

How Long Is Too Long for an Empty Rental

In Colorado it depends on the month and on your kind of renter. Three weeks in July and three weeks in December are different signals.

By John Runkles, co-founder, Urban Forest Property Management · Updated October 6, 2026



There's no fixed number of weeks that means trouble. A reasonable vacancy depends on the month and on the kind of renter your property draws. Nationally, Apartment List estimates that renters searching in summer face 20% to 30% more competition than renters searching in winter. Three weeks empty in July can be a problem. The same three weeks in December usually aren't.

Demand swings through the year

Apartment List puts summer competition 20% to 30% above winter's. Rents follow the same curve: they peak in June and July, and the national median falls about 1.6% from that peak to its November low. At the current national median of about \$1,390 a month, that's roughly \$20 to \$25.

In summer, more people are looking and landlords have more leverage. In winter, fewer people are looking at all.

Check this. Before deciding your price is wrong, note which month you're in and where it falls on Apartment List's seasonal curve.

Colorado follows the pattern, with one caveat

Local property managers describe Colorado's peak rental season as May through August. Neither local source puts a number on how much more competitive the peak is. Monthly rent data exists for the Denver metro and Fort Collins, from Apartment List and Zillow among others, but no one publishes a local version of the 20% to 30% figure. So the national percentage is the best number we can get here.

Check this. Use May through August as Colorado's peak, and treat the national 20% to 30% as a rough measure of how much busier it is, not a local fact.

Different renters, different calendars

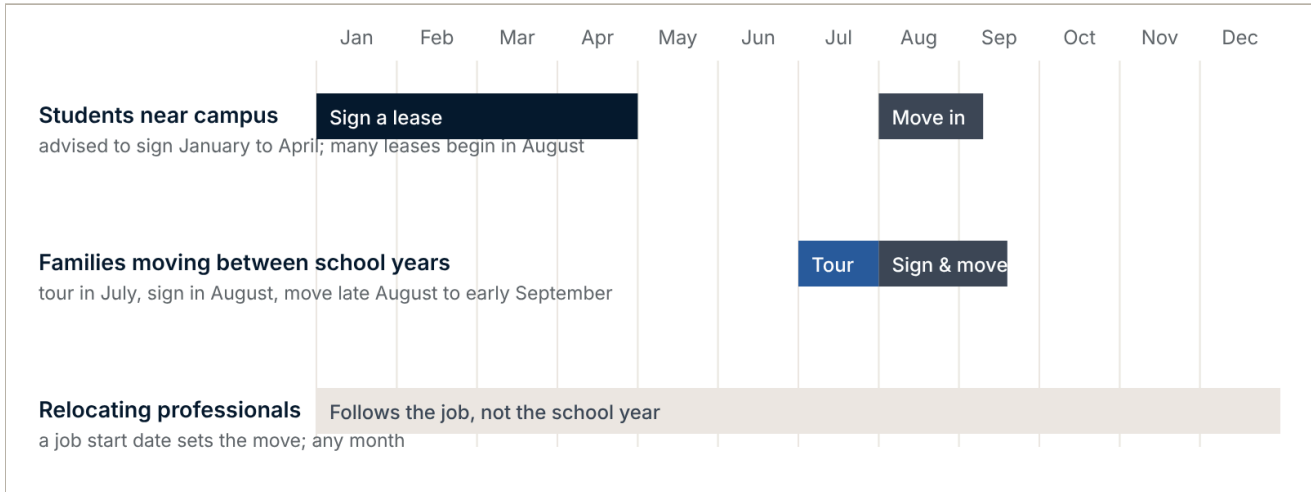
This is where many timing mistakes happen. We saw it in Fort Collins. A landlord bought an older five-bedroom house in January and listed it for rent in February. It sat, even after a price reduction, until May, and then leased quickly.

The house wasn't the problem, and in the end neither was the price. The calendar was. An older five-bedroom in that part of town rents like a student house, and in February very few people in that group are looking. By May, many more are: most students sign months ahead for August, but a fair number still look for a May start. A newer house near the interstate, the kind a professional relocating for a job might rent in February, would have had a very different winter.

The two main calendars:

- **Families** moving between school years feed the May-through-August peak. The moving site moveBuddha, using move dates entered in its online cost calculator, reports that 41% of U.S. moves fall in that window. June is the busiest month, June 1 and June 30 the busiest days, with September 1 and September 30 close behind. As one lender's analysis puts it, a family that has to be settled before Labor Day starts touring in July and signs in August, weeks ahead rather than months.

- **Colorado State University students** in Fort Collins run nearly the opposite rhythm around the same deadline. The university advises students to sign leases between January and April, and many leases begin in August. In our experience, a smaller group also looks for May starts.



Same deadline, opposite rhythms. Sources: Fort Collins Real Estate (student leasing calendar); American Heritage Lending (family touring and signing); moveBuddha (moving dates).



So a student-style rental still unleased in June has probably missed most of its season, while a family house unleased in June is right on schedule. Apartment List advises renters moving for school to start searching 90 or more days ahead, because competition spikes around campus areas. That fits the student calendar above.

Check this. Decide which calendar your property follows, student, family or relocating professional, and judge its vacancy against that one. The student calendar is laid out by Fort Collins Real Estate; the family calendar by moveBuddha.

This year is different

Apartment vacancy in the Denver metro reached 7.6% at the end of 2025, its highest in 16 years. It has eased since, but in the second quarter of 2026 apartment rents were still about 5.5% below a year earlier, according to CBRE, so apartment owners had less of their usual summer leverage. Single-family houses held up better: in June, the Denver Metro Association of Realtors reported single-family rents about 3% below a year earlier, against about 9% for apartments.

Check this. If you own an apartment in the Denver metro, expect less seasonal leverage than usual before concluding that your price is the problem. CBRE's quarterly figures show where rents stand.

Build your own baseline

1. Track your own time to lease by month, if you have a few years of history. It beats any regional average.
2. If you don't, check how long active listings like yours, same city and property type, have been on the market this month on Zillow or Apartments.com.
3. If your property follows its own calendar, as rentals in a university market do, measure against that calendar.

Whether a vacancy has gone on too long comes down to two things: the month, and the kind of renter your property draws. Get both right before you lower the rent. It can save an unnecessary cut, and it can reveal a real problem the calendar was hiding.

This article is part of a short series on why a rental sits vacant longer than expected. The hub, Why Your Rental Is Vacant, covers all four checks. Read next: Which Vacancy Rate Is Yours and Your Listing Is the Showing.

Wondering what your rental could rent for? We'll send you a rental analysis for your property. Call or text 720-964-1151.

This article is general information for rental owners in Colorado, not legal, tax or investment advice. Market figures are as of the dates cited in the sources; confirm current conditions for a specific property before acting.

Photographs created with Grok.

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