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8 Tips to Guide for Your Home Search

1. Research before you look. Decide what features you most want to have in a home, what neighborhoods you prefer, and how much you'd be willing to spend each month for housing.

2. Be realistic. It's OK to be picky, but don't be unrealistic with your expectations. There's no such thing as a perfect home. Use your list of priorities as a guide to evaluate each property.

3. Get your finances in order. Review your credit report and be sure you have enough money to cover your down payment and closing costs. Then, talk to a lender and get prequalified for a mortgage. This will save you the heartache later of falling in love with a house you can't afford.

4. Don't ask too many people for opinions. It will drive you crazy. Select one or two people to turn to if you feel you need a second opinion, but be ready to make the final decision on your own.

5. Decide your moving timeline. When is your lease up? Are you allowed to sublet? How tight is the rental market in your area? All of these factors will help you determine when you should move.

6. Think long term. Are you looking for a starter house with plans to move up in a few years, or do you hope to stay in this home for a longer period? This decision may dictate what type of home you'll buy as well as the type of mortgage terms that will best suit you.

7. Insist on a home inspection. If possible, get a warranty from the seller to cover defects for one year.

8. Get help from a REALTOR®. Hire a real estate professional who specializes in buyer representation. Unlike a listing agent, whose first duty is to the seller, a buyer's representative is working only for you. Buyer's reps are usually paid out of the seller's commission payment.