



Getting Ready for Showings

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Simple Tips for Better Home Showings

- 1. Remove clutter and clear off counters.** Throw out stacks of newspapers and magazines and stow away most of your small decorative items. Put excess furniture in storage, and remove out-of-season clothing items that are cramping closet space. Don't forget to clean out the garage, too.
- 2. Wash your windows and screens.** This will help get more light into the interior of the home.
- 3. Keep everything extra clean.** A clean house will make a strong first impression and send a message to buyers that the home has been well-cared for. Wash fingerprints from light switch plates, mop and wax floors, and clean the stove and refrigerator. Polish your doorknobs and address numbers. It's worth hiring a cleaning service if you can afford it.
- 4. Get rid of smells.** Clean carpeting and drapes to eliminate cooking odors, smoke, and pet smells. Open the windows to air out the house. Potpourri or scented candles will help.
- 5. Brighten your rooms.** Put higher wattage bulbs in light fixtures to brighten up rooms and basements. Replace any burned-out bulbs in closets. Clean the walls, or better yet, brush on a fresh coat of neutral color paint.
- 6. Don't disregard minor repairs.** Small problems such as sticky doors, torn screens, cracked caulking, or a dripping faucet may seem trivial, but they'll give buyers the impression that the house isn't well-maintained.
- 7. Tidy your yard.** Cut the grass, rake the leaves, add new mulch, trim the bushes, edge the walkways, and clean the gutters. For added curb appeal, place a pot of bright flowers near the entryway.
- 8. Patch holes.** Repair any holes in your driveway and reapply sealant, if applicable.
- 9. Add a touch of color in the living room.** A colored afghan or throw on the couch will jazz up a dull room. Buy new accent pillows for the sofa.
- 10. Buy a flowering plant and put it near a window you pass by frequently.**
- 11. Make centerpieces for your tables.** Use brightly colored fruit or flowers.
- 12. Set the scene.** Set the table with fancy dishes and candles, and create other vignettes throughout the home to help buyers picture living there. For example, in the basement you might display a chess game in progress.
- 13. Replace heavy curtains with sheer ones that let in more light.** Show off the view if you have one.
- 14. Accentuate the fireplace.** Lay fresh logs in the fireplace or put a basket of flowers there if it's not in use.
- 15. Make the bathrooms feel luxurious.** Put away those old towels and toothbrushes. When buyers enter your bathroom, they should feel pampered. Add a new shower curtain, new towels, and fancy guest soaps. Make sure your personal toiletry items are out of sight.
- 16. Send your pets to a neighbor or take them outside.** If that's not possible, crate them or confine them to one room (ideally in the basement), and let the real estate practitioner know where they'll be to eliminate surprises.
- 17. Lock up valuables, jewelry, and money.** While a real estate salesperson will be on site during the showing or open house, it's impossible to watch everyone all the time.
- 18. Leave the home.** It's usually best if the sellers are not at home. It's awkward for prospective buyers to look in your closets and express their opinions of your home with you there.



Spring Cleaning Checklist

With spring selling season arriving, take the time now to polish your home to perfection.

1. Let the sun in. Make any room look brighter with clean blinds and windows. Mix a solution of one part white vinegar to eight parts water, plus a drop or two of liquid dishwashing liquid, for a green window cleaner. Spray on and wipe with newspaper to avoid streaks. (Washing on a cloudy day also reduces streaking.)

Showing tip: Replace heavy drapes with lightweight shears during warmer months to give a room a brighter, lighter feel for prospective buyers.

2. Sniff out smells. Check the drip tray underneath your refrigerator and wash out any standing water from defrosting. Remove inside odors by washing the inside of the fridge with a baking soda and water solution. Boil lemon juice in your microwave and add it to your dishwasher to eliminate bad smells. Also, put the lemon rinds down the disposal. Add activated charcoal in the fridge to keep odors at bay.

Showing tip: Make the fridge smell fresh instantly with cotton balls soaked in vanilla extract or orange juice.

