

Tried, True, Trustworthy Home Advice

[About Bob](#)[Newsletters](#)[HOW-TO CENTER](#)[GET IDEAS](#)[FIND INFO](#)[DISCUSS IT](#)[WATCH TV](#)[Win a BBQ grill!](#)[Buying & Selling Homes](#)

19 Red Flags to Watch Out For When Buying a Home

So, the listing makes the house sound like a steal and the property is stunning in person—but wait. Before you rush into anything you may regret, watch out for the following signs of trouble ahead.

By [Glenda Taylor](#)

Buyer Beware

1/20



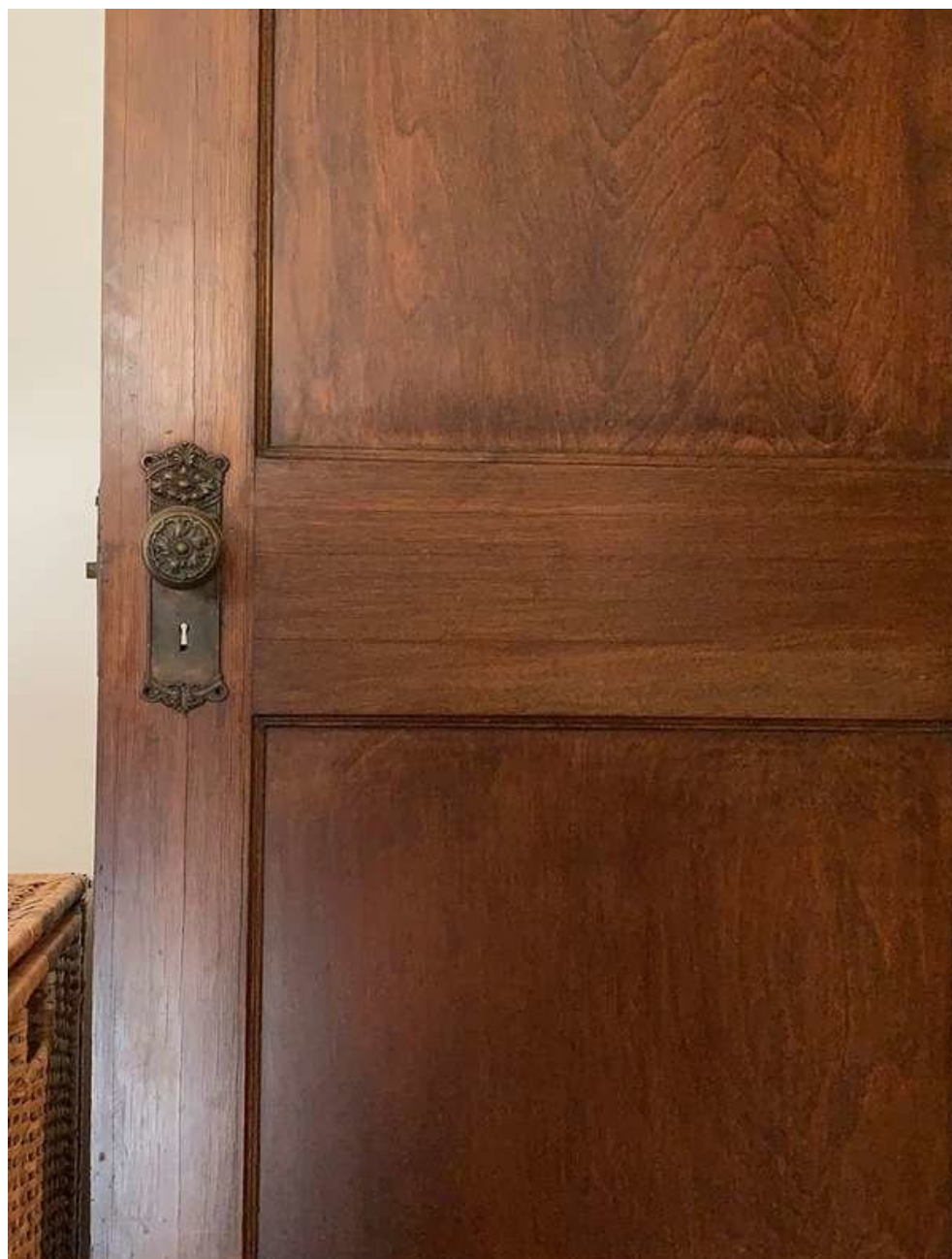
During an open house, prospective buyers try to get a sense of how well a house will fit their needs: Does it have enough bedrooms? Is the kitchen large enough?

house—the single biggest investment most people will ever make—has to do more than just suit a list of requirements. It also has to be in good shape. To help prospective buyers determine the condition of a property, the standard listing contract includes a disclosure form where the seller is supposed to list all the known defects of the house. The seller may not, however, be aware of all the defects, and some sellers may intentionally omit problems, hoping you won't notice them. To avoid unexpected repair costs, click through to learn about some common red flags that should make you think twice before you buy.

