

5 DIY Tips for Home Staging on the Cheap

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Your home's been on the market for a while now, and you're not getting any offers. Your real estate agent has suggested professional staging, but that's just not in the budget. What's a desperate home seller to do?

You might consider a staging consultation. Many home stagers will provide room-by-room assessments for homeowners, offering tips about paint colors, furniture placement, improving traffic patterns and more. Most consultations last about two hours and won't break the bank at \$150 to \$250.

Or, you can use these five low-cost, do-it-yourself staging tips to create a space that sells:

No. 1: Cut the clutter

Get boxes and tape, and start packing. Clothes, books, toys, extra pots and pans – pack up everything you don't absolutely need during the next two or three months. Remember that potential buyers will be opening closets and drawers; if it looks like there's not room for your things, buyers will assume storage will be tight for them as well.

Too much furniture can also make a space look cluttered. Your home will look bigger if it's not jam-packed. Go through the house room by room and ask yourself what you can live without. See if your friends are willing to store your things until the house sells, or consider renting a short-term storage unit.

No. 2: Let the sunshine in

"I advise homeowners to open all their window coverings," says Maureen Bray, owner of Portland, OR-based [Room Solutions Staging](#). "Don't just open the blinds — raise them to the top to allow people to see the view and let in light. Home buyers love light, bright rooms."

Of course, that means windows must be cleaned inside and out, and window sills need to be wiped down.

Got a view you're not so crazy about showcasing? Consider blinds that can be angled to let in light, or hang sheer panels.

What if you have those heavy, expensive, custom drapes and valances that were popular 20 years ago? "Take them down," says Bray. "You got your money's worth out of them. Today's buyers want light."

No. 3: Clean, then clean some more

"I always tell people, 'Clean like there's no tomorrow.'" says Bray. "A really clean house gives buyers the impression that it has been well-maintained."

Unfortunately, a one-time cleaning won't do the trick. You'll need to keep at it until your house sells. Knock down cobwebs, wipe counter tops, scrub grout, mop floors, wash light fixtures and repeat.

If cleaning bathtubs and wiping down baseboards is simply not your area of expertise, consider hiring a weekly cleaning service. Yes, it's an investment, but if it shortens your selling time, it's money well spent.

No. 4: Set the scene

Want buyers to fall in love with your house the moment they see it? First impressions matter. Your lawn must be mowed and edged, bushes must be trimmed, and flower beds must be weeded and topped with fresh mulch or bark. Add colorful flowers near the front door, either in flowerbeds or pots.

You'll make your home even tougher to resist if you borrow or rent a power washer to clean grimy sidewalks, driveways, stairs and decks. Remember: You want everything to look fresh, fresh, fresh.

No. 5: Take new photos

Once you've decluttered, cleaned and planted flowers, take new photos of your home.

According to a 2011 survey, 88 percent of buyers say their home search relies, at least in part, on online listings. It's important that the photos used in those listings and printed fliers reflect the improvements you've made to your home. Photos that showcase your decluttered, squeaky clean, curb-appeal-laden abode will appeal to a broader range of home buyers.