

How much value does a garden add to your house post-coronavirus?

A quarter of British buyers are seeking outside space after the pandemic, a YouGov poll for Home has found.



Before the pandemic, estate agents would often ask whether a house passed the “pint of milk” test. These days, it’s the “blade of grass” test you should be worried about flunking, as a short walk to the local shop has been usurped on buyers’ wish lists by proximity to green space.

Gardens have always been a boon, of course — who wouldn’t want to be able to complain about their begonias? — but after months spent cooped up indoors, agents are saying they can make or break a property deal.

“The message from our buyers is clear: having any sort of outside space is extremely desirable at the moment,” says Daniel Woods, head of estate agency Savills’ Hackney branch in east London. “Whether it’s a balcony, courtyard or large garden, outside space is absolutely top of the list of priorities and normally one of the first things our buyers ask us about.

“We are even seeing how buyers are willing to sacrifice internal space for something where they can enjoy a pre-work coffee or a weekend BBQ outside. And in some rare cases buyers have gone for a one-bed home rather than a two-bed, simply because of outside space.”

Londoners do seem to be more eager to escape the concrete jungle than buyers in other parts of the UK, coming out on top of an exclusive YouGov poll for Home that asked whether having a garden was more or less important to them after the pandemic. Nearly half of Londoners (48 per cent) say it’s more important, followed by a third of those in the east of England (33 per cent).

Scottish buyers are the least preoccupied with securing a home with a garden post-coronavirus, possibly because of greater access to green space and typically poorer weather, but a quarter of buyers there (24 per cent) still say gardens are more important to them now than they were.

Evidence can also be found in sales figures, where it’s clear that homes with greenery attached are selling faster and for higher prices than they were before the coronavirus outbreak. On average, a home with a garden in Great Britain that sold in July had been on the market for 50 days, whereas a home without one sat on the market for 121 days.

Compare this with sales figures from July 2019, and homes with a garden are selling 53 days faster than this time last year.

The stats, compiled by Hamptons International estate agency, could be skewed by the fact that all completions are taking longer at the moment because of a backlog in valuations and mortgage financing that built up while the housing market was suspended, and a higher proportion of sales in July (61 per cent) were homes without gardens that had come on to the market before the start of lockdown.

“This basically means that lots of the homes with gardens have sold quite quickly, whereas a lot of the homes without gardens came on to the market before lockdown and have therefore been on the market for some time,” says Alison Bleasdale, head of research at Hamptons International.

As homes with gardens are being snapped up, there are fewer of them to meet this rising demand and homes with gardens are commanding significantly higher prices.

Family homes with south-facing gardens sell for £22,695 more on average than homes without, a 7 per cent national price premium, according to a Rightmove study released this week. There were double the number of searches for homes with gardens on the property portal in June compared with last year, and Yorkshire and the Humber has the highest premium nationally (14 per cent).

“You’d be amazed at how many people turn up to a viewing and use the compass on their phone to work out where the sun is coming from, it’s a really important requirement in these parts,” says David Phillip, partner of David Phillip Estate Agents in Yorkshire. “These types of properties are selling quickly, especially since the market reopened in May. Lots of homes in Yorkshire are in rural areas, and so the trade-off from not living in an urbanised area is that you want a lovely outdoor space, and what’s more lovely than a garden that gets lots of sunshine? South-facing gardens have almost become a necessity.”

Even those who already have gardens are looking for bigger ones. Not wanting to quarantine on her own in a flat in Brixton, Gemma Shah, 35, decamped to her sister and brother-in-law’s house in Kingston upon Thames.

After weeks spent wandering around the acres of Bushy Park, she returned to south London and found her garden wanting. “I never thought I’d be this desperate to live in Surbiton,” she says laughing.

Her garden no longer measures up, but when the local estate agent saw it, he audibly breathed a sigh of relief. “He told me the garden is king,” she says. After he told her to clean her garden furniture, he said that he was selling a flat in west Norwood with a substantial garden that was under offer for £525,000, but the buyer pulled out because of Covid-19. It has emerged from lockdown more valuable and it’s now under offer with another buyer for £540,000.

It’s not just about having a luscious lawn — the most desirable gardens appear to be extensions of the house itself. “Gardens are like another room of the house so you’ve got to make it look its best,” says Robin Chatwin, director at Savills, southwest London. “Spend money on your garden as early as you can so when you come to sell it, it doesn’t look like an Astro Turfed games pitch.”

Anecdotal, agents report that alfresco dining features are popular, such as pizza ovens, barbecue areas and undercover, heated patios. Vegetable patches have become fertile ground for buyers and sellers to bond over on viewings. Trouble travelling abroad and going to the gym has also sent swimming pools and tennis courts to the top of buyers’ demands in the countryside, and a home office in the garden is the dynamite combo du jour.

