



“DRESS YOUR HOUSE FOR SUCCESS”

YOU ONLY GET ONE CHANCE TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Nothing pays dividends to Sellers of a house quite like elbow grease. Good housekeeping and repair, spaciousness, and pleasant aromas bring top dollar and fast sales. Conversely, the demons to the business of home selling are dirt, lack of light and space, too much deferred maintenance, and bad odors.

If you're planning to put your home on the market, you want your property to look its best. This checklist pinpoints specific items around the home that can be the key to a successful sale. The list is extensive, but the most salable properties usually reflect attention to each of the areas discussed. If your home needs extensive work and time of funds are limited, it may not be practical to cover all the points, but do the best job possible.

SPRUCE UP OUTSIDE

PAINT: Few things you can do will enhance the salability of your house quite as much as painting the outside. Before painting, scrape or water-blast any blistered or peeling paint; repair gutters and downspouts; and replace wood showing dry rot. Wood, trim, gutters, and wrought iron should receive primary attention.

FRONT ENTRY: Give special care to this area. This is where Buyers get their first opportunity to make a close inspection, and they will pick it apart looking for flaws, so eliminate them. All woodwork should be freshly and neatly painted, including the door if necessary. Replace a badly worn or broken doorbell button. Polish any door brass. Paint or replace an unsightly mailbox. Put out a new or clean doormat.

YARD: Mow and trim the lawn. Weed flower beds; remove or replace dead plants or trees. Water regularly during the growing season. Make sure that no underlying plastic is exposed, that rocks and sand are tidy and that weeds and grass are removed.

DRIVEWAY, GARAGE/CARPORT: Clean up grease or oil spots; remove the soil at least, if not the stains. See that the garage door opens freely, and if you have an automatic door opener, make sure it is in good working order. If possible, don't park cars in front of the house or in the driveway, and try to have very few parked on the street near the house. Recreational vehicles or boats should be in the garage or carport or behind a fence in the back. Derelict cars or ones being overhauled should not be visible from the street and preferably should not even be present.

FENCE: A few missing stakes or slates are real eyesores to Buyers. Yet usually they are inexpensive and easy to fix. Repair, paint, or stain as necessary.

ROOF: Remove any visible debris or toys. Straighten the TV antenna if necessary. Remove any tree branches bearing on the roof.

AIR CONDITIONER: Paint or replace any rusted exposed metal. Correct improper draining.

PATIO: A nice spread of outdoor furniture looks very appealing. If necessary, borrow some from a friend to enhance the showability of your property.

SWIMMING POOL: Adjust chemicals until the pool sparkles. Hose dust and cobwebs from filtration equipment. Store chemicals and tools neatly.

WINDOWS: Repair or replace torn or bent screens. As a last resort, remove them entirely; it's better to have no screens than to have unsightly ones. Replace any cracked or broken panes. Also, notice foliage near windows. A window framed in ivy can give a warm, homey feeling, but cut it back if the foliage is restricting the light coming into the room. Drapery rods should be affixed firmly to walls and work smoothly; draperies should be reasonably clean and hang properly.

DOORS: Repair or replace doors with holes. One method of repair short of replacement is to cover a hole with a mirror or a piece of paneling. Check to see that all doors open and close freely, including closet doors and patio or sliding glass doors. Oil any squeaky doors. Tighten the hardware, particularly doorknobs. And while you're doing this kind of adjustment, tighten hardware on kitchen and bathroom cabinets, too.

WALLS: As with the exterior, painting indoors will pay dividends out of all proportion to the time and effort spent. Wallpaper should be clean and adhere smoothly to walls. Patch all major holes in wallboard and plaster. Loose handrails on stairways should be secured firmly to walls. Clean or paint air-vent covers.

FLOORS: Repair or replace missing or damaged pieces of tile; polish if needed. Repair of a loose stair place or loose carpeting on a stairway is a top priority.

CARPET: Steam cleaning is the best answer for soiled carpets; shampooing seldom does the job where showability is concerned. If pet odors are present, clean the carpet some time before your home is placed on the market to be sure the odors have been eliminated. Loose carpet should be anchored properly.

LIGHTS: Every light socket in and around the house should have a good bulb of adequate wattage. Don't overload those outside and in the garage. Also, remember the utility room, halls, closets, over the kitchen sink, and in the oven and exhaust hood.

SWITCHES AND FIXTURES: Repair or replace wall switches, outlets, and light fixtures that don't work. Replace any broken switch plates. Note: If you are not fully competent to handle these repairs, call in a professional electrician.

APPLIANCES: Those that will be sold with the home should be in good working condition. If specific equipment does not work and you do not intend to repair it, point this out.

PLUMBING: Badly chipped or irreversibly stained sinks and tubs should be re-enameled, patched or replaced. Leaky or excessively noisy toilets should be fixed, as well as dripping faucets.

SPRINKLER SYSTEMS: These should be working properly with no defective heads.

A SPACIOUS LOOK: One of the best and least expensive ways to improve the showability of your home is to open up as much space as possible. Openness stimulates positive feelings in Buyers. Overstuffed rooms or closets give the impression of being smaller than they really are. You can't change the size of what you have, but you can try to present it in a pleasing way.

CLOSETS AND STORAGE AREAS: One of the most frequently voiced requirements of Buyers is for closet and storage space. Open up your storage areas by getting rid of items you aren't using.

