



# Preparing to Sell Your Home

## 101 Ways to Prepare Your Home For Sale

### Would You Like to Sell Your House?

To a prospective buyer, the total value of your home isn't limited to the price paid. The dictionary defines value as "that which makes anything worth possessing". When looking at possible new homes, the buyer is motivated by what the house will do for his or her family. Will the house serve their needs comfortably? Will they be proud to invite friends and family into it? Does it feel like they could settle in and be happy there?

Sometimes houses do grow on buyers, but most often the first impression that the house makes on people is the one they carry away with them. Usually, they have looked at five or more houses on the same day they look at yours. The one that appears to be the most spacious, the most cheerful, and has the most curb appeal is the house they will remember. To sell them your house, yours must be the best possible choice in that price range.

To make YOUR house the best possible choice, there are many small but significant differences you can make, if you are willing to spend the time and a little money. According to real estate agents, there are two main reasons a house flounders on the market unsold. The first is the price. If the house is priced too high in the beginning, even reducing it later doesn't often revive enthusiasm in either real estate agents or in buyers. Trust your agent to help you arrive at the best price.

The second reason is the condition and appearance of the house. Don't rely on the buyer to use his or her imagination! Its charm, soundness, comfort and attractiveness must be obvious from the instant they view the house from the street to the time they walk out the back door.

This brochure will provide tips on how to do just that. Start with the outside of your home, and then work in from the front door. Painting is the first thing most agents recommend to home sellers. It's the quickest and most inexpensive way to freshen a room. Second, make sure that your home is neat and clean when a Showing or Open House is scheduled. A well-kept look makes a favorable impression. With just a little effort, you can make inexpensive changes that will result in a faster sale and help assure that you receive top dollar for your home.

"Oh-h-h, now THIS is a nice house!"

Making your house appear as attractive as possible from the street is important. Without it, you will be hard put to get buyers interested in recognizing your home's other attributes or potential. Start with the MAILBOX, if you have one on the street.

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Remove all signs of deterioration. Replace the post it sits on, if necessary. If not, painting it to match the house is a nice touch. Remove rust from the box itself, and apply a new coat of paint. Renew the look of the flag by brightening faded red paint. Replace tattered house numbers.

If there are flowers planted at the base, make sure they look as fresh as possible.

## **The Yard**

Mow it often enough to keep it looking neat. Toss some grass seed on bare spots. It won't take long to sprout and show that you are putting forth the effort to improve the area.

Keep planted & landscaped areas weed-free.

Trim back over grown shrubs that obscure windows.

Save a little paint from the mailbox post to spruce up a birdhouse.

Pick up dead tree branches.

Trim shrubbery if it has started to get out of hand.

Clean out the fishpond. If it's empty, just try to keep leaves and debris from piling up in it again.

Clean out fountains and birdbaths. (When showing your home, turn on fountains. The sound of gurgling water is very pleasant and relaxing to most people).

If you ordinarily have a lot of yard ornaments, like statues of animals, etc., you may want to put some or all of them away, for two reasons: first, so buyers can concentrate on the yard and/or its view or landscaping, and not your statues. Second, so that buyers don't assume without asking that your yard ornaments stay with the house.

If your yard has a clothesline, make sure it is sturdy. Straighten leaning posts, and give faded ones a coat of paint. Remove rust from metal posts. Replace the line if it's frayed.

If there is a swing that stays with the house, get it in good repair. Oil squeaks, paint it, and replace missing parts, if possible. If you have any kind of rope swing, replace frayed ropes. If it's beyond repair, take it down.

Remove piles of anything from the yard that are unsightly, such as limbs, concrete blocks, flowerpots, or that stack of old bricks that you never got around to building that barbeque out of.

Remove inoperable vehicles from the yard or driveway.

Outbuildings need to be in good shape. Paint them if they look a little tired.

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Latches and locks need to work reasonably well. If wired for electricity, replace burned out bulbs.

See that all yard lights work.

