



# Eaton Insider

Courtesy of Craig Eaton ☞ [www.EatonRealtyLLC.com](http://www.EatonRealtyLLC.com) ☞ 813.672.8022

March, 2010

## 7 Quick Tax Time Tips

It's already March? Gosh, how is it that tax time has come so fast again! Is it just me or does April 15 seem to come faster every year? Oh well, no point in lamenting this; let's instead figure out how to get the most out of our deductions. Here are seven quick tips for this tax season:

### Homebuyer Tax Credit

Did you buy a home last year? The Worker, Homeownership and Business Act of 2009 extends a tax credit for those who qualify. If you were a first-time buyer, you may be eligible for \$8,000 tax credit; if you were a previous owner who moved up, you could receive \$6,500 tax credit. This is only for principal residences (no income properties qualify) and there are, of course, limitations and deadlines. Check with your tax professional.



### Tuition

The tuition and fees deduction is an easy one to claim since it does not even require you to fill out Schedule A - just fill in line 34 (on Form 1040) or line 19 (on Form 1040A). You can deduct up to \$4,000 in tuition and fees, but note that other associated costs such as books, room and board, are not eligible. The classes you took must be college-level and taken for legitimate educational reasons. However, it is not required that you took the classes yourself; if you paid tuition and fees for your spouse or dependents, you can still take the deduction.

### Earned Income Tax Credit

For many folks, last year was a tough one financially. If you worked but did not earn a whole lot, you may qualify for the refundable Earned Income Tax Credit. Married couples who file jointly and earned less than \$48,279 may be eligible (for individuals, heads of household and surviving spouses the income limit is \$43,279). And what does this "refundable" credit mean? It means that if the credit is greater than your tax bill, you actually get money from the IRS. The rules for this credit are complicated so it is best to sit down with your tax advisor to get the full details.

### Child Care and Dependent Care

Did you incur day care expenses for your children or disabled adult dependents last year? If you did, you may qualify for a tax credit of up to \$3,000 (for one dependent) or \$6,000 (for two or more). As with all the tax breaks, there are rules and limitations; the child or adult dependent must meet certain criteria, the day care provider must qualify too, you must have earned income last year, etc. The IRS Form 2441 with the accompanying instructions explains how to claim the credit.

### New Job

If you switched jobs last year, Uncle Sam might give you a break on your taxes. This  
*(continued, Page 2)*



Spring is finally here, and with it the start of a new real estate selling season. Is a new home in your near future? Are your family and friends talking about buying or selling soon? If so, please give me a call. I will use my knowledge and expertise to make your real estate transaction as smooth as possible, and will do the same for anyone you refer to me. I offer friendly service, caring attitude, solid advice, and there is never any sales pressure.

### Craig Eaton

(813) 672-8022 (office)  
(813) 436-5242 (fax)  
[craig@EatonRealtyLLC.com](mailto:craig@EatonRealtyLLC.com)  
[www.EatonRealtyLLC.com](http://www.EatonRealtyLLC.com)



**Eaton Realty, LLC**  
*the future of real estate*

# How Not to Choose an Agent

How do you choose a good agent? Most people know the dos: interview a few, make sure they are licensed, ask for references, ask for a written plan of action, etc. But how about some don'ts? Let's look at those now. It's generally a bad idea to choose an agent solely based on:

## Suggested Price

Here's a simple way for an agent to sign up a lot of sellers: tell people what they want to hear. Sellers like to hear that their homes are worth a lot of money, so some misguided agents will promise a big selling price even though they know the home is not worth it. A seller that falls for this will see his home languish on the market for many months until it finally sells at a lower price than it could have. You don't want to be that seller. Ask agents to backup their price recommendations. If you think the suggested price is too low, have a spirited discussion with the agent. But if it's suspiciously high, or if the agent readily agrees with everything you say, be cautious.

## Commission

"I want to pay as little in commission as possible," some sellers will say. I would recommend a different approach: "I want to get the biggest bang for my buck."

What's the difference? The difference is not how much you pay your agent but what you get for your money. You can hire someone who will give you a big discount and then make little effort to actually find you a buyer. Or handle problems that pop up. Or return your calls. On the other hand, you can hire someone who charges a little more, but will bend over backwards for you. And answer your calls even after hours. And get you a better price due to having better negotiating skills. The old, overused, adage "You get what you pay for" still holds true.



