



How to Prepare Your House to Get the Best Price

There are certain things you can do to increase your chances of selling your home along with bringing the highest price possible. Do all or as many as possible to make a good FIRST IMPRESSION!

Buying a house is the same process as falling “madly” in love. All houses will most likely meet the buyer’s logical criteria, but what matters the most is how the buyer feels about the house. Just as when people first meet, the first few seconds when a buyer “meets” the house are critical. You need to attract the buyer by presenting the house in the best way. As a seller, you must stop feeling passionate and start thinking “retail”.

Making the transition to thinking of the home as a product is difficult when there are many loving memories of occasions and people associated with the house. To make a successful transaction, you must emotionally divorce yourself from the house first and then think of your home as a “retail” product if you want to sell it at a retail price. The logic some home sellers have is “let the buyer make an offer and then I will negotiate the price”. Your home must first ATTRACT the buyer- for without an interested buyer, there is NO negotiation.

The first impression is critical. If the first impression (the exterior) is not good, there is no second impression (the interior). The exterior and the first few rooms need to be focused on to maximize the buyer’s first impression. Your home already satisfies most of the buyer’s parameters; otherwise they wouldn’t be there to view your home more closely. They are feeling with their hearts, not thinking with their heads when they drive up to your home. As soon as the buyer sees something negative, the feeling mode shifts into the thinking mode. Buyers typically exaggerate both the time and the cost of an improvement.

Most buyers do not have the vision (those that do expect to get a good deal). Most sellers do not want to give a good deal. For you to get a good deal, your home must be properly prepared for that first impression.

Outside:

- Peeling Paint- it must be painted.
- Hose down or power wash dirty siding
- Remove holiday decorations if the season has passed.
- Replace any broken screens and windows and replace any broken seals.
- Repair rotting trim.
- Cut back trees that are too close to the house.
- Clean the windows- sparkling windows have the impression of a well-maintained home.
- Lawn and shrubs should be well trimmed.

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- Make sure the front door does not show excessive wear.
- Clean gutters and downspouts- this would give the impression that the house hasn't been taken care of before the buyer even gets inside.
- Fencing- Replace rotting sections and paint peeling areas. You may want to remove the fence if you don't want to fix it.
- Any mold, mildew, moss, or algae - power wash or scrub with a diluted solution of bleach and water.
- Masonry- Check for loose or missing mortar and fix it.
- Exterior Lighting- lights must sparkle. It is a subtle, but powerful influence. New brass lighting is inexpensive.
- Doorbell must work.
- Replace any burned out bulbs.
- Mailbox- first part of the impression. Replace any leaning, decapitated, rusted or dented mailboxes.
- House numbers should be clearly visible. Inexpensive #'s are fine, visibility is important

Landscaping:

- Go to the curb and look at your home as a buyer would for the first time. Landscaping should support the architecture, not obscure it. Landscaping is the best return for the money spent. Windows are an important part of architecture and shrubs should not cover them. Prune shrubs to windowsill height if possible. Green should be left on top! If removing shrubs, roots may be left.
- Walkways should be cleared of overhanging shrubs or groundcover.
- Garden beds should be freed of weeds.
- Remove any pet waste.
- Lawn ornaments should be removed (yes, no more pink flamingos!)
- Swimming Pools- can be a deal maker or deal breaker. In warm weather create a passionate selling environment with accessories such as lawn furniture and pool toys. Stow the equipment. Clean the area around the pool. Maintain the water- it must be clear and clean.
- Ponds- must be maintained or they are a BIG negative.
- Trash Cans- Have creative places to keep the trash. Front porches are a bad choice. Cans should be clean and without odor.
- Toys outside-Toys scattered about the yard are a distraction for buyers; try packing some away, both inside and outside.
- Remove any play gym or swing set if it's in poor condition.
- Driveway- should be in good repair. Find off-site storage for trucks, trailers, campers, boats and excess vehicles. Park vehicles in garage. If not, it leaves the impression that there's not enough room.
- Stow hoses, bikes, toys, etc... in garage. Remove snow, leaves and other debris.
- Porches-patios-decks- With furniture, these spaces function as an additional room so set up furniture if it has been stored.
- Remove broken grills and replace torn screens.



- Flowering plants or small shrubs in containers are attractive.
- Front Door- Buyers almost always enter through the front door- this is where the buying decision is made. The door must be clean and painted. Fingerprints, nose prints, and paw prints must be removed. Clean brass hardware (try 0000 steel wool dipped in water). A decorative wreath suitable for the season is an eye-catching accessory if the door is plain.
- Storm door- paint or replace or remove if not in good condition. The doormat is important too. Replace it if in poor condition.
- Finally, a pot of colorful flowers near the front door welcomes the buyer and focuses attention to the front door.
- Hummingbird feeders and birdhouses create a pleasant mood.