Make dog pens or runs as clean and attractive as possible. Pick up any animal poop from the yard, if animals are not penned. If your dog is a digger, fill in holes and spread grass seed.

Even if the grill attached to your patio doesn't work, spruce it up. Clean racks and the appearance of serviceability will at least make it seem more of a positive possibility than an eyesore.

Many buyers do not want the responsibility of caring for a swimming pool. It is imperative, then, that you clear the swimming pool of leaves and debris every day. It must look inviting if it is to appeal to buyers who do want a pool, or to those who will consider a home with one. At night, turn on mood lighting to help buyers imagine themselves entertaining around your pool and patio or deck.

Play up the comfort and visual appeal of your patio or porch. Arrange your patio furniture in an attractive way. Place a book on a chair in a shady corner. Leaving up the table umbrella lends a festive touch. Flowers in containers will add lively color.

### **The Driveway**

Over time, gravel drives pack down, baring the dirt underneath. If your drive has exposed spots, and especially is prone to mud puddling, spread a new layer of gravel. You may be surprised at how inexpensive some grades of gravel can be, and how much difference a new load can make in appearance. Also, eliminate grass and weeds sprouting in the drive to avoid an unkempt look.

If your asphalt or concrete drive has cracks, repair them with a crack-filling compound purchased from a lumberyard.

If a basketball goal is fixed to or around your drive, make sure it looks good and is in usable condition. The next owners may consider it a nice detail.

Attend to those flowerbeds bordering the drive.

Prune any hanging tree limbs that may scratch the tops of cars or obstruct a desirable view. Also, cut back shrubbery for the same reasons. Buyers do not want vegetation that inhibits getting in and out of the car, or scratches its finish.

### **The Fence**

Make any repairs to fences that make the property appear run down, such as sagging or squeaky gates, missing pickets, rusty latches, or peeling paint.

Fill in holes your energetic doggy may have dug around the fence.

### **The Walkways**

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Fill cracks in concrete or asphalt. Pull or spray weeds from between stones or bricks. Fill in missing mortar between stones or bricks. Trim shrubbery to clear the path. Attend to flowers lining the walk.

### **The Outside of Your Home**

Agents say that short of painting, simply making sure the exterior of the house is clean and looks maintained is important.

Repair any ornamentation, such as shutters, ginger breading, spindles, posts or columns. Paint, if necessary. Remove rust from ironwork. Even though it will cost some money, strongly consider shoring up or even replacing a visibly sagging porch on an old home. The idea is to avoid giving any indication of deterioration or instability.

Paint peeling trim around doors and windows.

Replace or paint rusted or broken light fixtures on porches or beside doors.

Replace cracked plastic bubbles over basement window wells. If there are none, remove any trash or debris that tends to collect in such spaces.

Remove mud daubers and wasps' nests.

See that the swing is still securely fastened to the porch ceiling. Paint it, if necessary. If it has cushions that have seen better days, purchase bright new ones, or slipcover the old ones.

Make the front entry as inviting as possible. Polish the brass knocker and kick plate. Since both are available in inexpensive grades, consider adding one or both. Hang a colorful wreath on or near the door. Painting the front door a compatible but contrasting color from the body of the house or trim can affect a very pleasing visual impact. Make sure windows on the door sparkle.

If you have lived with house numbers that really aren't adequately readable from the street consider updating them. You may even want to change the materials they're made of, such as from brass to wood or vice versa.

A metal or wooden plaque by the front door with the address or the date the house was built is always an attractive detail. If you have one, make sure it looks good.

Potted or hanging plants can do so much to make a porch or entry feel cheerful. If you are not good with live plants, purchase some good quality silk plants (provided they will be out of the weather) and fake it! You can always take them with you, and use indoors, if you like.

Nothing adds charm to the façade of a house like window boxes. They can be purchased inexpensively, and are easy to install. If you already have them, keep the blooms coming. During winter months, plastic holly or green garlands draped over the bases lend a homey, holiday mood.