Photo: istockphoto.com

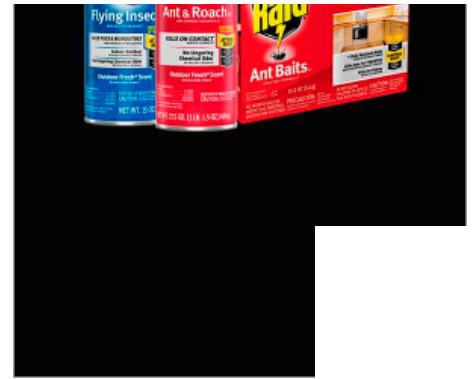
Doors That Won't Close

2/20



the door frame is now out of square. In some instances, the homeowners may have cut a bit off the top or bottom of the door to get it to close. So, if you notice a door with a little trimmed off the top or bottom, beware: The door may shut properly, but the problem that led to the shifting still exists.

Photo: istockphoto.com



Foundation Cracks

3/20

Virtually all poured concrete foundations will crack at one time or another, but hairline cracks are not an indication of a problem. If a crack is wider than 1/2 inch, however, it's a good idea to have a foundation contractor examine the area. This also holds true for cracks that appear to have been recently patched. Large cracks can indicate an unstable foundation.

Photo: istockphoto.com

ADVERTISEMENT

Most mold isn't of the scary toxic variety like, for instance, *Stachybotrys*, but inhaling any type of mold spores can contribute to respiratory symptoms, headaches, and other illnesses, and the presence of mold may indicate a problem with the house. If you smell mold, check beneath sinks, around windows, and in basements and crawl spaces for leaks. If a leak has been going on for a long time, construction materials, including wood members, drywall, and carpets may need to be replaced.

Photo: istockphoto.com

The presence of live termites can throw a house contract into jeopardy, so it pays to recognize the signs before making an offer. One telltale indication is small piles of tiny brown droppings on a floor near a wall. Other signs include a hollow sound when you knock on a wood surface and the presence of mud tubes on a foundation. Termites are subterranean, so they construct tiny tunnels of mud along foundations and walls to protect them from sunlight as they travel back and forth between the wood they're munching and their below-ground nests.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Water Stains

6/20

Water and construction materials don't mix. The trickle of water from a leaky roof or window can over time rot away structural wood members. If water stains are yellowish or brownish, they may be evidence of a plumbing problem on an upper floor. Until you know where a leak is coming from and how much damage it's caused, don't make an offer.

Related: [A Flipper's Top 10 Tips for Increasing Home Value](#)

Photo: istockphoto.com



Saggy Ceiling

7/20

No matter how quaint and cozy the house, if the ceiling sags, it's a red flag. A saggy ceiling—even if the sag is only slight—can be the result of roof leaks, structural movement that's causing the ceiling drywall to work loose from the ceiling joists, or an insect infestation that's eating away at the joists. Whatever the cause, fixing it could be expensive.

Photo: istockphoto.com

DIY Additions

8/20

File this one squarely in the realm of "buyer beware!" While many homeowners are capable of making repairs around the house, few have sufficient knowledge and skills to construct an addition that meets building codes. If the homeowner built an addition without oversight from the local building authority, it could contain structural, wiring, and plumbing defects.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Not all fresh paint indicates a problem. In fact, sellers often roll a new coat of paint on the walls before listing their homes. You should question fresh paint, however, when it seems out of place, such as when only one wall in a room has been painted. Spot painting could indicate that the seller is trying to cover up a defect on the wall, such as a water stain.

Photo: istockphoto.com

ADVERTISEMENT



Strong Air Fresheners

10/20

If you're immediately assailed by the strong scent of air freshener when you walk into a house, or if essential oil diffusers are steaming away in every room, this could indicate that the homeowner is trying to cloak the smell of something else, such as carpeting that's saturated with pet urine or mold that's growing beneath the sink. If you're interested in the house, ask for a second showing and request that the seller not use air freshener before you arrive.

Everyone's Selling

11/20

As real estate agents are fond of saying, the most important factor in buying a house is "location, location, location." If many nearby homes are up for sale, this could be an indication of a problem with the location, such as a rising crime rate or a proposed landfill in the area. Make neighborhood sleuthing a regular part of your house-hunting.

Related: [Rental Regret: What Real Homeowners Wish They'd Known Before Renting Out Their Properties](#)

Photo: istockphoto.com

Standing Water in the Yard

12/20

To keep water away from the foundation wall, a yard should have a minimum 2 percent grade away from the house. Drive by the house you like after a rain. If you find puddles of standing water, the yard may have a drainage problem. Puddles near the foundation are the most concerning, because water that drains along a foundation wall can leak into a basement through the smallest crack.

