

The greatest misconception in real estate?

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We've all heard the advice: don't list your house in winter if you want to get the highest price for it. Average house prices take a big jump in spring, so it seems obvious that winter is a terrible time to sell.

But does the season really make a lot of difference in how much money you'll get for your property? Not according to Nick Goodall, research analyst at CoreLogic. He has found that price isn't affected by the season – the price spikes are caused by changes in the type of listings, not the season itself.

The highest-priced properties are listed in autumn and spring, pulling average prices up and creating the illusion that you'll get more for your house if you sell during those months.

"The idea of a seasonal market is one of the greatest misconceptions in New Zealand real estate," says Hayden Duncan, CEO of Harcourts. "The value you'll achieve is based on supply and demand. Just because there's less supply in winter, doesn't necessarily mean there's less demand."

"Across our business we don't see fluctuations in price because of the season."

The real seasons of housing

Summer

With many of us on holiday over Christmas, this is a time of few listings, though some buyers remain dedicated. This is a great time to sell a beach or holiday house, says Duncan, but most people wait until they're back at work before considering selling or buying.

Despite sunny days and tidy gardens, two reasons often cited for selling during warmer months, properties typically take their longest to sell at this time (41 days). Goodall says this is probably because if they don't sell immediately in December, they are unlikely to find a buyer over Christmas

and may remain on the market until the New Year. That doesn't mean the price will be any lower, though.

Autumn

All those houses which were listed in February start to sell in March, and autumn sees a massive jump in listings, particularly at the top end of the market. This increase in higher-end houses drives up average prices, says Goodall, rather than prices increasing because of the season.

With high numbers of properties on the market in autumn, if your property fails to sell, don't wait until spring to relist it – have another go in winter when buyers have fewer houses to choose from.

Winter

The property market tends to hibernate in winter, at least in part because sellers want to show their house at its best – dry and warm – so they wait for spring before listing. However, this doesn't mean you'll get less money for your house in winter, and with fewer listings on the market it may even have a better chance of being noticed.

"Winter may be a better time to sell, because there's less competition," says Duncan. "Anecdotally, we're hearing a growing view from buyers that they'd rather see a property at its worst."

It's also possible that you'll get better service from your real estate agent if you list in winter; with fewer listings on the books yours could get a little more of the agent's attention.

Spring

The spring uplift in sales is less pronounced than the autumn one, but this is the season when properties sell most quickly, at 35 days. But with less than a week's difference between spring and summer sale times, it's not an enormous difference.

Ultimately, says Duncan, the 'seasonal' market is created and maintained by our own perceptions. In reality, whether you're a buyer or a seller, timing your transaction for a certain time of year is unlikely to result in a better deal. Smart buyers are on the hunt all year round, and a canny vendor knows what his or her property is worth.