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Some trees, like maples, produce seed pods. These pods are very bad about collecting in gutters, and will even sprout, if allowed to remain. Be sure to remove those unsightly seedlings if they are visible from the ground.

Is the doorbell cover rust free? Does that little bulb inside the button need to be replaced?

If you never replaced the screen on the storm door after the kids poked out the corner with a bat, do it now. Replacement screen can be purchased at lumberyards or hardware stores. Some places may even install it for you, at additional cost.

Yes, it's the one of the most dreaded household chores, but do wash the windows inside and out or call a cleaning service. The more light you can let into your home for showing, the better.

Now comes the moment the buyers have been waiting for. The key is in the lock. If the lock is difficult to work-requiring jiggling of the key or lifting up the door-fix or replace it. New owners don't want to hassle with a contrary lock every time they use the door.

### **SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES APPLICABLE TO THE ENTIRE HOUSE INTERIOR**

Take a walk through your house and try to look at it as though YOU are a potential buyer. If you find this impossible, ask a friend, relative, or your agent to go with you to help you see things in a more objective light. These suggestions apply to every room.

Look at the carpet. Is it worn or matted, and dirty? Is it reasonably up to date? It is a color others could live with? Dirty carpet can be cleaned, but worn or outdated carpet needs to be replaced. These days, shag carpet of variegated oranges won't help sell a house. Neither will a carpet colored so unusually that most people can't decorate around it. You do not have to buy the best carpet available, but do buy a grade in a neutral color that will suit most people.

You will get money back on this one. People look more favorably on a house that has carpet they don't have to replace right away. Also, new carpet prevents them from using worn out carpet as a reason to offer you less money than you want.

Clean every room thoroughly. For most buyers, the house must have the "read to move into" look.

Dirty, scuffed, fingerprinted walls are a major turn-off for most people. The quickest and cheapest way to fix that is to paint.

You like those purple walls in your bedroom, but it's unlikely that anybody else will. To cover an undesirable color, neutrals like ivory and light gray are an attractive alternative to white. You may have to apply a primer first to completely cover strong colors.

You may consider neutral colored carpeting and paint to be boring, but it is one of the major concerns of homebuyers. Many people don't like to live around strong or bright colors. Purple walls, bright blue

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carpeting, or fuchsia woodwork may blind buyers to the potential your house could have if it were decorated in colors more to their liking.

Clean all light fixtures, particularly glass globes or panels. Revive tarnished metals.

To make rooms look more commodious for any type of furniture, remove the pieces you can store elsewhere.

Are there any occasional tables or armchairs you can do without? How about multiple plant stands that make the corners appear cluttered? Can you live without footstools that impede the easy flow of traffic?

Straighten out closets and other storage areas. The idea here is to make them seem as capacious as possible. Remove some of your hanging clothes, if necessary, to eliminate the sardine look. Stack items neatly on shelves. Line up shoes. Stack boxes in an orderly fashion. If you have house pets, it is absolutely essential that your house does not smell like you have them. Smells trigger instant and strong responses that are extremely difficult to change. You want a buyer's first response to your home to be one of pleasure, not revulsion. Therefore, you must be vigilant about changing cat litter and keeping pet areas squeaky clean. You would be wise to limit the area in which your pet inhabits during the sale period.

It wouldn't hurt to set around unobtrusive dishes or baskets of potpourri. You may want to do this anyway, just to evoke a pleasant sensation when people step in the door. This goes double for households with smokers.

If you have taken down pictures from the walls, be sure to fill in the nail holes, and paint. Filling compound can be purchased at hardware stores or lumberyards.

The best results are obtained by apply it with a putty knife. Let dry. Sand till the surface of the compound is smooth and flush with the wall surface. It is now ready to paint over.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR EACH ROOM – THE FOYER, FRONT HALL OR ENTRY WAY**

The front door swings open. You want to ensure that the entry's most outstanding features immediately arrest the prospect's attention.