Photo: istockphoto.com

ADVERTISEMENT



Inadequate Attic Ventilation

13/20

From outside the house, look at the underside of the roof eaves (the soffits). You should see one or more vents—these are intake vents. Additional exhaust vents should be located along the ridge of the roof, on the face of the roof near the ridge, or at the top of a gable wall. Without adequate ventilation, an attic can become blazingly hot during summer, which can lead to damage of the roof sheathing (decking) and the shingles themselves.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Aging HVAC System

14/20

The average furnace lasts 15 to 18 years, and the average AC unit lasts around 10 to 12 years. As heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) units approach the end of their useful lives, they're less efficient than they once were. As a result, you'll pay higher utility costs to run them, and they may not heat or cool the house effectively. There's also the chance that one or both of them will quit working entirely, and you'll be left with the cost of replacing them.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Shingle Problems

15/20

Replacing a roof is an expensive proposition: A new roof can cost \$6,000 to \$20,000 or more, depending on the size of the roof and the type of roofing materials, so it pays to check out the roof carefully. Shingles that curl up at the corners, missing shingles, cracked shingles, or exposed nail heads are all signs that the roof might need to be replaced. A roofing contractor will know for sure.

Photo: istockphoto.com

ADVERTISEMENT

As-Is Properties

16/20

There's a good reason why some sellers list their homes "As Is": They simply don't want to deal with problems that could be uncovered during a professional inspection. They're basically telling you that if problems exist, they won't pay to fix them. You can still have the home inspected—and you should—but if the inspector finds termites, mold, or other problems and you still choose to buy the house, all repair costs come out of your wallet.

Photo: istockphoto.com

House Has Been on the Market for a Long Time

17/20

Many factors can affect the amount of time a house is on the market before it sells, but according to real estate guru Zillow, the average time from listing to close is [68 days](#). Talk to a real estate agent about the average time in your community, but in general beware of a house that's been on the market for months, or years. It could very well have hidden problems that could be expensive to repair.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Bargain-Basement Price

18/20

When a house is priced far below market value, find out why before you rush to make an offer. You won't be getting an amazing deal if the septic system backs up the day you move in, filling your shower with raw sewage. Houses that are priced very low often have problems that will be expensive to repair. Take the time to hire professional inspectors so you know exactly what you'll be getting before you buy.

Photo: istockphoto.com

ADVERTISEMENT

For Sale By Owner

19/20

The prospect of saving a few thousand dollars in agent commissions by buying a for-sale-by-owner (FSBO) home is enticing, but you could end up with more trouble than you bargained for. Real estate transactions are complex, and without an agent to guide you through the steps, you could end up with a house that has serious problems with either the structure or the deed. At the very least, consult with a real estate attorney before making an offer on a FSBO.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Sloping Floors

20/20

Normal settling can cause floors to be slightly out of level, but if the slope is noticeable, it could be related to a foundation problem, broken floor joists, or rotted support beams. Structural problems can cost thousands of dollars to repair, so it pays to have a structural engineer take a look at the home if one or more of the floors are sloping.

Related: [12 Things I Wish I Had Known Before Moving to a Small Town](#)

Photo: istockphoto.com

Don't Miss!

Get the help you need for the home you want—[sign up](#) for the Bob Vila newsletter today!

Disclosure: BobVila.com participates in the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program, an affiliate advertising program designed to provide a means for publishers to earn fees by linking to Amazon.com and affiliated sites.

TAGS: | [real estate](#)

MORE FROM BOB VILA

[12 Inexpensive Ideas to Make Your New House Feel Like Home Fast](#)

[10 Things You Need to Know About Buying a House at Auction](#)

[15 Things Not to Say in Your Real Estate Listing](#)

[Watch Out for 12 Real Estate Tactics Designed to Make You Spend More](#)

[12 Reasons a Realtor Might Not Want to Work with You](#)

[7 Signs You're About to Buy the Wrong House](#)

[As-Is Real Estate: What Buyers and Sellers Need to Know](#)

[12 Things You Don't Realize Are Annoying Your Neighbors](#)

[15 Cheapest Places to Buy Land in America](#)

- DIY Storage Benches
- Best TV Wall Mount
- Door DIY Ideas
- Best Duct Tape
- New Uses for Old Candles
- Best Ladder
- DIY Shoe Rack Ideas
- Best Rechargeable Batteries
- Room Divider Ideas



Newsletter signup:

You agree that BobVila.com may process your data in the manner described by our [Privacy Policy](#).

[About Bob](#) [Newsletters](#) [Contact](#) [Advertising](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Do Not Sell My Personal Info](#)

Copyright © 2021 [Acton Media Inc.](#) All rights reserved.