3. Make your bed better. Vacuum mattresses and box springs, and then rotate and flip over. Do the same for removable furniture cushions. This is also a great time to wash or dry-clean the dust ruffle and mattress pad.

Showing tip: Add new loft to a lumpy comforter by having two people vigorously shake the quilt up and down to redistribute stuffing.

4. Clean those coils. Improve energy efficiency by vacuuming grates, coils, and condensers in your furnace, stove, and refrigerator (either underneath or in back). If a vacuum won't reach, try a rag tied to a yardstick.

Showing tip: Shut some air conditioning vents on the first floor or basement so that more air will reach and cool the second floor. Reverse the process in winter for heat vents.

5. Wash the walls. Grease, smoke, and dust can adhere to walls and make even the best decorating look dingy. Wash walls using a general-purpose cleaner with hot water. Start at the top of the wall to avoid drips and in a corner so that you wash one wall at a time. Rinse the mop head frequently in clean water. And don't press too hard because flat latex paint won't absorb too much water.

Showing tip: Resist the temptation to spot-clean walls since it will make the rest of the wall look dingy.

How to Get an Offer on Your Home

1. Price it right. Set a price at the lower end of your property's realistic price range.

2. Prepare for visitors. Get your house market ready at least two weeks before you begin showing it.

3. Be flexible about showings. It's often disruptive to have a house ready to show at the spur of the moment. But the more amenable you can be about letting people see your home, the sooner you'll find a buyer.

4. Anticipate the offers. Decide in advance what price and terms you'll find acceptable.

5. Don't refuse to drop the price. If your home has been on the market for more than 30 days without an offer, you should be prepared to at least consider lowering your asking price.



8 Quick Fixes to Increase Value

To attract buyers, sellers must up the ante to convince them that their property offers what many want most — top value for dollar expended. Here are eight fast fixes:

- 1. Buff up curb appeal.** You've heard it before, but it's critical to get buyers to want to look on the inside. Be objective. View listings from the street. Check the condition of the landscaping, paint, roof, shutters, front door, knocker, windows, house number, and even how window treatments look from the outside. Add something special — such as big flower pots or an antique bench — to help viewers remember house A from B.
- 2. Enrich with color.** Paint's cheap, but forget the adage that it must be white or neutral. Just don't let sellers get too avant-garde with jarring pinks, oranges, and purples. Recommend soft colors that say "welcome," lead the eye from room to room, and flatter skin tones. Think soft yellows and pale greens. Tint ceilings a lighter shade.
- 3. Upgrade the kitchen and bathroom.** These make-or-break rooms can spur a sale. But besides making each squeaky clean and clutter-free, update the pulls, sinks, and faucets. In a kitchen, add one cool appliance, such as an espresso maker. In the bathroom, hang a flat-screen TV to mimic a hotel. Room service, anyone?
- 4. Add old-world patina.** Make Andrea Palladio proud. Install crown molding at least six to nine inches in depth, proportional to the room's size, and architecturally compatible. For ceilings nine feet high or higher, add dentil detailing, small tooth-shaped blocks used as a repeating ornament. It's all in the details, after all.
- 5. Screen hardwood floors.** Buyers favor wood over carpet, but refinishing is costly and time-consuming. Screening cuts dust, time, and expense. What it entails: a light sanding, not a full stripping of color or polyurethane, then a coat of finish.
- 6. Clean out, organize closets.** Get sorting — organize your piles into "don't need," "haven't worn," and "keep." Closets must be only half-full so buyers can visualize fitting their stuff in.
- 7. Update window treatments.** Buyers want light and views, not dated, fancy-schmancy drapes that darken. To diffuse light and add privacy, consider energy-efficient shades and blinds.
- 8. Hire a home inspector.** Do a preemptive strike, since busy home owners seek maintenance-free living. Fix problems before you list the home and then display receipts and wait for buyers to offer kudos to sellers for being so responsible.