If a unique floor makes your entry remarkable, make it the center of attention. Roll up rugs. Keep furniture to a minimum. If the floor requires a shine or luster, maintain it scrupulously.

Staircases are very often the most interesting feature of an entry. Clean the carpet, paint worn spots, polish or wax woods and metals, paint dirty walls, and glue back the corner of wallpaper that peeled last year. If it's near Christmas, take a little extra time to drape the banister with garlands and ribbons. Ensure that the banister is sturdy.



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Quiet annoying squeaks on the stairs.

Stained or leaded glass above a staircase can be breathtaking. Make sure it's wiped clean so it can sparkle to its best advantage.

## **THE LIVING ROOM**

As with the house in general, you want to impress upon prospects the comfort, beauty, and livability of the living room.

Clean the fireplace of ashes and soot. Polish screens, andirons, and fireplace tools.

Is your magazine rack overflowing? Throw away what you do not need.

When showing your home, turn on lights, open drapes, light a fire (if practical), or play music softly in the background.

## **THE DINING ROOM**

As you did with the living room, look around and take note of peeling wallpaper, the condition of the carpet, and all painted surfaces. Make repairs and improvements as best you can.

When showing, turn on all light fixtures. If the switch is adjustable, mute the lighting at night to create a pleasant ambiance, such as the buyers might use when entertaining.

When showing the house, ask your agent to point out the convenience of any built-in cabinetry in the dining room. Direct attention to anything special about the room, such as ornamentation on the ceiling, crown moldings, a chandelier, wall sconces, or a beautifully carved or tiled fireplace.

## **THE LIBRARY OR STUDY**

Make this space seem like the ideal spot for home office work, playing computer games, or relaxing with a book or jigsaw puzzle.

Leave a lamp on by a comfortable chair with an open book, upside down, on the cushion. If it's daylight, a window seat comfortably padded with pillows can be given the same treatment.

Clear your desk or work area of all clutter. Make the space seem as efficient as possible, as though new owners will have all they need in this room to get down to business. Turn on relevant lighting.

If the room has been specially insulated to block noise, tell your agent so she can demonstrate that to buyers.

Point out anything in the room that will facilitate a business purpose, such as separate wiring for a laser printer, multiple phone jacks, or extra electrical outlets.

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If the room has cable television access, mention it.

## **THE KITCHEN**

The kitchen absolutely must be spotless. After you have thoroughly cleaned, you may want to place your trash container in the garage, laundry room, or basement while showing the house. You don't want an unpleasant smell to cancel out all your hard work. Since garbage disposals can often stubbornly retain smells, run a lemon half though daily to eliminate odors.

How's the floor look? Since new flooring is expensive, most sellers don't want to spend that much to replace it. About all you can do is to see that it looks clean. A new coat of wax will bolster its image quickly and cheaply. The same goes for a hard wood floor.

If your kitchen is carpeted, it can be replaced easily. Only do so, though, if it is badly stained or worn.

When showing the kitchen, open all blinds and curtains, and turn on all lights. Most people want a bright kitchen.

Be sure to point out any extra conveniences the kitchen may be equipped with, such as sliding shelves, turntables, a convection oven, or trash compactor.

Remove clutter from countertops. The idea is to make the kitchen look like it has ample counter space and cabinets for anyone's needs.

Fix dripping faucets.

Agents say many buyers judge overall housekeeping by how clean the oven and range are. Do not give them any reason to turn up their noses.

Clean the inside of the dishwasher door.

## **THE LAUNDRY ROOM**

Remove all the clutter from the floor or from the top of the dryer. Wipe dust and lint from appliances.

If your laundry room doubles as storage space, just make sure it looks neat.

## **THE BATHROOM**

This room, also, must be kept spotless and odor free.

Fix or replace leaking faucets or drain plugs that won't function properly. If the chrome finish has peeled off in spots, replace all the components to give a clean, all-is-in-working-order feeling.



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Make any repairs now to the stool that you have just been living with.

