



# Rod Johnston's Real Estate Reader



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With the emergence of online review sites and hospital guides, finding the right doctor has never been easier. Learn how to find the right one for you.

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If your car has been affected by the recent recalls, you won't want to miss this simple guide to getting your car repaired.

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Growing your own food can save you money and improve your health. Follow these tips to grow your own private fruit and vegetable supply.

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## Inexpensive Home Improvements That Make a Big Difference

When you are selling your home in a competitive market, maximizing your home improvement dollars is important. Here are

three simple improvements that can make a big difference in the final sale price of your home.

### A Fresh Coat of Paint

A fresh coat of paint can make any home look years younger than it actually is. Avoid bold colors and opt for light, neutral colors, which will make your home appear roomier and brighter.

### New Flooring

Once you have finished painting, turn your attention to your flooring. Depending on your budget, you may opt for new carpets, wood floors, or some kind of laminate. Or, if you have relatively new floors, you can simply clean them or have them refurbished. With new floors and a fresh coat of paint, your entire home will have a fresh, new-home feel to it.

### That "New Home" Smell

It may seem like a small thing, but the smell of your home will be one of the first things potential buyers recognize. If you have pets or do a lot of cooking, there is a good chance that you have years of built-up odors trapped in your home, even if you don't notice them. You can have your home professionally cleaned and deodorized. Then, finish up with some plug-in air fresheners in each room. Now, your home will look, feel, and smell like new, and the final sale price will reflect those improvements.



## St. Patrick's Day Resources

Saint Patrick's Day is days away. Here, you'll find all the information and resources you need to make this year's holiday the best ever.

### Places to go, things to do

St. Patrick's Day is known for its parades and public events, so chances are there is a parade in your area. To find planned festivities in your area, visit this site:

<http://www.st-patricks-day.com/>

If you're looking for a more intimate celebration, you can search Yelp for Irish pubs and restaurants. Simply enter "Irish" in the search bar. You can read reviews to select the best place for you, and even view a menu before you arrive.

[www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)

### Eating like the Irish

No holiday is complete without a holiday feast. St. Patrick's Day is a great time to sample Irish cuisine. Irish cuisine features hearty meats and vegetables and simple, straightforward preparation. There are quite a few sites dedicated to Irish recipes, but this one is our favorite, because of the rankings, reviews, and photos of each dish. When you arrive at the site, type "Irish" in the search bar to get started.

<http://allrecipes.com>

### Get Your Green On

There's still time to assemble the perfect green wardrobe for your holiday. You can search fun, Irish-themed t-shirts and accessories here:

[www.zazzle.com/irish+tshirts](http://www.zazzle.com/irish+tshirts)

# What To Do With Your Toyota



If you are among the millions of Americans affected by the recent Toyota recalls, you may be wondering what to do with your car. Here is a non-sense guide to navigating the Toyota recalls.

## Is my vehicle affected?

So far, about 10 models have been affected, including all of Toyota's most popular vehicles (Camry, Corolla, Prius, Tacoma). The problems mostly affect recent vehicles (2009-2010). However, Priuses sold as early as 2004 have also been recalled. Two models (Avalon, Tacoma) have problems dating back to 2005, and two others (Camry, Tundra) have problems dating back to 2007. For a complete list of all affected vehicles, visit: [www.toyota.com/recall](http://www.toyota.com/recall).

## What should I do if my vehicle is affected?

Most problems can be broken down into two categories (though many cars are affected by both problems): floor mats that are engineered in a way that the pedals can become stuck while driving and accelerator pedals that can accelerate spontaneously. The first problem can be solved without a trip to the dealer. Simply remove the floor mats from your car and replace them with non-Toyota brand floor mats. Toyota will replace your floor mats free of charge eventually, but due to the volume of recalls, Toyota is staggering repairs over the next several weeks and months. For obvious reasons, the spontaneously accelerating pedal is more dangerous and requires more urgent attention. The problem occurs due to a special friction device that is intended to allow the gas pedal to accelerate and decelerate smoothly. After normal wear and tear, the device can start to stick, making the gas pedal increasingly less responsive, eventually to the point of continuing to accelerate, even after the foot is taken off the pedal. If your vehicle is affected by this problem, you will likely notice warning signs before your vehicle begins to accelerate spontaneously. For instance, you will notice the gas pedal is responding more slowly, and potentially more sporadically. If this happens, you should stop driving your vehicle immediately and contact Toyota. To speak with someone at Toyota, call 1-800-331-4331.

## So, when will Toyota fix my vehicle?

Toyota has been mailing recall information to affected owners since February 1st, and will continue to do so until all owners have been contacted. If you have changed your address recently, make sure you have mail from your previous address set up to forward to your current address. You can [manage your mailing information here](#).

## Hot New Product



## The Most Embarrassing Scale in the World

Imagine if you could turn your morning weigh-in into a public event. Do you think you would be more motivated to lose weight? WiThings is betting that you would, in spite of the awkward social consequences. Its new product--an electronic scale with a WiFi connection--uses the power of social pressure to help you lose weight. As soon as you step on the scale, it sends an update to your Twitter account, allowing all of your followers to see your weight, body fat percentage, and body mass index.



