## Lender gives tips for first-time home buyers

While today's interest rates and the variety of affordable loan products have created an ideal home buyer's market, consumers may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of a home purchase. According to Joe Anderson of Countrywide Home Loans, the nation's largest independent mortgage lender, the home-buying process can be a rewarding experience, if consumers explore all available options and plan carefully. "Owning a home can provide pride, security and financial stability," said Anderson, executive vice president of Countrywide's

Consumer Markets Division. "A home is not only shelter; it is a financial investment which appreciates in most markets over time, and generally provides significant tax benefits."

According to Anderson, the first and most important step in getting ready to by a home is getting pre-approved before shopping for a home. Pre-approval werifies credit information at the time of the loan popication. It is a commitment to lend, subject to receipt of satisfactory property appraisal and confirmation of the information on which the pre-approval was

granted.

Pre-approval lets buyers know what type of house they can afford, so their house-hunting time is spent efficiently. It also improves their bargaining power with a seller as it shows that they are serious and eager buyers. With programs such as Countrywide's "Instant Approval," buyers can be approved within minutes, climinating the anxiety of not knowing if they can afford a home. 'Anderson also advises prospective buyers to overcome the sometimes-difficult down payment hurdle by setting an

and sticking to it. Buyers should examine their lifestyle for areas where they can cut back and increase their savings," he said. "Secrificing a new car, electronies or a vacation new can pay off in the long run."

While five to ten percent of a home's selling price is generally the minimum down payment required, buyers more plant their lean shopping by exploring the wide range of afforbile down payment alternatives available today. A Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan, for example, requires less than five per-

level.

Prospective buyers can also get ready to buy a home by examining their credit record. Borrowers should have a clean credit record, with no bills past due more than 30 days in the last year. However, many lenders are willing to overlook one or two problems on a credit report as exceptions in a buyer's credit history.

It's a good idea to review one's

history.
It's a good idea to review one's credit report with a mortgage lender before considering purchasing a home, especially if there have been any credit problems in the past.

# Harvest luscious fruit from the work of summers past

By LEE REICH FOR AP SPECIAL FEATURES

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Take a break from winter by
getting comfortable near a sunnathed window. Close your eyes
and think about summer.

In your dreams, drift utside
to the peach tree you planted a
few springs ago and select perfectly rip fruit of the community of the
Mmmmn. You le juice dripping
down your chin deen't run onto
you shirt.

The properties of the course, so the pice dripping
the summing sensitive to the
course, so the pice dripping
town your chin deen't run onto
you shirt.

The properties of the course of the
challenge. Some fruits are difficialle og grow to perfection. Take
that peach, for example. You'd
better be prepared to battle borers that graw, into the trunk,
fruit moths that bore into the
ahiots and fruits, and a fruit
fifingus that lives up to its name,
hrown rot. If winter cold deen not
damage the tree, spring frosts
might kill the early blossoms.

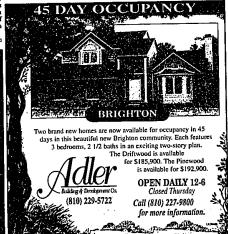
On the other hand, if you enjoy visiting your fruit trees every few days, snipping here and there occasionally with your pruning shears, you can plant more closely.

Having decided where and what to plant, you undoubtedly would like to know: how much to plant and how long to wait until harvest? Plan on 4 to 8 bushels of fruit from any full-size tree, a couple of bushels from a dwarf tree and a couple of quarts from any berry bush.

any berry bush. You should get your first taste

berry plant in the ground. Dwarf trees – their fruit is full size—generally bear fruit in about four years; their full-size counterparts take about eight. You coan enjoy fresh fruit from your garden year-round. The first strawberry of spring (an early-ripening strawberry like Sunrise)









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