

How To Make Your Home More Attractive To Buyers

By Cynthia Jones

Potential buyers form their initial impression of a home within the first 15 seconds. Real estate experts advise sellers to take an objective tour of their home, notebook in hand, and make notes on anything that could be perceived as a negative.

One of the most important steps you can take is to give your home more “curb appeal.” That means improving the landscaping, painting the exterior, and repairing cracks in driveways and walks. You don't want to lose potential buyers before they even see the inside of your home. Curb appeal is enhanced by making sure the lawn and shrubs are neatly trimmed and by planting a few flowers to give your yard more color. Consider adding more shrubs, outdoor lighting, a bench or a fountain to make the landscape more interesting.

Make sure the front entrance is clean and inviting. Paint the front door, install a new doorknob, and put out a fresh doormat. A couple of plants, a wreath, or an attractive light fixture can make an entrance much more appealing. You might consider painting the front door a darker color like red or blue, which will attract more attention from the street. Clean all exterior windows and remove debris from gutters, downspouts and trees. Get rid of chipped trim, faded canopies and porch railings that are worn or dated. Stow lawn tools, garden hoses and other equipment in organized racks in the garage or backyard. Mow the lawn regularly and keep flowerbeds free of weeds. Dispose of fallen leaves and get rid of any broken or low hanging tree branches near the roof.

Once you've placed the house on the market begin clearing the garage and closets of clutter. Pack out-of-season clothes in trunks or wardrobe boxes and store in the garage. The idea is to create a roomy feel when potential buyers open closet and cabinet doors.

If you need to repaint interior or exterior walls use neutral colors and window treatments. You don't want buyers to be turned off by bold colors or a decorating scheme that distracts their attention from other important features of your home.

Bathrooms should be clean and organized. Place toiletries, hair dryers and miscellaneous items in baskets or plastic containers that can be stored out of sight and retrieved easily when needed. Replace worn shower curtains and bath rugs. Make sure that faucets work and that toilets are flushing properly.

Clean kitchen counters and stovetop and wipe fingerprints from the refrigerator door, wall outlets and light switches. Store small appliances like toasters, mixers and blenders in the pantry or a cupboard. The counters should appear spacious and uncluttered but you should leave a few decorative items such as a fruit bowl or colorful jars filled with pasta. Replace worn kitchen towels and potholders with new ones. Attractive placemats, napkin rings and plates on a dining table can give the room a more sophisticated yet lived-in

look.

Get your carpets professionally cleaned and wax all wood floors. Replace worn linoleum or tiles in kitchens and bathrooms. Check all doorknobs and cabinet pulls to make sure they are clean and in proper working order. Be vigilant in eliminating dust and any odors from tobacco, mildew, pets or cooking. Organize magazines, toys and sports equipment in baskets, bins and other containers.

Take a tour of model homes in your area to pick up decorating tricks you can use to give your home a look of casual sophistication. Many of the accessories used by decorators are purchased inexpensively at home decor stores. For example, a woven basket filled with hand towels, washcloths and scented soaps is more attractive in a bathroom than a plain wall shelf. Even if your bathroom is small, it's easy to create a more luxurious feeling with new towels, an elegant shower curtain, plants and chic countertop accessories.

Small touches can make a big difference. You may notice in model homes that small bedrooms frequently have a twin bed pushed against a wall in the corner with decorative pillows taking the place of a headboard. This modern look imparts a more spacious feel. By placing a beautiful fabric under a glass table you'll instantly achieve a new look and the glass will keep the fabric clean. Dried flowers can be displayed with leaves, fruit, tree branches and other elements of nature to create beautiful table centerpieces. Visit your florist or a local craft supply store for ideas.

Try to look at your home objectively through a buyer's eyes and listen carefully to any suggestions that your real estate agent advises. A few simple improvements to enhance the exterior and interior appearance of your home can translate into a higher selling price.