

Let's look at some key reasons why buying a home in the winter can be a smart decision.

### 1. LESS COMPETITION

One of the most significant advantages of buying a home in winter is the reduced competition among buyers. Many people pause their home-buying efforts during the holiday season or wait until spring when the market picks up. With fewer buyers searching for homes, you are less likely to face bidding wars, and sellers may be more willing to negotiate on price or other terms.

### 2. LOWER PRICES

Homes on the market during winter often come with more attractive price tags. Often, sellers who list their properties in winter do so out of necessity, such as job relocation or financial reasons, rather than waiting for the busy spring market. This urgency can work in your favor, leading to better deals and saving thousands of dollars.

### 3. MORE MOTIVATED SELLERS

Winter sellers tend to be more motivated, which can lead to faster and smoother transactions. These sellers are often eager to close quickly, especially if they need to move or finalize their sale before year-end tax deadlines. This can give buyers more leverage in negotiating terms such as closing costs, inspection requests, or contingencies.

### 4. A MORE REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Winter provides a unique opportunity to evaluate a home under less-than-ideal conditions. You can assess how well the heating system works, whether windows and doors seal properly, and if the property is prone to icy walkways or poor drainage. Seeing how the house holds up during colder weather can reveal issues that might not be apparent during spring or summer.

### 5. FASTER CLOSING TIMES

Because fewer transactions happen in winter, lenders and title companies often have lighter workloads. This can result in faster closing times, allowing you to move into your new home quicker. If you're hurrying to settle, this can be a crucial factor.

### 6. TAX BENEFITS

Closing on a home before the end of the year can offer tax advantages. For instance, you may be able to deduct mortgage interest, property taxes, and some closing costs on your tax return. These deductions can be a significant financial benefit, especially for first-time homebuyers.

### 7. PLANNING AHEAD FOR SPRING

Buying a home in winter allows you to settle in and make any necessary updates or renovations before the warmer months. By spring, you'll be ready to enjoy your new property fully or, if you've purchased it as an investment, list it for rent or sale in the peak market.

Buying a home in the winter offers a range of benefits, from lower prices and reduced competition to motivated sellers and faster transactions. While it may require braving the cold weather and navigating the holiday season, the potential savings and smoother experience make it a worthwhile endeavor. If you're ready to take advantage of these opportunities, winter might be the perfect time to find your dream home.

\*source: MLS

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