Sources: Ernie Roth, Roth Interiors, Los Angeles; Angel Petragallo, ABR®, Group One, Boise, Idaho; Melissa Galt, Galt Interiors, Atlanta; Steve Kleiman, CEO, Oakington Realty, Houston; Sid Davis, Sid Davis & Associates, Farmington, Utah, and author of First-Time Homeowners' Survival Guide (Amacom, 2007); Steve Hochman, Friendly Note Buyers, Roxbury, N.Y.; Margi Kyle, designer and spokesperson for Hunter Douglas.



How to Hold a Successful Garage Sale

Garage sales can be a great way to get rid of clutter — and earn a little extra cash — before you sell your home. But make sure the timing is right. Garage sales can take on a life of their own, and it might not be the best use of your energy right before putting your home on the market. Follow these tips for a successful sale.

- 1. Don't wait until the last minute.** You don't want to be scrambling to hold a garage sale the week before an open house. Depending on how long you've lived in the home and how much stuff you have to sell, planning a garage sale can demand a lot of time and energy.
- 2. Get a permit.** Most municipalities will require you to obtain a special permit or license in order to hold a garage sale. The permits are often free or very inexpensive, but still require you to register with the city.
- 3. See if neighbors want to join in.** You can turn your garage sale into a block-wide event and lure more shoppers if you team up with neighbors. However, a permit may be necessary for each home owner, even if it's a group event.
- 4. Schedule the sale.** Sales on Saturdays and Sundays will generate the most traffic, especially if the weather cooperates. Start the sale early, 8 a.m. or 9 a.m. is best, and be prepared for early birds.
- 5. Advertise.** Place an ad in free classified papers and Web sites, and in your local newspapers. Include the dates, time, and address. Let the public know if certain types of items will be sold, such as baby clothes, furniture, or weightlifting equipment. On the day of the sale, balloons and signs with prominent arrows will help to grab the attention of passersby.
- 6. Price your goods.** Lay out everything that you plan to sell, and attach prices with removable stickers. Remember, garage sales are supposed to be bargains, so try to be objective as you set prices. Assign simple prices to your goods: 50 cents, 3 for \$1, \$5, \$10, etc.
- 7. If it's really junk, don't sell it.** Decide what's worth selling and what's not. If it's really garbage, then throw it away. Broken appliances, for example, should be tossed. (Know where a nearby electrical outlet is, in case a customer wants to make sure something works.)
- 8. Check for mistakes.** Make sure that items you want to keep don't accidentally end up in the garage sale pile.
- 9. Create an organized display.** Lay out your items by category, and display neatly so customers don't have to dig through boxes.
- 10. Stock up on bags and newspapers.** People who buy many small items will appreciate a bag to carry their goods. Newspapers are handy for wrapping fragile items.
- 11. Manage your money.** Make a trip to the bank to get ample change for your cashbox. Throughout the sale, keep a close eye on your cash; never leave the cashbox unattended. It's smart to have one person who manages the money throughout the day, keeping a tally of what was purchased and for how much. Keep a calculator nearby.
- 12. Prepare for your home sale.** Donate the remaining stuff or sell it to a resale shop. Now that all of your clutter is cleared out, it's time to focus on preparing your house for a successful sale!



When an Appointment is Made

Agents from many real estate firms will want to show your home. Please allow any agent who calls to show your home at the suggested time. If you are not frequently available, it is suggested that you allow a lockbox to be installed on your door. You will increase your odds for a sale by allowing more qualified buyers to see your home. You do not want to miss an out-of-town transferee because your home was not able to be shown.

During a showing:

- Open all draperies and window shades during daylight hours.
- Turn on all lights and replace bulbs with high wattage bulbs where needed.
- Open windows one half hour before showing to circulate fresh air.
- Open all the doors between rooms to give an inviting feeling.
- Place fresh flowers on kitchen table and/or in the living room.
- If possible, bake cookies or bread to add an inviting aroma.
- The kitchen & bathroom should sparkle.
- Pets should be confined or restricted from view. Eliminate pet odors. Not everyone may share your love of animals. Some people may be allergic to them.
- All jewelry and small valuables should be stored in a safety deposit box or in a locked closet.
- Replace any items not included in the sale, or tag them appropriately with "to be replaced with..." or "not included" signs.
- Beds should be made & clothes picked up. Bathrooms should be clean, with towels folded and toilet lid down.
- When you leave the house, please leave it as if you know it is going to be shown. You never know when the right person is going to look at it!