## Presentation

Good agents should be able to give you a good presentation of their services. They will likely discuss how long they've been in the business, what track record they have, what marketing methods they use, and what plan of action they have in mind for selling your house. This is all good. But you still have to "click" with that person. Is this agent carefully listening to your questions? Answering your concerns? Is he or she genuinely interested in working with you? Will you like working with this person? Yes, listen to the presentation and ask a lot of questions. But use your intuition too. Your gut feeling can tell you a lot about someone, sometimes even more than graphs and charts.

*(continued from Page 1)*

only works for the folks who (1) switched to a job in the same field, (2) did not take a lot of time off between the two jobs, and (3) your new job is not your first one straight out of school. If you meet the qualifications, you could deduct: employment agency fees, resume service costs, associated printing and mailing expenses, phone calls and travel expenses for interviews. Even if you are self-employed you could get a tax break, if your new business is in the same line of work as your earlier profession.

## Say "No" to Quick Money

Quick money sounds good doesn't it? But when it comes to the so called "rapid refunds" there is an enormous hidden cost. The truth is that no one can make the IRS send you your refund faster. What the "rapid refund" agencies do is really give you a loan that is automatically repaid by your tax refund. As with all loans, there is an interest rate, but unlike most legitimate loans these "rapid refund" loans are ridiculously expensive. When you calculate what the rate charged would be on an annual basis you will be shocked to realize that some go as high as 700%! So be patient, say "no" to these rapid refunds, and save your money.

## Free Help

Did I just say "free?" Why, I sure did! For those who make less than \$49,000 per year the IRS has established VITA Program where certified volunteers help prepare tax returns and answer tax questions free of charge. To find the local office call 1-800-829-1040. And for those 60 years of age and older, AARP offers a similar program - free tax preparation and advice! For the nearest location (there are over 7,000 nationwide) call 1-888-227-7669.

## Free Special Report Available

**The Seven Expensive Mistakes Sellers Frequently Make** is a four-page special report that no seller should be without. If you are thinking of selling a home soon, arm yourself with the knowledge that can help you avoid expensive mistakes too many people have made. Request this report today - there is no cost or obligation.

**(813) 672-8022**

**craig@EatonRealtyLLC.com**

### The Small Print:

The above article does not constitute tax advice. Consult your CPA or tax advisor for answers regarding your particular tax situation.

# Caring for Your Annuals

With the spring just around the corner, it is time to think about your garden. Here are the basics of planting colorful annuals:

## Location

Just like in real estate, the location is crucial for plants. Most annuals love sun, although there are a few shade-loving exceptions. For the sun-lovers, make sure to pick a spot that gets at least four hours of direct sunlight per day. The soil is another important factor to consider. Properly prepared soil is loose and loamy, with plenty of nutrients for your plants. Tilling the top 6 inches of soil is a good idea, as is adding about 3 inches of quality compost.

## Planting

If you've purchased your plants from a nursery that kept them out in the open, you can plant them right away. However, if your young annuals were grown in a greenhouse, you may first want to allow them about a week to gradually adapt to their new surroundings. Keep them in a shaded area at first, and each day bring them out in the sun for a little longer so they feel "comfortable" in it.

Annuals like warm soil and steady weather. It's a good idea to plant late in the afternoon or on a cloudy day to avoid "upsetting" the flowers too much. When removing the plants from their containers, don't pull on their stems as this will likely damage them. Instead, carefully slip them out by turning the container upside-down, and try to disturb the roots as little as possible.

Your annuals should be planted at the same depth (or

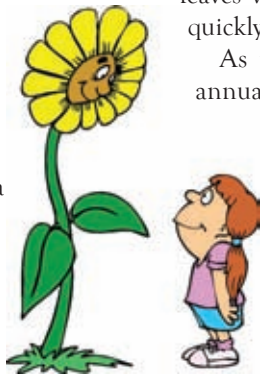
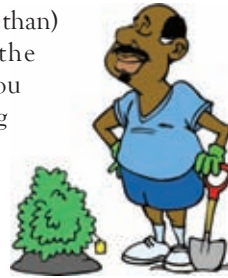
just slightly deeper than) they were at the nursery. After you are done planting your new annuals, rejuvenate them with water and some starter fertilizer.