The Interior:

This is the next critical point in the purchase process. The buying decision is made at 2 points: at the curb and once a buyer steps inside the front door. There is only one chance to make that first impression, and it is made within seconds of walking in the front door. The 4 most important words for the interior of a home are: Clean, Neat, Light, and Bright. A neat house does not have distractions like many knick-knacks, magazines, medicines on the counter, photos on the fridge, etc... People are easily distracted by collections. Every accessory should support the goal of selling the home instead of providing continued pleasure or convenience to you, the home seller.

Lighting- A light filled house lets buyers appreciate the views and lets natural light enter. You want to sell the lifestyle as well as the layout and square footage. A brightly lit house lifts the buyer's spirits. Homes with views of mountains, woods, water, etc... command a greater price than the neighbors without a view.

- Foyer- Remove dead leaves from plants, dust artificial plants and flowers, one rug only, maximum one coat on coat rack, clean the light fixture and bulbs. Remove any furniture, which makes the space feel tight.
- Staircase- make sure the staircase is in good repair, with no loose railings or worn-out carpet. Remove items on the steps. No fingerprints on the sloping ceiling.
- Living Room- Most people have difficulty visualizing space so you have to help the buyer envision himself or herself living in the house. If there is too much seating in the room some may be moved to another room, the basement, or even a rented storage area to avoid the look of being too crowded. The cost of a storage unit is less expensive than not selling your house. Does the furniture placement block the view of the length of the room?
- Family photos can be in the room if they are not the focal point. Collections attract the buyer's attention and distract the buyer from what is being sold.
- 2-3 items can stay on an end table with a lamp. Several items can stay on a mantel, provided they are grouped and not strung across the shelf. Dirt is a MAJOR turnoff. Clean the carpeting and furniture if necessary. Too many rugs create a distraction.



- Fireplace- this is a hot spot for selling a home. It should have a “clean face”. The fireplace should be highlighted; having too many accessories around it detracts. It must look like it can be used, not a storage area or hold a flower arrangement. Remove trophies.
- Windows- Clean both inside and outside. Remove outdated draperies, rods and hardware. Repair nail holes in the wall, if hardware has been removed.
- Ceiling- if the ceiling is discolored from a previous leak, it MUST be painted. Buyers are afraid of water leaks. If the ceiling is discolored from nicotine, paint it.
- Walls-Trim: Nicotine stains on the walls are a big negative. Paint and clean the walls and please smoke outside while the house is on the market. Paint the walls if the current color is outdated or marred. Paint a color that is in style or stick with a neutral cream or gray. Baseboards need to be clean!
- Floors- Carpeting that is in poor condition, whether faded or worn, should be removed and/or replaced. Bare wood floors are preferable to carpeting, but have them cleaned. If you are replacing the carpet, choose a NEUTRAL color.
- Dining Room** - should evoke emotions concerning wonderful meals and great conversations. Center the table under the light fixture. Consider removing a leaf and some chairs if the room is tight. No plastic wrappings on chairs. Set the table only if the room is boring, otherwise it draws too much attention away from the room. A runner can be made by folding a tablecloth in thirds or lining up placemats end-to-end. Place some decorative items in the center, flowers are always nice. The light fixtures and bulbs should be sparkling clean.
- Kitchen** - it is VERY important that the kitchen be both clean and neat. Appliances should be operational. Clean or replace drip pans if they are dirty. Clean every surface that may be greasy. Arrange a FEW attractive items on the counter. Refrigerators should have ONE item on the top and should have NOTHING on the front. Cabinets must be bare and interiors must be neat. Please refrain from cooking cauliflower, curry dishes, etc.. when the house is on the market. Baking cookies or bread before a showing may enhance the smell of the kitchen- just don't expect it to cover up odors. The floor should be replaced if it's in poor condition. The pet's food dishes should not take up more room than your table and chairs!
- Family Room/Den** - Make sure there is easy access to glass door (if there is one), even if you don't use it. Keep rearranging the furniture until the room is the “star” and not the furniture. Sometimes there are too many pieces; pick one to eliminate and many new possibilities are created. Lamp shades near the entrance block the view of the room, so move those lamps. Visual Stimulation = a nice way to say Clutter- it spells confusion for buyers. Two or three accessories on a table are sufficient. Display only the current issue of each magazine you subscribe to. A “lived in” environment is too distracting to the buyer.
- There should be nothing on top of or in front of the books in a bookcase, and all book spines should be facing out. Of course, all the recommendations for ceilings, floors, walls, trim, windows, and lighting are consistent here as well.
- Laundry Room** - Neat and bright are the two most important criteria for the laundry room. Dirty, smelly, laundry, especially athletic accessories should not be in evidence. Laundry tub should be clean as possible. Pitch all empty containers.



