



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2010

SENSIBLE HOME

Indoor humidity problem is all relative



JAMES DULLEY
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

Question: My kids have allergies, so I am not sure how humid the air should be in my house in winter and summer. What is a good target humidity level, and what is the best and most efficient way to maintain it? — **Jan G.**

Answer: There is not just one ideal indoor humidity level. People are typically comfortable with a relative humidity of 30 percent to 50 percent and can tolerate 20 percent to 60 percent. The ideal RH depends whether you live in the North or the South, and it changes with the seasons. High RH often is a summertime problem in the South, and excessively low or high RH can create wintertime problems in the North.

Controlling humidity lowers your utility bills by allowing you to set the furnace or central air conditioner thermostat down or up, respectively. It also creates a healthier indoor environment. Although overly humid

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You can get tax credits for home improvements, but do it soon

By Stacy Downs
McClatchy Newspapers

Who knew you can receive a tax credit for new garage doors?

The tax credits created in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 can be complicated, but with careful choices, consumers can reap as much as 30 percent of the product costs (with a limit of \$1,500).

Homeowners seem to be unaware of the guidelines for the "move-up" credit, worth as much as \$6,500 when they buy a new house, says Jean Badciong, chief operating officer of Inlanta Mortgage of Waukesha, Wis.

"One of the misunderstandings people have is that they think your prior home has to be sold before you qualify," Badciong said. "It doesn't. The credit allows even more people to take advantage of purchasing a home during the most affordable time in 20 years."

Home-buyer tax credits

Credit available: \$8,000 for first-time homebuyers; \$6,500 for "move-up" buyers.

Time line: A buyer enters a binding contract by April 30 and has until June 30 to settle on the purchase. Members of the Armed Forces and certain federal employees have an extra year.

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Follow your heart

By Susan Smith-Durisek
Contributing Writer

For garden lovers, combining the gift of a perfect, beautiful rose with the promise of a road trip to visit a newfound paradise could be at the heart of a romantic Valentine gift.

Where to go? That depends on your time, resources and garden desires.

Here's a quick look at some beautiful places that would be great destinations for a romantic getaway.

■ Nashville's annual Antiques & Garden Show, Thursday through next Saturday at the Civic Center. Only about a 3½-hour drive from Lexington, this year's 20th anniversary show is themed "The Shape of Things

For avid gardeners, a horticultural getaway can make your love grow

to Come." Scheduled speakers include garden designer Ryan Gainey White House decorator Michael S. Smith and the Duchess of Northumberland, Lady Jane Percy, who has established a spectacular contemporary garden at her estate near England's Alnwick Castle.

There will be more than 150 antiques and horticulture dealers, making it one of the largest shows of its kind in the country. Admission is \$15 a day; lectures are \$40 each, with discounts for advance and run-of-show tickets. For details, go to www.antiquesandgarden-show.com.

■ The Duchess' Alnwick Garden, www.alnwickgarden.com, would be an interesting

place to visit in itself. Starting in 2000, Percy transformed an underdeveloped landscape into specialty garden rooms like the gated Poison Garden, holding caged cannabis and bedded belladonna, and the Grand Cascade of pools and fountains, the largest water feature of its kind in the United Kingdom. The estate's medieval castle was the setting for Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* movies. Alnwick is becoming a popular European garden destination.

■ A tour of gardens in southwest England is being planned by Yew Dell Gardens in Crestwood, just east of Louisville. To be led by director

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YEW DELL GARDENS



L. ALBEE



SUSAN SMITH-DURISEK

Left: If a tour of European castles is out of reach, Yew Dell Gardens in Crestwood has its own castle. **Center:** Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania is a pretty place to take your Valentine. **Right:** Alnwick in Northern England has been transformed into a series of gardens in the past 10 years.

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