# Grow Your Own Food

Many Americans are growing their own food as a way to cut costs while eating fresher, healthier food. Growing fruits, vegetables, and spices is easier than you think, especially with all of the wonderful resources and tools available today. Follow these guidelines to turn your backyard into your very own private produce section.

## The benefits of growing your own food

There are several good reasons to grow your own food. Many contend that it saves money, though that is usually not true until several months into the process, since your upfront investment will offset any initial savings. Most people are motivated more by the health benefits than the cost savings. Fruits and vegetables are healthiest when they are fresh, and nothing is fresher than the food you grow in your own garden. In addition, the convenience of being able to walk into your garden and pick out fresh fruit and vegetables just seconds before you eat them is hard to resist.

## Resources to help you get started



Before you get started, watch this [video on YouTube](#). The video will give you a good idea of what to expect and what steps you will need to take. If you would like to learn from an experienced farmer, visit [Growfood.org](http://Growfood.org). This site can connect you with a farmer in your area who will teach you free of charge, on your own schedule. Once you are ready to start your garden, you will need to [buy some seeds](#). If you are worried that you may not have enough space to grow a garden, check out this [list of vegetables that can be grown in a pot](#).

## Continuing education

Once your garden begins growing, you will begin to have questions about specific issues.

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What is the best organic pesticide? What is the best time of year to plant an orange tree? What company makes the best gardening gloves? You can find answers to these questions at [backyardgardener.com](http://backyardgardener.com), a site dedicated to the continuing education of amateur gardeners. For more involved discussions with other gardeners, visit [helpfulgardener.com](http://helpfulgardener.com), an online message board for gardeners.

## Tech Tip: Streaming Netflix Movies & TV



If you are a Netflix user who hasn't yet taken advantage of Netflix's "Watch Instantly" feature, there's never been a better time to check it out. This free feature allows you to watch movies on your computer, streamed from the Netflix website. Netflix is adding more titles every month, including television series on premium cable channels (HBO and Showtime). Perhaps the most interesting part about this feature is where it's headed. Recent rumblings from Netflix suggest that streaming movies and television shows may soon be available on your iPhone. Stay tuned.

## Finding the Right Doctor for You



Today, you can find reliable online reviews of restaurants, movies, cars, and electronics. But try to find out who the best dermatologist is in your area, and you will quickly notice how little usable information is available to health care consumers. For the most part,

Americans rely on the recommendations of friends and family when choosing a doctor. Unfortunately, unless you have the exact same health needs as your friends and family, relying on their recommendations may lead you astray. Follow these simple guidelines to find the right doctor for you.

### Ask the right questions

Friends and family members' recommendations can be helpful, if you ask the right questions and listen carefully to the answers. Restrict your questions to subjects that are relevant to your health needs and priorities. If possible, find people who have visited the doctor in question for the same reasons you are seeking a doctor. If that's not possible, ask questions that are likely to touch on universal patient priorities. For instance, questions like, "how long did it take you to get an appointment, how clean were the facilities, and did the doctor take the time to answer all of your questions to your satisfaction?" are likely to be revealing, regardless of your reason for visiting. Most importantly, don't make your decision based on a single personal account. One man's "caring" is another man's "intrusive."

### Get Familiar with Doctor Review Websites

In the absence of a reliable national database of doctors, consumers have developed several websites dedicated to rat-

ing and reviewing doctors. Here is a list of the five most common doctor review sites:

[www.ratemds.com](http://www.ratemds.com)

[www.vitals.com](http://www.vitals.com)

[www.healthgrades.com](http://www.healthgrades.com)

[www.drscore.com](http://www.drscore.com)

Spend some time on each site and familiarize yourself with the interface. It's a good idea to bookmark two or three, or even all five, because you will find that some doctors are reviewed on one site but not on another. You will also find that each site focuses on slightly different types of information. Some talk a great deal about specific experiences, while others restrict users to simple letter grades or star ratings.

### Get to Know Your Local Hospitals

While doctor reviews have been left to consumer websites, well-researched hospital ratings are much easier to find. There are a couple reasons for this. First, it's easier to rate a hospital using empirical data than it is to rate a doctor. A new MRI machine is better than an old one. A larger pediatric wing is better than a small one. Making similar judgments about doctors is hard. Is a doctor who spends time with her patients better than one who doesn't, if it means patients have to wait longer to see her? It's more a matter of preference. Furthermore, hospital ratings are just as important to doctors and insurance companies as these ratings are to patients. Doctors need to know where to send patients for specific procedures and tests, and insurance companies need to know which hospitals offer quality care at a good price, so the companies know which ones to include in their coverage plans. In fact, if you want to know where the best hospitals are, just ask your doctor or insurance provider. There's a good chance you'll be pointed in the right direction. Or save yourself a phone call and visit this site:

<http://health.usnews.com/health/best-hospitals>