- Powder Room** - This bathroom is generally the guest bathroom and should look “dressed up” for a guest. Roll up a small pile of 3-5 fingertip towels, a dish of decorative soap, a vase with silk flowers or some pretty bottles for accessories. It is important that this room be CLEAN, neat and light. No hair left behind. Clean every surface, and replace the toilet seat if it is worn or scratched and looks dirty. Stow toothpaste, mouthwash, pill bottles, deodorant, hair grooming supplies, and make up. Re-caulk and re-grout where needed (skinny caulk). Replace any dripping faucets. Eliminate rust stains using a rust remover. Clean the shower curtain and liner. Hang nice towels, neatly folded. Remove the litter box.
- Master Bedroom** - Should look like a room for sleeping and romance. End tables can have a few books and magazines, not an entire library. Remove laundry piles, remove the ironing board, remove the treadmill or exercise bike, remove any desk (it indicates that there is not enough room in the house. Make the bed. Stow all jewelry and stray change.
- Reorganize closets; remove unused hangers, plastic bags, and excess clutter. Open blinds, shades, shutters, or drapes.
- Hide drugs, guns, and jewelry.
- Other bedrooms- unless the bedrooms are in terrible disrepair, the sale will probably not be killed here. There is a different standard for additional rooms than for master bedrooms. Make the beds, clear the clutter. Put away anything private in nature. If the room is used primarily as a warehouse, stow those items elsewhere.
- Basement** - 4 words: Pitch-Pack-and Sweep. Provide access to the mechanicals for buyers to check them out. Buyers really shy away from purchasing a home with mechanical or electrical defects. A musty smell is a big turnoff to buyers. Use a dehumidifier in warm weather. It is especially important to fully disclose any water problems.
- Steps to the basement must be cleared of things “on the way down”. All bulbs should be in working order. If you have a workshop, the workbench should be neat. The time for emotional attachments to scraps of wood and school projects is over (if it’s not moving to the new house, pitch, sell, or donate it).
- Garage- if the space appears to crowded for what it is designed for, buyers will get the impression that there is not enough storage space. Stow and hang equipment and bikes around the perimeter or ceiling, or remove them altogether and store elsewhere. Oil stains can be absorbed with kitty litter and the discoloration may be removed with a granular detergent.
- The garage door should be operational. If it is not, repair or remove it. Close the garage door for showings!

IMPORTANT INFLUENCES

Odors, pets, and your presence during a showing are as important as clean gutters. Buying a house is an emotional decision and every detail is important. Buyers need to think of the house as their “own” home, not yours. Also, if you are home, buyers will be constrained in their comments to the agent not allowing the agent to overcome any objections. If you must remain in the house, try to stay in one area. Never, never follow a buyer



around the house, volunteer information, or answer any questions the buyer may have. The longer the buyers stay in your home, the better chance of them buying your home. They will not stay long if you are there.

- Pets- all animals capture the buyer's attention, whether it is positive or negative. You should arrange to have a distracting pet isolated from buyers. Animal odors can be the single most influential negative impact for a sale.
- Cat urine odors are the biggest turnoff. Smoke odor is the second biggest turnoff. Musty odors are worrisome because they may indicate a water problem. Remove any ashtrays and take out the trash.
- Litter boxes must be clean, and the surrounding area swept free of litter.

- Mood Enhancers- A fire in the fireplace on a cool day evokes warm feelings (we suggest this with a gas fireplace). The air conditioner keeps the buyer from wilting on warm days. Soft music enhances the buyer's mood. Turn on all lights, even on a sunny day. If it is an evening showing, make sure outside lights are on. Raise the shades and open the blinds. Put toilet seats and lids down. Turn off the television. Pour vanilla or cinnamon on a cookie sheet and warm the oven to produce the sweet smell of cookies.

Playing catch up to sell a house is called "deferred maintenance". This maintenance a buyer expects to have done to the house to have market value. Performing deferred maintenance brings a house to market value, NOT MORE. How to tackle this job: Start at the beginning of a buyer's tour. Progress task by task in small increments.