## Care

To grow happily, your annuals need about one inch of water per week. Deep, infrequent watering is preferred over frequent "sprinkling" since it encourages development of deeper roots. When you water, try not to water leaves as this can trigger foliage diseases. If you are using an automatic sprinkler, water early so the leaves will have a chance to dry off quickly.

As far as fertilizing goes, most annuals don't need much, provided that you've prepared the soil well. Once or twice per growing season should be plenty; if you used plenty of quality compost in the beginning you might not need fertilizer at all. Mulch is another smart feature to consider. In addition to improving the look of your garden, properly applied mulch helps the soil retain moisture and hinders weeds - both very nice bonuses for your plants.

And finally, if you want your annuals to produce a multitude of colorful flowers, don't forget about "deadheading." This is the process where you remove any faded flowers from your plants to encourage new growth. Remember, annuals live to produce seeds for the new generation of the plant; if you remove the dying blooms containing new seeds, you will "trick" the plant into thinking it has to produce another flower. The more vigilant you are about this task, the more you will extend the colorful life of your flower garden.



**Q: What is title insurance and why do I need it?**

*A: Abraham Lincoln lost his home twice due to problems with the title. The purpose of title insurance is to help you avoid the same fate. Simply put, it insures you and your lender against errors or potential problems with the ownership documents of your home. For example, if someone was to claim to be the rightful owner of your home, the title insurance protects you against possible loss or damages.*

*Two types of title insurance are available. The lender's policy protects only the lender from title defects, liens or judgments. The owner's policy protects the buyer against the same problems, and can be expanded to cover additional title risks, such as unrecorded liens. A lender's policy is required in order to obtain a mortgage. An owner's policy is not, but since it's only slightly more expensive than the lender policy, buying it is certainly not a bad idea as it gives you added peace of mind.*

**Have a tough real estate question? Your calls and e-mails are always welcome:**

**Craig Eaton**  
(813) 672-8022  
craig@EatonRealtyLLC.com



### Craig Eaton

Eaton Realty, LLC  
6139 Kestrelridge Drive  
Lithia, FL 33547



March 2010

## ARCHITECTURE CORNER: AMERICA'S LANDMARK HOMES

### THE BILTMORE HOUSE

Nestled in North Carolina mountains, near the town of Asheville, lies America's largest privately-owned home – the Biltmore House. This landmark residence has a whopping 175,000 square feet, 250 rooms and 65 fireplaces. Its original owner used to call it his “little mountain escape.”

The Biltmore House was built by George Washington Vanderbilt II, an heir to the Vanderbilt steamship and railroad empire. The house is modeled after several fine chateaus (mansions) in France, and is the finest example of the French Renaissance style in the United States. The construction took six years, starting in 1889 and finishing in 1895. This was such an enormous undertaking that a brick factory was purpose-built nearby, as well as three miles of railroad that transported all the building materials to the construction site.

No expense was spared on this lavish home. Some rooms are so large that a small house could fit inside. The Biltmore's collection of fine art boasts, among other things, a painting by Renoir and a chess set once owned by Napoleon Bonaparte. There is also a private bowling alley and what is thought to be the world's first indoor swimming pool. The home was quite high-tech for its time too; it features such 19<sup>th</sup> Century technological marvels as elevators, smoke alarm and an intercom system.



George Washington Vanderbilt II envisioned his home as a self-sustaining estate. He established poultry, hog and cattle farms on his property, and built a village to house people who would work for him. He was also passionate about horticulture and forestry, and in order to properly care for his enormous estate he established America's first forestry education program. Vanderbilt's original property of 125,000 acres(!) became the first professionally managed forest in the U.S.

Creating the Biltmore Estate was such an expensive project that it severely depleted Vanderbilt's inheritance. After his death in 1914, his widow sold most of the land to the U.S. Government, which used it to establish Pisgah National Forest. The house and the remaining 8,000 acres were inherited by Vanderbilt's daughter Cornelia, who in 1930 opened it to the public in order to help pay for the property's upkeep. The Biltmore House is still owned by Vanderbilt's descendants, and over one million people visit it annually.