

Decorating Ideas and Quick fix projects to help you get the best price for your home

Getting Your Home Ready to Sell

Appeal to buyers

When preparing to sell your home, think about how your personal decorating style may affect prospective buyers. They are looking for a home that they — and their furnishings — can move right into. You want your home to be clean and clutter-free and as neutral as possible so prospective buyers can visualize how their furnishings will look in your home. And keep in mind, *there is a difference in how you live in your home and how it should look when it's on the market!* The good news is that some of the most effective “quick-fix” remedies are inexpensive projects you can tackle yourself.

Cleaning up and clearing out

Begin with a thorough cleaning of all rooms in your home. Every room and window in your home should be kept squeaky clean. Rid your home of aromas such as pet odors and smoke. Clean litter boxes and eliminate cigarette stubs, then clean carpets and wash walls thoroughly. Add pleasant odors with candles, boiling a pot of cinnamon sticks or putting a dab of vanilla on cold light bulbs.

And while you're at it, begin to organize and sort your possessions. That's because your home will show best if you pare down. Remove about half of the items stored in closets and cabinets and toss or give away items you don't use. To give your storage areas an even neater look, add organizers or storage tubs. Use baskets or dividers in medicine chests and drawers to corral supplies. Kitchen cabinets can be better organized with utensil dividers, pull out baskets, lid holders, under-the-sink organizers or other creative holders. Also consider storing out-of-season items and excess furniture as a way of clearing your home.

Neutralize your home

Nothing makes a home look newer faster than painting and getting rid of outdated wallpaper. These may be the best interior improvements you can make. Paint colors that won't jar potential buyers and that allows your personal belongings to blend into the background. Repaint walls in neutral colors — white, off-white, or beige. Not only will a new coat of paint freshen your rooms, but painting all rooms in a similar neutral color scheme will make your home seem more unified and spacious. Painting dingy woodwork can also help lighten up a room.

Cover dark chairs or sofas with crisp, neutral slipcovers to let them blend into the background (right). Add color with accessories such as pillows, vases of fresh flowers or a small area rug.

Even kitchen cabinets and appliances can be given a new outlook on life with a paint job. The key to a quality paint job is adequate preparation; it's important to patch holes, scrape peeling paint, sand the surface and, if necessary, put on a

primer coat. Choose a premium-quality paint; the difference in results far exceeds the difference in cost.

In addition, if you have repaired a leaky roof, patch and paint the ceiling. A water-marked ceiling is a signal to prospective buyers that the roof leaks — or has leaked at one time. However, don't paint to hide a problem; always fix and then paint.

A little space, a lot of room

A key to decorating to sell your home is to maximize space while minimizing your possessions. The first step is to keep your furnishings sparse to avoid the look of overfilling the room. Put a few pieces of furniture in storage and remove some of your knickknacks and accessories. Then arrange the room to best utilize the remaining furniture pieces and accessories. The first step toward good furniture arrangement — whether the room is large or small — is to find a focal point.

The focal point might be a fireplace, an entertainment center, a picture window, a painting or a favorite piece of furniture. Experiment with different arrangements until you find the one that makes your room look the most spacious and appealing. Create a feeling of spaciousness with mirrors or metal surfaces. Move the eye upward with tall plants, artwork, pedestals or vertical stripes. Adding a planter or basket of dried flowers to the top of an armoire or breakfront will have the same effect.

What's the first thing buyers will see when they enter? Even if your home doesn't have a distinct entryway, you can create one that is warm and welcoming using a few suggestions from the pros: Establish a focal point with a plant, print, or decorative lamp. You might add attractive storage with a wall shelf or a table artfully arranged with a few well-chosen collectibles or flowers. Or just hang a picture or mirror on the wall, and put out a decorative throw rug.

Pay attention to details

You may not notice the dripping faucet in the kitchen, the lack of storage in the bedrooms or the outdated light fixtures in the dining room, but be assured that potential buyers will notice. Tackling a few fix-it projects may pay in big dividends as you sell your home.

Repair leaky faucets or freshen sinks by installing new faucets. If the sinks are slightly scratched or the colors are outdated, consider re-enameling or simply replacing them. Brighten the lighting in your home by updating dated fixtures and switch plates. Replace bulbs with the highest-wattage bulbs allowed for the

fixture. Consider brightening dark areas with easy-to-add strip lighting, under counter lighting and reading lamps.

Potential buyers will notice details such as windows and screens and doors.

Besides cleaning

windows and doors, you will want to repair cracked panes, torn screens, broken sashes and ropes and cords as well. Doors and window frames may need a fresh coat of paint or varnish.

Call in the professionals

You may be able to make some repairs, such as replacing a faucet or painting, but may not be able to tackle others such as electrical or plumbing problems. If you must call on professionals to have repairs made, get several estimates before proceeding with the job. And talk with your real estate professional about whether the projects should be tackled before putting the home on the market — or if creating an allowance to allow the new homeowners to tackle the job might be more realistic. If so, having bids available will be helpful in letting buyers know the scope of the project.

Floors

If your floors are badly worn, outdated or stained, you may need to make improvements. If you decide to replace floor coverings, concentrate on the high visibility areas — the living and dining room — first. But rather than replace, there are some other steps you can take:

- Clean carpets and vacuum often.
- Check for hardwood floors beneath the carpeting. You may be able to pull up the carpeting and refinish or simply clean and wax the floors to create a classic, new look.
- It is possible to repaint a vinyl floor that has an outdated look (as long as it is free of holes and dents).
- Repair cracked or broken tiles.
- Make use of neutral-color area rugs to diminish the impact of the flooring beneath.

Let the light shine in

A home that's awash with natural sunlight is desirable to prospective buyers — so open your curtains, raise the shades and let the sun shine in! Move large furnishings away from windows if they block the light or view. And make sure windows are sparkling clean!

Allow window coverings to recede into the background. If yours are old and dingy, or block

light and the view, take them down. Replace with simple mini-blinds or shades. Or dress up windows with a simple draping of sheer fabric that lets the light shine through.

Lighting for a brighter look

Proper lighting is a must for brightening your rooms. Be sure the lighting is adequate in each area for the tasks performed there — putting on make-up in the bathroom, food preparation in the kitchen, reading in the living room and bedrooms. Use the highest watt bulbs your fixtures will accommodate and add inexpensive strip lighting in areas that may be a bit dark.

In addition, if you have a particularly nice feature or area — perhaps a plant or artwork — create a little showbiz with a spotlight on the subject. To create a special mood in one of your rooms, such as the dining room, install a dimmer switch. And when the home is going to be shown, turn on the lights — to show your home in its best light.

In a nutshell.

- Remove excess furniture and knickknacks.
- Neutralize rooms with a fresh coat of paint in beige, off-white or gray.
- Rearrange the furniture in each room for a more spacious look.
- Add a splash of color and fragrance to any room with a fresh flower arrangement.
- Put new logs in the fireplace.
- Arrange colorful candles and candlesticks on a coffee table or fireplace mantel.
- Add inexpensive strip lights to brighten up dark areas such as under cabinets or in bathrooms.
- Dry-clean or launder window coverings or remove if they are dark and worn. Install mini-blinds, shades or sheer curtains.
- Install the highest watt bulbs your fixtures will accommodate.
- Open draperies and blinds and turn on lights before a showing of your home.

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