In the city, where space is scarcer, any outside space has become more desirable. One in seven (14 per cent) of buyers say having a balcony or terrace is more important to them than it was before lockdown, and, according to those polled by YouGov, this increases to one in four (24 per cent) 18 to 24-year-olds, who are more likely to live in flats in urban areas than those in other age groups.

Even being near green space — such as parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) — is prized highly nowadays, and can significantly increase the price of your property. One in four British buyers (26 per cent) say that living near parks or nature is more important to them now. Access to greenery has meant the most to young, city-dwelling families in particular; 25 to 34-year-olds in London with children aged four and under were the top category for those who said they valued these spaces more after lockdown.

Chichester Harbour is the most expensive AONB to live by, Savills Research reports, with homes there commanding the greatest average premium of 132 per cent; and the Peak District is the most expensive national park to buy near, with a premium of 95 per cent. The least expensive to live by are Tamar Valley AONB in Cornwall and Snowdonia National Park in northwest Wales, with average premiums of 7 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

The most rarefied public green spaces are perhaps London’s gated residential squares. “Broadly speaking, today a property that has a communal garden versus one that doesn’t can potentially add a premium of up to 20 per cent for the right purchaser,” says Miles Meacock, head of Strutt and Parker’s Notting Hill office.

These properties are “typically” sold off-market because of privacy concerns and because buyers fear their property will be seen publicly languishing in an uncertain post-lockdown market. This has worked out well for Sophie Rogerson at the buying agency RFR Property, who is advising three buyers who only want to buy on a communal garden with budgets between £8 million and £15 million. “[These properties] have always carried a cachet, but now there is a manhunt on for the best in class.”

Demand for outside space has shot up the most among the buyers who can least afford it. Younger first-time buyers, who once may have compromised to get on to the property ladder, now see the value of such a space, with 41 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds and 38 per cent of first-time buyers saying a garden was more important to them now. Surprisingly, 44 per cent of full-time students now say gardens are a primary concern for them.

Maybe the Great Garden Grab of 2020 will be a short-lived craze, prompted by an unusual summer by anyone’s standards. But for many, those frustrating months locked away in a tiny flat may have made a lasting impression.

THE FACTS & FIGURES

- **32%** of buyers say the pandemic has made having a garden more important (Source: YouGov)
- **77%** is the national price premium for family homes with south-facing gardens (Source: Rightmove)
- **50** the average number of days a home with a garden was on sale for if it sold in July (Source: Hamptons International)
- **26%** of buyers are seeking more green space as a result of the pandemic (Source: YouGov)

John Lewis branches out

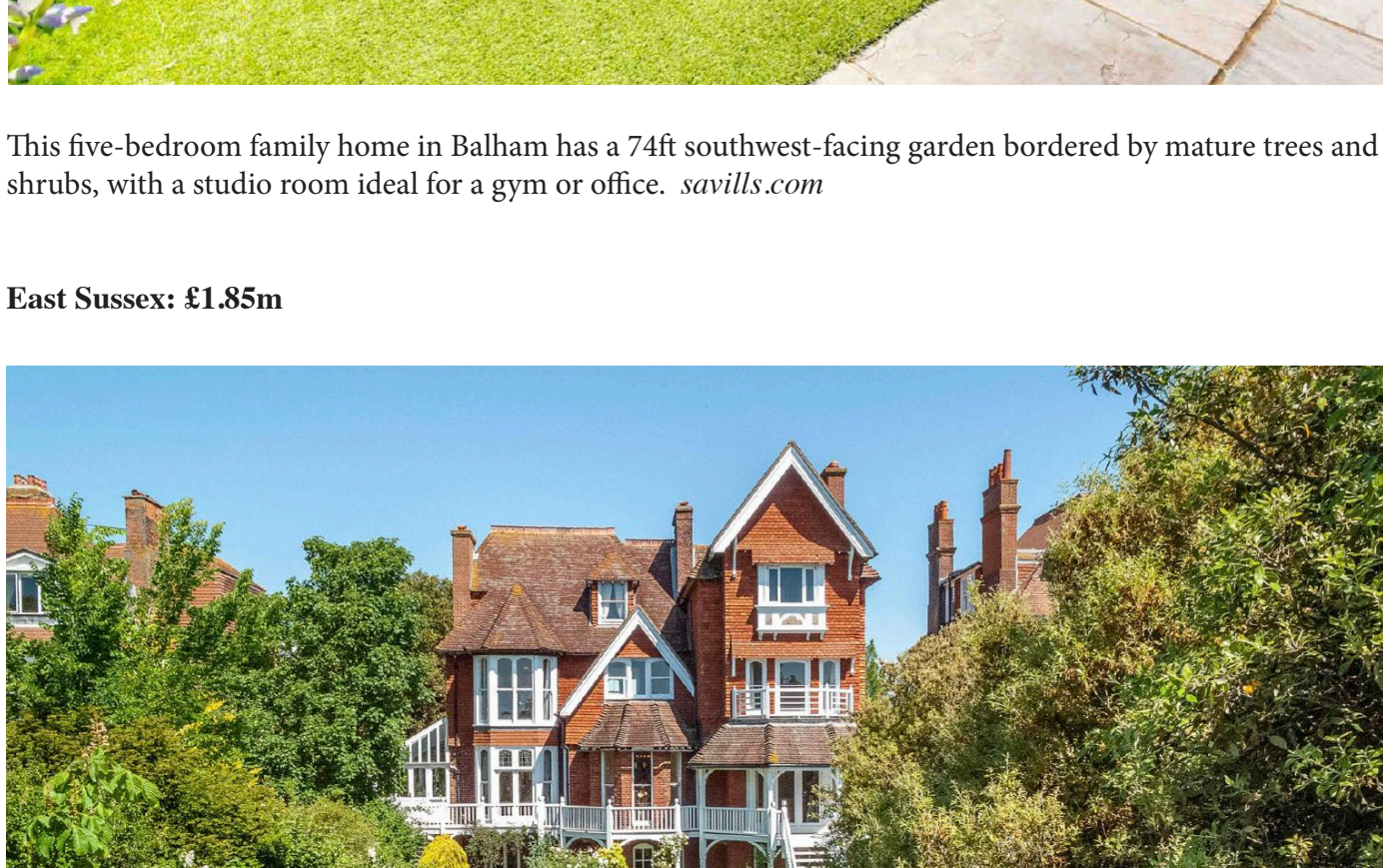
The John Lewis Partnership is venturing into gardening, its chairwoman announced last week. The retailer plans to build a new horticulture business out of its existing ventures such as Waitrose Garden, its 2,800-acre Leckford Estate in Hampshire, the Waitrose Farm and John Lewis Outdoor Living, and it will even offer landscaping.

