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The Big Takeaway: Curb Appeal

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Savvy sellers know that adding curb appeal to homes going on the market is a sure-fire way to attract buyers, and to up their chances for getting top dollar. Putting a home's best face forward may sound like an undertaking, but in actuality, it can be easy, attainable and stress-free. According to two Portland pros, it's how much you put into it that counts, but equally important, is what you take away that can make a huge impact, as well.

Amanda Haworth, broker at Living Room Realty, says that, "Curb appeal sets the tone for the way a buyer feels about the rest of the house. It makes them want, or not want, to see the rest of your house."

If you're on a tight budget, she says, go for low cost, low skill improvements that will have the most impact. "Make any visible repairs; remove moss from the roof; clean up flower beds; plant fresh and vibrant flowers; weed and edge the grass or replace grass with sod if there's a small patch that doesn't look great."

"If your budget is larger," says Haworth, "give your home a fresh coat of paint; replace railings, steps or your front door if they look old or have deteriorated; add decorative lighting or a pergola; or have it professionally landscaped. If you have a large porch, stage some outdoor seating or hang a porch swing. Everyone loves a porch swing."

Maureen Bray, professional home stager, interior designer and owner of Room Solutions Staging, says that for a home to really have strong curb appeal sellers first have to take care of the paint, making sure it's not chipped, cracked or peeling. If so, a paint job is in order. Color is secondary to condition, she says. For some Portland neighborhoods, a bold color works as long as the paint is in good condition.

Bray says that sometimes just the front door needs a fresh coat of paint. Studies have shown that white and yellow front doors do not go over well with buyers. The colors are too bland and weak. Choose something bold, like black, red, purple or orange. The color should complement the house and fit with the rest of the neighborhood. If there's brick or stone in the architecture, the door needs to tie in with that element. Also check the condition of the hardware on the door and replace what looks worn.

If there's a metal security door in front of the front door, take it down and put it in the garage. A security door sends the message that the neighborhood isn't safe. Apply touch-up paint, the same color as the door frame, after removing the screws and hinges.

Replace the old or nonexistent front door mat with a plain, black rubber one as wide as the door. For porch lights, clean the dirt and bugs out. If the home has dated brass outdoor lighting fixtures, replace them with something more contemporary.

Power wash your sidewalk and driveway to ensure they are bright, clean and free of moss. Add fresh mulch wherever it's needed around flower beds. Dark-colored mulch, or bark dust, is popular with homebuyers. Be sure to add a couple of pots of seasonal flowers to draw buyers to the house.

Trim hedges and shrubs to just below the window height, so natural light coming into the home is not blocked. In addition to keeping the view clear, make sure to clean windows so they sparkle. "Perfectly clean windows will make your house look more expensive," Bray adds.

Another important feature to pay attention to is the mailbox. Most people are so used to looking at their homes, they overlook small details like this. If the mailbox is in need of repair, paint or replace it. "These are the kinds of things that indicate to a potential buyer, if this house is really well maintained on the outside, they're hoping it's like that on the inside."

Lastly, be sure that you put all children's toys away and leave the garden hoses coiled at the side or back of the house where they're not so obvious. Be sure to take out all bird baths, garden gnomes and wind chimes. "When you're selling your house, " says Bray, "it's about the buyer's personality, not yours."

Text by Suzie Mayes