

FIRST-TIME BUYER GUIDE

Clear answers, practical guidance, and a calmer way to approach your first home purchase.

01	Know your numbers
02	Build your team
03	Search smart
04	Understand the offer
05	Investigate the property
06	Close with confidence

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First: You Don't Have to Know Everything

Buying your first home introduces a new vocabulary, unfamiliar paperwork, deadlines, inspections, financing decisions, and a lot of opinions from other people. It is normal not to know how all of it works yet.

Your job is not to become a real estate expert before you buy. Your job is to understand the decisions you are making, ask questions when something is unclear, and work with people who will explain the process without rushing you.

A useful rule: If you do not understand something you are being asked to sign, pay, waive, or agree to, ask. A good question asked before a deadline is much easier to deal with than confusion afterward.

1. Know Your Numbers Before You Fall in Love With a House

Start with a lender before you seriously shop. Preapproval helps establish what you may qualify to borrow, but your maximum approval is not necessarily the amount you will feel comfortable paying every month.

Talk through the whole payment

- Principal and interest
- Property taxes
- Homeowners insurance
- Mortgage insurance, if applicable
- HOA or other recurring property fees, if applicable

Also plan for upfront expenses

- Earnest money
- Home inspection and any specialized inspections
- Appraisal or other lender-related expenses, as applicable
- Closing costs and prepaid items
- Moving and immediate homeownership expenses

2. Understand Your Financing Options

First-time buyer does not describe a single loan program. Depending on your finances, location, military eligibility, and the property, you may have several financing paths.

Conventional	A common option with different down-payment structures and mortgage-insurance rules depending on the loan.
FHA	Government-insured financing that may be useful for buyers who need more flexible credit or down-payment requirements.
VA	For eligible veterans, service members, and certain surviving spouses; may allow no down payment and does not require monthly PMI.
USDA	May offer no-down-payment financing for eligible borrowers and eligible properties in qualifying areas.

Down-payment assistance

State, local, lender, and nonprofit programs may sometimes help eligible buyers with down payments or closing costs. Availability, funding, income limits, property requirements, education requirements, and repayment terms vary. Ask a knowledgeable lender what is currently available and whether it actually improves your overall financing.

Compare more than the interest rate. Ask about estimated cash to close, monthly payment, mortgage insurance, lender fees, loan restrictions, and how long you expect to keep the home.

Questions worth asking a lender

- Which loan programs fit my situation and why?
- What would my estimated payment and cash to close look like?
- Can I receive seller concessions with this loan?
- Are there first-time-buyer or assistance programs I should consider?
- What financial changes should I avoid before closing?

3. Build a Team That Explains Things

A purchase involves several professionals. They do different jobs, and knowing who is responsible for what makes the process much less confusing.

- **Real estate broker:** helps you search, evaluate properties, prepare and negotiate the offer, manage contract deadlines, and navigate the transaction.
- **Lender:** handles loan qualification, underwriting, financing requirements, and loan-specific costs.
- **Inspector:** evaluates the property's visible condition and systems within the scope of the inspection.
- **Appraiser:** provides an independent opinion of value for the lender when an appraisal is required.
- **Title & escrow:** handles title work, closing documents, funds, and the mechanics of closing.
- **Specialists:** depending on the property, you may need septic, well, sewer, roof, structural, electrical, HVAC, survey, legal, tax, or other expertise.

4. Search Smart - Not Just Pretty

Photos and finishes are easy to react to. Try to evaluate the things that are harder or more expensive to change.

- Location and surrounding uses
- Layout and functionality
- Condition and major systems
- Storage and parking
- Lot and exterior maintenance
- Commute and access
- Future needs, not just today's needs

Central Oregon buyers: Acreage can introduce wells, septic systems, legal access, private roads, zoning, utilities, wildfire considerations, irrigation, water rights, and other due-diligence questions. Rural property deserves a different checklist than a house on a city lot.

5. What Happens When You Find 'The One'?

Your broker will help you prepare a written offer. An offer is more than a price: it contains deadlines, contingencies, financing terms, possession terms, and other obligations that can affect both your money and your options.

Terms you will hear

- **Earnest money:** money deposited according to the contract to demonstrate the buyer's good-faith commitment.
- **Contingency:** a contractual condition or protection tied to matters such as inspection or financing.
- **Seller concession:** an amount the seller agrees to contribute toward certain buyer costs, subject to contract and loan limits.
- **Closing date:** the date the transaction is expected to close; possession may or may not occur at exactly the same time.
- **Counteroffer:** a proposed change to the terms of an offer. Negotiation may involve several terms, not just price.

There is no universal 'perfect offer.' A strong offer depends on the property, market, competition, financing, seller priorities, and your own limits. Know what matters to you before negotiations become emotional.

6. Inspection & Due Diligence

Once under contract, use your due-diligence period carefully. A home inspection is one source of information, not a guarantee that nothing will ever go wrong.

- Attend or review the inspection carefully and ask questions.
- Consider specialist evaluations when findings warrant them.
- Review seller disclosures and available property information.
- Research property-specific concerns rather than assuming they are covered by a general inspection.
- Keep track of contractual deadlines for notices, negotiations, and decisions.

7. From Loan Approval to Closing

While you are investigating the property, your lender is working through underwriting. Keep your financial situation as stable as possible and respond quickly to requests.

Until the transaction closes:

- Do not open new credit without speaking with your lender.
- Do not finance a car, furniture, appliances, or other major purchases without checking first.
- Do not change employment or income arrangements without discussing the impact.
- Do not move large sums of money without asking how they should be documented.
- Keep making existing debt payments on time.

The final stretch

- Review final loan and closing figures.
- Arrange homeowners insurance as required.
- Complete the final walkthrough.
- Follow escrow's verified instructions for funds and identification.
- Sign closing documents.
- Wait for funding and recording before assuming the transaction is officially closed.
- Take possession according to the purchase agreement.

Then you get to be a homeowner. Keep copies of your closing documents, know where your main water shutoff and electrical panel are, change access codes or locks as appropriate, and start a maintenance file for the house.

First-Time Buyer Roadmap

1	Prepare	Budget + preapproval
2	Search	Needs + neighborhoods + properties
3	Offer	Price + terms + negotiation
4	Investigate	Inspection + property research
5	Finance	Appraisal + underwriting + insurance
6	Close	Walkthrough + signing + recording + keys

YOUR FIRST HOME DOESN'T HAVE TO FEEL OVERWHELMING.

Good information makes the process easier. If you're thinking about buying in Central Oregon, we can start with your questions, your budget, and what you actually need - then work forward from there.

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