

Getting Your Home Ready to Sell

Exteriors and Landscaping

Enhance curb appeal

First impressions are lasting impressions. A large percentage of home buyers decide whether or not to look inside a house based on its curb appeal--the view they see when they drive by or arrive for a showing. That's why the appearance of your home's exterior — its curb appeal — is critical when merchandising your home. An inviting exterior entices prospective buyers to step inside with a "this could be ours" attitude. You can help make sure they come inside your home by spending some time to freshen up its exterior appearance.

Evaluate your home's curb appeal by surveying your lawn, landscaping, paint, entryway, roof and gutters, windows and lighting. Note if there are some areas that could be improved to make your home look its best.

Painting pays off

A new coat of paint can do wonders to restore a home's appeal. Is your exterior paint cracking peeling or chipping? If your budget can stand it, a top-quality job of scraping, filling holes, priming and a fresh coat of paint will increase your home's market value. Choose neutral colors appropriate for the style of your home and that blend in well in your neighborhood. And consider the color of your roof when choosing paint color.

Roof repair

Leaking roofs and damaged downspouts and gutters signal that the home hasn't been well-cared for. So now is the time to repair these problems! Once the roof is repaired, patch and paint the ceiling inside so buyers won't worry about roof problems.

Make a grand entrance

A neat, cheerful front entry extends a friendly invitation into your home. Paint the door and trim and polish or add new hardware and a decorative knocker. Or consider adding a more stylish front door that complements the architectural elements and decorative details of your entryway, inside and out.

In addition, details such as a working doorbell, a new doormat, pots of fresh flowers on the porch and a freshly painted mailbox add a warm, welcoming touch.

Let your home shine, even at night, by installing a decorative light post or accent lighting. Be sure the lighting illuminates your entrances, walkways and drive. And turn on all the outdoor lights when your home is being shown.

Clean windows have never been so important! Make sure that your interior and exterior windows are spotless and that your screens and storm windows are in good condition. If the garage is a focal point in the front of your home, take a serious look at it. A new paint job may breathe new life into it. But if the door is bent or rusted, or if it droops, sags or wobbles, installing a new garage door may be the best solution.

Basic outdoor maintenance counts

A well-manicured lawn and attractive landscape plantings enhance your home's curb appeal. Mow, water and fertilize the lawn regularly. Remove dandelions and other weeds that are visible to the eye. Keep crisp edging lines between your lawn, drive and walkways and be sure to pull grass from between the cracks.

Do you have some bushes or trees that obscure windows and the front of your home? It may be time to cut landscaping back significantly, maybe even removed entirely. If necessary, call a professional.

Your walkway and drive also affect prospective buyers' perceptions of your home. Sweep them clean of all debris. Repair broken asphalt or cement and pull weeds from cracks. If you have a fence, repair, repaint or stain as necessary.

Landscape for a luxurious look

Landscaping (or lack of it) can have a powerful impact on potential buyers and how they view the "total package" of your home. Simple, inexpensive planting projects are often all it takes to perk up a landscape.

If you need assistance in planning your landscape, hire a professional landscape designer to prepare a customized plan that you can easily implement before putting your home on the market.

Flowers for impact

Colorful flowers in your front yard also enhance your home's curb appeal. If you're short on garden space, brighten the exterior with pots of blooming plants or flowering annuals near your front entrance or along your drive and walkway. In addition, a window box full of flowers is an inexpensive way to add an accent of color to your home's exterior.

Foliage adds color

Trees, shrubs or hedges add a finishing touch to your landscape with color and detail. Plants come in several shades of green — add impact by combining different types. Keeping the foliage trimmed and pruned will also contribute to the overall well-maintained look of your home.

Add beauty to the backyard

If you have a deck, patio, porch or other outdoor entertainment area such as a pool or hot tub, make the most of it. Keep these areas, as well as your backyard, clean and clutter-free; put debris in covered trash cans.

Carry your landscape plan into your backyard — attractive arrangements of flowers, shrubs and trees invite potential buyers to linger awhile and enjoy the beauty of your backyard.

Give your backyard a finishing touch with the addition of stepping stones, a birdbath or a bench under a stand of trees.

Merchandising tips

- Take photos of outstanding landscape features — a brilliantly blooming tree or snow lingering on pine trees — to show the beauty of your landscaping in all seasons.
- Put fresh bark or crushed stone around trees, shrubs or hedges.
- If you are an absentee seller, make arrangements for lawn care and snow removal.
- Remove oil marks from driveway and garage floor.
- Polish hardware and exterior light fixtures. Install the highest-wattage bulbs allowed.
- Put away lawn equipment and gardening tools.
- Replace your house numbers if needed.
- Clean gutters and downspouts. Straighten and repaint if necessary.

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