



# The Westchester Landlord Starter Guide

*Everything You Need to Know to Successfully Rent Your First Property in Westchester, NY*

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## Who This Guide Is For:

If you've recently inherited a property, purchased your first investment, or are transitioning from homeowner to landlord in Westchester County, this guide is designed just for you. Managing your first rental can feel overwhelming, but with the right preparation and knowledge, you can confidently navigate the process.

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## 1. Preparing Your Unit for Rent

Before listing your property, make sure it's clean, safe, and market-ready. Here's a checklist to guide you:

### **Basic Preparation Checklist:**

- Deep clean the entire unit
- Patch and paint any damaged walls
- Service HVAC, plumbing, and appliances
- Replace any broken light fixtures or switches
- Ensure all smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working
- Check that all doors and windows lock securely
- Consider adding curb appeal (landscaping, exterior lights, etc.)

**Pro Tip:** Homes that show well rent faster and for more money. Investing in small upgrades like modern hardware or new light fixtures can make a big difference.

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## 2. Understanding Basic New York Rental Laws

As a landlord in New York, you are required to follow a set of rules designed to protect both you and your tenants.

### Key NY Rental Laws to Know:

- **Security Deposit Limit:** Maximum of one month's rent
- **Return of Security Deposit:** Within 14 days after lease termination with an itemized list of deductions (if any)
- **Entry Notice:** Landlords must give reasonable notice before entering (typically 24 hours)
- **Rent Increases:** For market-rate units, increases must be reasonable; for rent-stabilized units, DHCR guidelines apply
- **Fair Housing:** You cannot discriminate based on race, gender, religion, national origin, disability, or family status

**Pro Tip:** Keep updated with NYS and Westchester County regulations to avoid costly legal missteps. Check out this website for more information: [Westchester Code Enforcement](#)

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## 3. Lease Templates and Move-In Checklist

Having a strong lease sets the tone for your landlord-tenant relationship.

### What to Include in Your Lease:

- Names of all tenants
- Term of the lease and rent due date
- Late fee structure
- Security deposit amount
- Maintenance responsibilities
- Rules on subletting, pets, and smoking

### Move-In Checklist:

Conduct a detailed walk-through with your tenant  
Take date-stamped photos of all rooms  
Confirm keys, access codes, and mailbox info  
Get all signatures on the lease and checklist

**Free Resources:**

- [NYS Attorney General's Sample Lease](#)
- [HUD Fair Housing Guidelines](#)

**Pro Tip:** A clear, written lease prevents misunderstandings and protects you in court if disputes arise.

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## 4. Tenant Screening Tips

Choosing the right tenant is the most important decision you'll make.

**What to Screen For:**

- **Credit History** – Look for on-time payments and low debt
- **Income Verification** – At least 2.5–3x the monthly rent
- **Rental History** – Speak to past landlords about payment habits
- **Background Check** – Screen for evictions or criminal history

**Questions You Can Ask:**

- What is your credit score?
- When would you like to move in?
- Do you work part time or full time?
- Do you have pets?

**Avoid Asking About:**

Race, religion, age, disability, or any protected class status (this violates fair housing laws)

**Pro Tip:** Use a third-party screening service to ensure you're complying with state and federal laws.

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## 5. Maximize Rental Income: 10 Upgrades That Pay Off

As a landlord, maximizing your ROI is essential. Here are smart, cost-effective ways to boost your rental property's appeal and value:

### Top Interior Upgrades:

- Fresh paint in neutral tones
- Modern light fixtures and ceiling fans
- Durable, attractive flooring (like vinyl plank)
- Updated kitchen hardware and faucets
- Energy-efficient appliances

### Curb Appeal Tips:

- Trim hedges and maintain the lawn
- Install outdoor lighting
- Power wash exterior surfaces
- Add a welcoming doormat or entryway decor

### Tenant Retention Strategies:

- Respond to maintenance requests promptly
- Offer lease renewal incentives (e.g., carpet cleaning, minor upgrades)
- Conduct annual property check-ins to show care and build trust

### Pricing Strategies for Westchester Neighborhoods:

- Compare similar rental listings nearby
- Highlight proximity to schools, trains, and downtown areas
- Adjust pricing seasonally to align with market demand

**Pro Tip:** Small, strategic improvements not only help you attract quality tenants but also reduce vacancy periods and long-term maintenance issues.

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## 6. Why Hire a Property Management Company?

Many first-time landlords underestimate the time and effort required to manage a rental property effectively. Hiring a property management company can save you time, reduce stress, and even improve profitability.

## Key Benefits:

- **Tenant Placement:** Professional marketing and rigorous screening processes reduce the risk of bad tenants.
- **Legal Compliance:** Ensure your lease, notices, and practices follow NYS and Westchester regulations.
- **Maintenance Coordination:** Handle repairs promptly with trusted vendors, often at lower negotiated rates.
- **Rent Collection & Accounting:** Automated systems and detailed reporting keep your finances in order.
- **24/7 Emergency Support:** Tenants can reach someone anytime—so you don't have to.

**Pro Tip:** For landlords juggling jobs, families, or multiple units, a property manager provides peace of mind and allows you to enjoy the benefits of ownership without the daily hassle.

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Becoming a landlord in Westchester can be a rewarding investment when approached with the right tools and knowledge. Keep learning, stay organized, and don't hesitate to partner with a professional property manager if it feels overwhelming.

## Need help managing your property?

Invictus Management offers full-service and a la carte support for landlords in Westchester County. Schedule a free consultation on our [website](#).