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Serving the Greater Houston Area

Renting Out Your Home: A Landlord's Step-by-Step Guide

From pricing and listing to signing and move-in — every step covered

Renting out a home looks simple, but every step has its details: get the home rent-ready, price it to the market, screen tenants by one consistent standard, and put everyone's rights and duties into a proper lease. Do the groundwork well, and the rest takes care of itself.

Stage 1: Getting the Home Rent-Ready

Meet the standard before you list

1. Bring the Home Up to Rental Standard

Make sure smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors are installed and working, door and window locks are sound, and water, electricity, and A/C all run properly. These are a safety baseline and the basics a tenant is entitled to — check each one before listing.

2. Deep Clean and Take Care of Minor Repairs

Give the whole home a deep clean, and fix small issues — leaks, faulty appliances, worn paint — before photos and showings. A home in good shape supports the rent you are asking and makes visitors take it seriously.

3. Switch to a Landlord Policy

Replace your homeowner's insurance with a Landlord Policy — the two cover different things, and a homeowner's policy usually does not pay for losses that occur while the home is rented out. If the home sits in a flood zone, consider adding flood insurance as well.

Stage 2: Pricing & Listing

Price it to the market

4. Set the Rent from Comps — and Work Out the True Return First

Set the rent using Rental Comps — comparable rentals nearby — not a guess. Run the numbers: monthly rent minus the mortgage payment, property taxes, insurance, HOA dues, and a maintenance reserve is your true return. The usual Security Deposit is one month's rent, and the pet policy should be decided in advance and stated in the listing.

5. Photograph and List — After Checking Rental Restrictions

Have professional photos taken, then list on the MLS and the major rental platforms. First check whether the HOA restricts rentals — minimum lease terms, caps on the share of homes that may be rented, or prior approval — and complete any rental registration your city or county requires.

6. Set the Criteria First — and Apply Them to Everyone Equally

Your screening criteria should be set before the first application arrives, put in writing, and applied consistently to every applicant. That is the core requirement of Fair Housing law — and the most effective way to avoid discrimination disputes.

7. Standard Thresholds and the Screening Process

Common thresholds include monthly income of about 3 times the rent, a checkable credit history, no eviction record, and no major negative rental history. Run the full process — application plus background check — through a professional Tenant Screening service, keep the written criteria on file, and keep records of each review. It protects you as the landlord and holds up if a decision is ever questioned.

Stage 4: Signing the Lease & Move-In

In writing, in black and white

8. Use a Standard Lease

Use the Texas REALTORS® Lease and fill in every term completely — rent, lease term, Security Deposit, pets, and who is responsible for which repairs. Both parties sign and keep a copy. A verbal promise does not count; what is written into the lease does.

9. Handle the Security Deposit Under Texas Law

Collecting, holding, and refunding the Security Deposit follows the Texas Property Code: within 30 days after the tenant moves out, the landlord must refund the deposit or provide a written itemization of deductions. Refunding late, or deducting without an itemization, can expose the landlord to additional liability.

10. Walk the Home Together on Move-In Day and Document It

On move-in day, complete the Inventory & Condition Form together with the tenant, noting the condition of doors, windows, walls, floors, and appliances item by item, with photos, signed by both sides. Hand over keys, garage remotes, and access devices against a signature, and have the tenant transfer water, electricity, and gas into their own name to avoid billing disputes later.

The condition form plus photos is your most useful document at move-out: how the home looked at move-in versus move-out, side by side. Deposit deductions rest on evidence, and disputes stay rare.

11. Review the Rent Every Year

Review the rent against nearby comps once a year. Keeping increases in line with the market helps good tenants stay; pricing too high stretches the vacancy period, which costs more than the increase would have gained.

12. Start Renewal Talks Early

Open the renewal conversation at two points — 60 days and 30 days before the lease ends — and confirm early whether the tenant is staying. If they renew, sign the extension promptly; if they are leaving, relist promptly. Either way, the vacancy gap stays as short as possible.

13. Triage Maintenance Requests

Sort repairs by urgency: leaks, power outages, and A/C failures in hot weather are emergencies and should be handled as quickly as possible; minor issues can follow a reasonable agreed timeline. Keep a short list of reliable repair contacts on hand, so a middle-of-the-night problem does not mean searching for help from scratch.

14. No Time to Manage It? Property Management Is an Option

If you do not have the time, or you live out of the area, a professional property management service can handle rent collection, maintenance coordination, and Tenant Screening. The day-to-day goes to a specialist, and you keep the reports and the major decisions — a much easier way to hold a rental.

Questions about renting out a home, property management, buying, selling, or a mortgage? Free consultation:
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This guide is for general information only; specifics are governed by the lease and Texas law.

Feel free to share this guide with friends who may find it helpful.