Make sure towel racks and toilet paper dispensers are fastened securely to the wall. If their finish is shabby, they can be inexpensively replaced.

Neaten the items stored in vanities, medicine cabinets, and linen closets. (People are going to open them). Throw out any clutter you don't need.

It is a nasty, time-consuming job, but it is important to remove every bit of that scum from glass shower doors. The sight of it automatically turns off buyers.

Re-apply caulk that is peeling or will not come clean.

Look at an angle at the wall facing the sink. See thousands of spots? Hair spray, especially the liquid spritz kinds, accumulates on the wall. You probably cannot smell it, but its fragrance lingers. Be sure to give it a wipe when cleaning.

Pretty towels hanging from racks will distract attention from your bathrooms less attractive features.

## **THE BEDROOMS**

Eliminate any extra furniture that appears to make the room seem smaller.

A colorful throw rug will disguise flooring that may not be in the best shape.

Make the beds every day.

## **THE GARAGE**

Here and in the basement is where clutter seems to multiply! This is a good time to eliminate all that stuff you want to get rid of. As for the rest, just make sure it is neatly stacked or hanged. Make it seem as though there is enough room for a new owner to park any size car or truck in your garage.

Try to clean off the oil drips from the floor. Spreading kitty litter over it can easily absorb oil. Leave on 24 hours and then sweep away. Most of the stain can be scrubbed off with any degreaser.

## **THE BASEMENT**

Clean the basement as best as the surfaces allow. Stack, hang, or stand items as neatly as possible. Mostly, people don't expect too much from the basement, only that it is dry. Don't bother finishing your basement to add square footage. The cost generally can't be recouped in the selling price.

**A note about basements and foundations:**

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If your house falls into the price range most attractive to first time home buyers or singles, it's very likely that the buyers will want to get financing from a government agency like the Federal Housing Authority (FHA). (These loans require less of a percentage down payment instead of the usual ten.) In that case, FHA Inspectors will more closely scrutinize your home during the mechanical and general inspections. In particular, the foundation and roof are most vulnerable to criticism. If the condition of either of these is questionable, the inspector more than likely won't approve the loan to the buyers until you have fixed the problem.



If the hot water heater or furnace works great but shows its age, a coat of spray paint can provide a quick face-lift.

### **Can you really sell your property and forget about it?**

Title insurance protects you in almost all disputes over ownership. Wrapped up among the numerous charges known as closing costs when you buy or sell property is a charge for title insurance. Both the buyer and the seller of any property are well advised to take title insurance coverage to protect their interests in the property.

Historically, title insurance has not covered matters that occur after the policy date.

A deed of sale by a previous "owner" may have been a forgery or signed by a minor. A one-time owner may have been legally incompetent to execute a deed. The deed may have been signed with a power of attorney after the owner had died. There may be people with a legal claim to part of the property because of a divorce or because a child was born after the execution of a will. Or there may have been a legal judgment or levy on which the title is dependent.

Any of these can void the title, leaving your buyer not only without the property but also with additional legal costs to pay.

Title Insurance:

- Insures that the deed is good
- Insures the buyer against loss if ownership is disputed, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy.
- Nominal one time charge is based on the value of the property, and the protection remains in force until the property is sold again.

### **Extras to Help Sell Your Home – Make a List**

To help us sell your home more quickly and for the most money, take a few minutes to tour your home and make a list of the extras that may not be immediately obvious. When showing the house, we can use the list to point these out to buyers. Your list can include things like:

