



# Home & Garden

## Cultivating memories

### Mt. Vernon garden keeps memory of loved ones alive

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

MT. VERNON — A Mt. Vernon woman keeps a garden that signifies those who have passed on.

Debbie Gray said the oldest plant in her memorial garden is an aloe that she got 14 years ago from Bill Pope, a longtime neighbor who died in 2015.

Pope, Gray said, was engaged to her older cousin when she moved to Grant County over 25 years ago. Gray said she said Pope felt like family from the start.

Gray said she has other plants that remind her of other friends who have passed on.

"I just enjoy them because they are alive," she said. "They are a live being, actually inside of my home — as I am — so I can share my time with them."

Gray said anything that is alive has energy in it. She said the plants keep their energy alive.

Aloe and cactus plants are succulents — plants that are thickened with fleshy and engorged parts that retain water in arid climates or soil conditions.

Gray said that succulents do not take a lot of water and are easy to take care of.

"They don't need any more than a couple of weeks of water," she said. "They have an ability to absorb moisture and hold it."

Gray is proud of the aloe vera plant she got from her friend Bill Pope. The plant has bloomed, and now she wants to share it.

"I want to share this with anybody who might be interested," she said, "because it is really very neat."



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Debbie Gray, a Mt. Vernon resident, admires an aloe plant she grew from a start given to her by a neighbor.



Getty Images

Financial experts say it pays to brush up on tax codes before putting your home on the market.

### Cut taxes when selling a home

By LIZ WESTON, CFP  
NerdWallet

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If your home's value has soared, congratulations. If you decide to sell, beware.

Financial advisor James Guarino says some clients don't realize that home sale profits are potentially taxable until their returns are prepared — and by that time, they may have spent the windfall or invested the money in another house.

"They're not happy campers when they find out that Uncle Sam not only is going to tax this as a capital gain, but they're also going to have some exposure at the state level," says Guarino, a certified public accountant and certified financial planner in Woburn, Massachusetts.

Longtime homeowners who took advantage of previous tax rules, which allowed people to roll the gains from one home into the next, could be in for a particularly nasty surprise. Those old rules could trigger taxes even if you're under the current \$250,000-per-person exemption limits.

Understanding how home sale profits are calculated — and how you can legally reduce your tax bill — could save you money and stress if you're planning to cash in on the current home price boom.

exclusion, home sellers must have owned and lived in the home at least two of the five years prior to the sale. Married couples could shelter up to \$500,000.

Those exclusion limits haven't changed in 25 years, while home values have nearly tripled. The median home sale price when the law passed was \$145,800, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. The median was \$428,700 in the first three months of this year. Median means half of homes sold for less and half for more.

Having a taxable gain on a home sale used to be relatively rare outside of high-end properties and high-cost cities, but that's no longer true, financial advisors say.

#### Why your tax basis matters

Your first step in determining your gain is to identify the amount you realized from the sale. That's the sales price minus any selling costs, such as real estate commissions. Then, figure your tax basis. That's generally the price you paid for the home, plus certain closing costs and improvements. The higher the basis, the lower your potentially taxable profit.

Let's say you realized \$600,000 from your home sale. You originally bought it for \$200,000 and remodeled the kitchen for \$50,000. You'd subtract that \$250,000 from the \$600,000 to get \$350,000 in capital gains.

### Get your lawnmower ready to roll

By AVERY NEWMARK  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

ATLANTA — While you're giving your home some love during spring cleaning, be sure to give your lawnmower the preparations it needs to thrive all summer. According to Consumer Report, now is the perfect time to get your lawnmower primed and prepped.

Here are some helpful hints from their website for getting your lawnmower ready for the warm months ahead:

Just like a car engine, check or change the oil: After a season of sitting in the garage, gas mowers will need to have their engine oil changed. Always check your owner's manual to see if you should change the oil completely or just top it off.

Don't use the mower before then. A mower engine can overheat and fail from insufficient oil just like a car. "Running it for a minute or two is unlikely to cause damage," John Galeotafiore, head of CR's home improvement testing team, said. "It could lead to problems, though, if you use it to cut for more than a few minutes."

Sharpen the blades: Don't make mowing the lawn harder than it needs to be — always check your blades to make sure they aren't dull.

If your blades have gone dull, you can remove them yourself and take them to a hardware store for sharpening. "To remove your mower's blades, wear heavy leather gloves, remove the spark plug wire, and jam in a short 2x4 to keep



Contributed Photo

While you're giving your home some love during spring cleaning, be sure to give your lawnmower the preparations it needs to thrive all summer.

the blade from turning as you loosen the bolts," CR recommends.

For battery mowers, be sure to remove the battery before removing the blades.

Gas up: Before you start up your mower, make sure that it has fresh fuel.

"A mower carrying leftover fuel — gasoline from last season that was never winterized with stabilizer, for instance,

shouldn't be started up right away. Circulating stale fuel could create problems that require you to drain the lines," CR said.

According to the website, users should drain the old gas from the tank before refilling it with new fuel and stabilizer. And if you ran the mower dry last fall, you can add stabilized gas to the tank now.

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#### How tax rules have changed

Until 1997, home sellers didn't have to pay taxes on their profits if they bought another home of equal or greater value within two years. In addition, people 55 and older could use a one-time exclusion to avoid paying taxes on up to \$125,000 of home sale profits.

The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 changed the rules so that instead of rolling profits into another home, homeowners could exclude up to \$250,000 of home sale profits from their income. To qualify for the full



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