COUNTERS AND CABINETS: The same principle applies here: overcrowding gives the impression of inadequacy. This applies to bathrooms and kitchens, with the kitchen being the most important. Store infrequently used countertop appliances. Do some prudent discarding in cabinets.

GARAGE: Buyers will pay a premium for a garage if they can visualize it being of value to them, but it's hard to sell the virtues of a garage when it's filled to overflowing. If your garage has become a two-car attic, move the excess to a miniwarehouse for the duration.

BATHROOM: Few places in the home can get so dirty so fast and yet few things will "unsell" a house as fast as dirty baths. Vanity, sink, faucet hardware, and mirror are the focal points. But don't forget other potential problems: soap residue in the shower, a moldy shower curtain, accumulated dirt in the track of a sliding shower door, soiled or missing grout, stained toilet bowls, and dirty or battered bathmats.

KITCHEN: Like bathrooms, kitchens get dirty all by themselves. Most Buyers will inspect this area carefully, so extra time invested here is well spent. Clean the stove inside and out. Replace badly stained or corroded reflector plates under the heating elements on the electric range tops. Don't neglect the kitchen exhaust hood; buyers frequently check this area as clue to general housekeeping.

WINDOWS: Clean windows are an absolute necessity if a house is to look its best, yet this is very often overlooked.

WATER HEATER AND SOFTENER: Perhaps because it is so unusual, a sparkling clean water heater or water softener really impress Buyers – and it takes so little time and effort.

SNIFF OUT ODORS

WET TOWELS AND WASHCLOTHS: Residents of a home frequently aren't aware of what a potential source of bad odor these are. Replace all used towels with fresh ones before a showing.

SOILED CLOTHES: When the house is being shown, keep dirty laundry out of the living area; move it to the utility room, garage, or storage area. This applies especially to a diaper pail.

GARBAGE: Take all trash and garbage out of the house, particularly any food-related discards from the kitchen. And make sure no potatoes or onions are going bad under the sink or in the pantry.

SEWER GAS IN THE HOUSE: Do whatever necessary to correct this problem before house is placed on the market.

CATS AND DOGS: As a first step, move the cat's litter box out of the house. And be sure to clean up after the dog before any showings.

REMINDERS

VALUABLES: You may have valuable possessions that you like to display in your home, but when the house is being shown to strangers is not the time. Never leave small valuable items lying around on counters or visible in closets or cabinets. Get them out of sight, if not out of the house. Don't invite a problem.

EXCLUSION FROM THE SALE: Make a note now of the items you do not intend to include with the sale of the house. Freestanding items generally are not included, but when in doubt spell it out.

KEYS: As you are reading the house for market, make a note to gather all the keys for the house, including keys for doors, deadbolts, garage doors, and any padlocks around the property, after all, the new owner will need these.

INSTRUCTION MANUALS: As with keys, gather manuals and warranties for the mechanical equipment in the house kitchen appliances, water heater and softener, air conditioning and heating units, evaporative cooling units, pool and filtration equipment, and electronic air filters.

TIPS FOR SHOWING

LIGHT: Open all draperies unless there is an objectionable view. In most rooms you should turn on lights for a bright and cheerful look. Lamps and indirect lighting are preferable, but use overhead lights if that's all there is in a room.

LIGHT SWITCHES: If some wall switches operate wall outlets, plug in a lamp or radio to demonstrate that the switch works. When a Buyer flips a switch and nothing happens, he instinctively suspects a problem

AROMAS: Set out some fresh flowers, both for their appearance and fragrance. Bake cookies or bread, or cook a beef roast; don't cook seafood or strong-smelling vegetables like cabbage or cauliflower.

CLOSETS: Keep door closed except for walk-in closets. Have those doors slightly ajar and turn on the lights to draw attention to this special feature.

POSTERS AND SIGNS: We live in a tolerant age, but don't take chance of offending a potential Buyer. Remove art signs and posters that might be considered offensive or controversial.

ASHTRAYS: Dirty ashtrays are both unsightly and a source of objectionable odor to nonsmokers. Keep them clean.

UTILITY BILLS: Have copies of the past 12 months' bills available, or at least a written summary of the amounts paid monthly for that period.

PETS: Get them out of the house, if not off the property. Some people don't like dogs, and nobody likes muddy pawprints on a clean suit or dress. Cats can be just as objectionable to the person who doesn't like them or is allergic to them and invariably a cat will single out the cat hater as a rubbing post.

MUSIC: Soft background music will help create a relaxed mood that prompts Buyers to linger and enjoy. But it's better to have no music at all than to have it too loud. And never have the TV on when the house is being shown.

YOUR PRESENCE: Most Buyers will not relax and closely inspect the home if the owners are present. So try to arrange to turn your house over to the real estate agent for showings. If you must retain at the home, refrain from talking unless question are directed to you. Trust the agent's professional abilities.

ONE FINAL NOTE: The legal principal of "caveat emperor" (let the buyer beware) is dead or dying. We are living in an age on consumerism, and it's hard to find a court that won't favor the Buyer in a dispute. In fact, consumer groups and many government agencies are taking the posture that the Seller must disclose everything.

If you have a problem in your home, don't mask it. A common example is a homeowner who spraypaints a ceiling to cover water stains caused by a leaking roof. If you have a major problem you intend to correct, be candid about it. Sure, some people will be turned off by a prospect of a major repair, but most Buyers who otherwise like the home will be philosophical about a problem openly displayed. And usually they will discount the price they offer by far less than the cost of the repair. Se be forewarned: hell hath no fury like a Buyer burned...