1. Central air-conditioning
2. A central vacuuming system
3. Lawn sprinklers
4. Built-in items in the kitchen

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5. Pull-out shelves in the kitchen cabinets
6. A convection oven
7. An industrial refrigerator
8. A security system
9. Intercoms
10. Central stereo with speakers throughout the house or outdoors
11. Gas log fireplaces or gas starters in wood-burning fireplaces
12. A pull-down ironing board
13. Pull-down stairs to a storage area
14. Garage door openers
15. New appliances, furnace, air conditioner, or water heater
16. A sump pump in the basement
17. 4 x 6 construction instead of 4 x 4
18. Extra insulation applied during construction
19. An attic fan
20. Location and number of outdoor faucets and electrical outlets
21. Quality materials used in the house, such as superior woods, metals, or stones
22. Windows with superior insulation or UV ray-blocking abilities
23. A water softener
24. A humidifier on the furnace
25. A separate water heater for any part of the house
26. Recent improvements to the house: waterproofing in the basement, new roof, any remodeling
27. Outside motion lights
28. Dead-bolt locks
29. Low-flow toilets or showers
30. Non-standard hardware, such as decorative faucets or door handles
31. Non-standard interior doors, like 6-panel doors or specially-milled designs
32. Sliding doors between rooms, especially in older homes
33. A deep sink in the laundry room for hand-washing
34. Any antiques that stay with the house-light fixtures, stained glass, or wood carvings, such as on a fireplace mantel
35. Extra outside lighting, like low lights illuminating the walk at night
36. A cedar closet
37. Alternate heat sources, like solar, steam, or heated floors
38. Maintenance-free siding
39. Custom-made items: window treatments, carpet designs, woodwork, cabinets, fireplace surrounds & mantels, or hand-painted tiles
40. Programming thermostat with a timer for energy efficient heating and cooling

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### **THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PROMOTE YOUR HOME – Second List**

It can help to point out favorable things about your home or neighborhood known only by someone who lives there. These are some suggestions for your list:

A description of the neighborhood, such as “There are four families on this block with children” or “The neighborhood has mostly retired people in it, so it’s pretty quiet” or “Both next door neighbors are really nice”

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or “The husband in that house works at night, he’s home during the day”.

Proximity to shopping, schools, churches, grocery stores, and restaurants.

- Whether or not cable is available, and if the house is already wired for it.
- Provide the number of boys or girls in the neighborhood who will mow lawns or baby-sit.
- If applicable, point out the reason other houses won’t be built close or next to your house: a creek or drainage ditch, the people next door bought two lots, or future plans for a city park nearby.
- If your area is wooded, mention the increased privacy you enjoy.
  - If you live on a busy street, make that a positive by saying, “With so much traffic going by, I don’t worry about my personal safety or being robbed”. If it’s true, say that you’ve never been robbed. Also, only if it’s true, say that you frequently see the police drive by. If the street is a main artery, that is true, in all likelihood.
- If your house has had an interesting or unusually history, write down some anecdotes.
- If you are selling your house when the flower beds or landscaping are not at their best, it could be helpful to provide pictures of your lawn showing flowers, shrubs, or trees at their peak.
- Some areas have started recycling and have several trashcans. If yours is one, say it.
- If your house was built to be energy efficient, provide an average monthly figure for utilities.



### **THREE LAST COMMENTS ABOUT SHOWING YOUR HOME**

Important Tips from Agents:

Before buyers arrive to tour your home, turn on all the lights in every room, and open drapes and blinds. Agents confirm that dark, gloomy houses turn off buyers.

If you can’t vacate the house while your agent is showing it, stay unobtrusively in the background, or better yet, out of sight. Your presence may make the buyer uncomfortable, and certainly not at liberty to make honest comments about the house. If you do have to be within earshot, let the agent do the talking by answering questions and emphasizing your home’s attributes.

If possible, arrange for pets to be completely out of the house during showings. Even though you love your pet dearly, the sight of a cat or dog stretched out on the bed or sofa may put off strangers. Watching them groom their coats may only remind buyers of all the pet hair that surely must be in the carpets and drapes!

Also, if your dog doesn’t like strangers in the house even though you’re with him – let’s say, on the porch during a showing – his snarling presence may distract nervous buyers and hurry them through your house, leaving them with a bad impression.

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You have done your best – now let your house sell itself with the help of Mike & Gayle's professional team of Real Estate Professionals as they make the process smooth, efficient and cost-effective.

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