Expanding to offer a gardening service “was the number one idea from Partners and is highly relevant to our target customers,” wrote Dame Sharon White, the company’s chairwoman, and it could partner with or acquire other businesses to make it happen.

More than 12,000 staff submitted over 650 ideas to boost profits, and gardening was one of four chosen for development in the company’s strategic review. The company said it could also sell “used” products in future or rent them out.

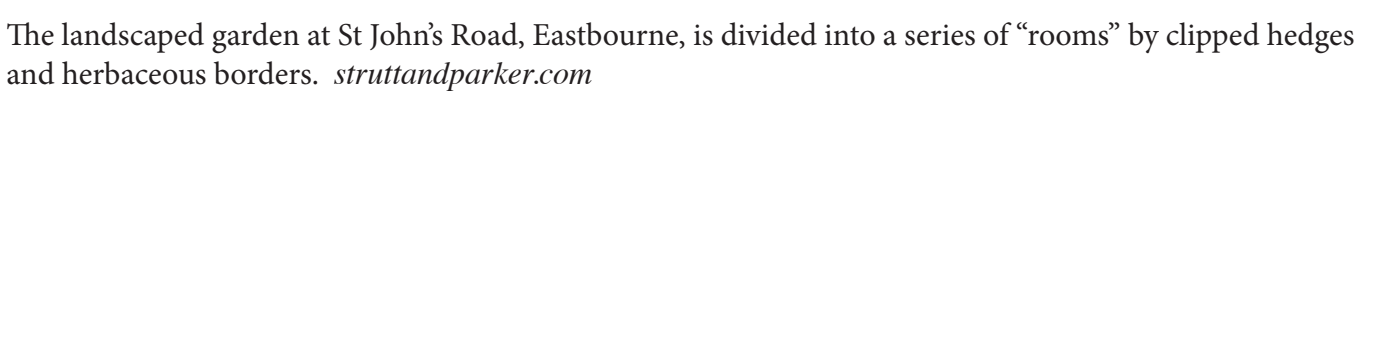
• Homes with desirable gardens to lust after

Surrey : £1.75m



The south-facing gardens of a four-bedroom wing at Furnace Place near Haslemere are bordered by woodland. There’s a formal lawn, flowerbeds and a planted terrace. [savills.com](#)

Gloucestershire: £6.5m



Set in 10 acres, Tormarton Court near Badminton has practically every garden you can think of: rose, kitchen, herb, walled and even a secret one. [struttandparker.com](#)

London SW12: £2.8m

This five-bedroom family home in Balham has a 74ft southwest-facing garden bordered by mature trees and shrubs, with a studio room ideal for a gym or office. [savills.com](#)

East Sussex: £1.85m

The landscaped garden at St John’s Road, Eastbourne, is divided into a series of “rooms” by clipped hedges and herbaceous borders. [struttandparker.com](#)