

Easy Facelifts to Sell Your Home Now

How to get your furnishings, closets and front yard ready to entice prospective buyers

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April 30, 2013

Eager to sell your home? Be careful. Many people anxious to sell feel prepared—to find a buyer, negotiate a deal, pack up their belongings and relocate—only their home isn't quite ready to put on the market.

Fortunately for sellers, home prices are rising, inventory is low and the number of contracts to buy existing homes in March rose to the highest level in nearly three years, according to the National Association of Realtors. Although the market is strong, if you overlook important home updates and repairs in rushing to put up that for-sale sign, you could hurt your chances of getting your asking price.

With simple outdoor repairs, interior cosmetic fixes and a good scrubbing, you can make your house shine for prospective buyers. Here's how:

Do a clean sweep. A dirty home is an immediate turnoff. While sellers frequently focus on tidying up high-traffic areas, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, many forget to clean the oven, furnace and baseboards. And don't forget floors and ceilings, which buyers pay close attention to. Sellers often make the mistake of simply painting over a stain in the ceiling when the whole ceiling needs to be repainted, says Chris Dossman, a real estate agent with Century 21 Scheetz in Indianapolis. She also recommends that homeowners with stained carpeting consider whether it's worth replacing.



[Read: [7 Reasons Your House Isn't Selling.](#)]

Those with pets may want to ask a neighbor to watch their furry friend during viewings, as some people are afraid of dogs or are allergic to pet hair (another reason to keep those carpets cleaned). Pet beds, toys, blankets and feeding bowls should be stowed away.

While many homeowners use plug-in air fresheners and candles to mask pet odor, strong scents can give viewers a headache. "The best smell in the house is clean," says Maureen Bray, a home-staging professional and owner of Room Solutions Staging in Portland, Ore. "You can get that fresh smell by cleaning often and letting [your home] air out a lot."

De-clutter. Although a home's square footage may look good on paper, a deluge of knickknacks can make a room appear smaller.

Connie Holubar went to extra lengths to organize her current home before putting it on the market. "We even organized the closets by style of clothing and color," says Holubar, a public relations consultant in Dallas. "It sounds OCD, but people will open them and think, 'Wow, there's so much room in here.'"

You can also create more breathing room in closets by removing excess blankets and linens and out-of-season clothes, such as heavy coats during the summer.

Clearing the floors creates open space and makes a room feel larger. "If people have beautiful hardwood floors, they really need to show them," Bray says. "That's a feature that buyers are paying for today. If you have big area rugs, remove them or replace them with rugs that are a smaller size."

Depersonalize. Personal items can distract buyers from your home's best features, so it's best to put away collections (even your beloved family of Pez dispensers). While you may love a lime-green den, buyers tend to prefer neutral colors on the walls, like beige or light gray. And even if it's tradition to put up a Christmas tree, holiday themes may turn off some buyers who practice a different religion, says Amanda Nachman, a resident of Mendota Heights, Minn., who sold two of her homes without a real estate agent.

[Read [7 Reasons to Downsize in Retirement.](#)]

Michael Corbett, Trulia's real estate expert and author of several books, including "Ready, Set, Sold!" says he cringes when he sees a house on the market that's cluttered with family photos or children's drawings on the refrigerator. "You want a buyer to be able to walk in and see themselves in your house—not you," Corbett says.

Enhance the furnishings. Think your home's layout needs some professional fine-tuning? Consider hiring a staging company. For about \$150 to \$250, a stager will give you a consultation that includes a walk through your home and tips on how to improve each room. Staging for a vacant home,

meanwhile, can run \$2,000 or more and involves outfitting select rooms with new furniture based on your budget. "You don't need to stage every room," Bray says. Instead, she typically only stages rooms that have the biggest impact, such as the master bedroom, family room and kitchen.

"People should show each room in its intended, original function," Bray adds. For example, a formal dining room that you turned into a playroom or office can confuse prospective buyers and make it difficult for them to envision how they would use the space.

Polish the curb appeal. According to Corbett, "Selling a house is a lot like dating: A pretty face will get buyers in the door." So cut the grass, trim shrubs and prune hedges to make sure the lawn looks manicured. You don't have to plant a full-blown garden, but a few flowers can make a home more inviting. Some real estate agents recommend placing potted plants on both sides of the front door.

[See 6 Tips for a Budget-Friendly Home Makeover.]

When it comes to the home's exterior, consider whether you need to paint, patch weathered gutters or repair light fixtures. Driveways and sidewalks should be power-washed. Even replacing worn house numbers or an old mailbox can elevate a buyer's first impression, Holubar says.

The entrance is most important, Corbett says, since most buyers see the front door first. A fresh coat of paint (in an inviting color), a shiny door handle and a new doormat can make all the difference.

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