Low-Cost Ways to Spruce Up Your Home's Exterior

Make your home more appealing for yourself and potential buyers with these quick and easy tips:

1. Trim bushes so they don't block windows or architectural details.
2. Mow your lawn, and turn on the sprinklers for 30 minutes before the showing to make the lawn sparkle.
3. Put a pot of bright flowers (or a small evergreen in winter) on your porch.
4. Install new doorknobs on your front door.
5. Repair any cracks in the driveway.
6. Edge the grass around walkways and trees.
7. Keep your garden tools and hoses out of sight.
8. Clear toys from the lawn.
9. Buy a new mailbox.
10. Upgrade your outside lighting.
11. Buy a new doormat for the outside of your front door.
12. Clean your windows, inside and outside.
13. Polish or replace your house numbers.
14. Place a seasonal wreath on your door.



12 Tips for Hiring a Remodeling Contractor

1. Get at least three written estimates.
2. Check references. If possible, view earlier jobs the contractor completed.
3. Check with the local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau for complaints.
4. Be sure the contract states exactly what is to be done and how change orders will be handled.
5. Make as small of a down payment as possible so you won't lose a lot if the contractor fails to complete the job.
6. Be sure that the contractor has the necessary permits, licenses, and insurance.
7. Check that the contract states when the work will be completed and what recourse you have if it isn't. Also, remember that in many instances you can cancel a contract within three business days of signing it.
8. Ask if the contractor's workers will do the entire job or whether subcontractors will be involved too.
9. Get the contractor to indemnify you if work does not meet any local building codes or regulations.
10. Be sure that the contract specifies the contractor will clean up after the job and be responsible for any damage.
11. Guarantee that the materials that will be used meet your specifications.
12. Don't make the final payment until you're satisfied with the work.

5 Feng Shui Concepts to Help a Home Sell

To put the best face on a listing and appeal to buyers who follow feng shui principles, keep these tips in mind.

1. Pay special attention to the front door, which is considered the "mouth of chi" (chi is the "life force" of all things) and one of the most powerful aspects of the entire property. Abundance, blessings, opportunities, and good fortune enter through the front door. It's also the first impression buyers have of how well the sellers have taken care of the rest of the property. Make sure the area around the front door is swept clean, free of cobwebs and clutter. Make sure all lighting is straight and properly hung. Better yet, light the path leading up to the front door to create an inviting atmosphere.
2. Chi energy can be flushed away wherever there are drains in the home. To keep the good forces of a home in, always keep the toilet seats down and close the doors to bathrooms.
3. The master bed should be in a place of honor, power, and protection, which is farthest from and facing toward the entryway of the room. It's even better if you can place the bed diagonally in the farthest corner. Paint the room in colors that promote serenity, relaxation, and romance, such as soft tones of green, blue, and lavender.
4. The dining room symbolizes the energy and power of family togetherness. Make sure the table is clear and uncluttered during showings. Use an attractive tablecloth to enhance the look of the table while also softening sharp corners.
5. The windows are considered to be the eyes of the home. Getting the windows professionally cleaned will make the home sparkle and ensure that the view will be optimally displayed.

Source: *Sell Your Home Faster With Feng Shui* by Holly Ziegler (Dragon Chi Publications, 2001)



Tricks-of-the-Trade Checklist

Your home has just one chance to make a great impression with each potential buyer. And it can! The following "tricks of the trade" will help you keep track of what needs to be done. The whole idea is to present a clean, spacious clutter-free home... The kind of place you'd like to buy.

Your Home's Curb Appeal

- ☐ Mow lawn
- ☐ Trim shrubs
- ☐ Edge gardens and walkways
- ☐ Weed and mulch
- ☐ Sweep walkways and driveway, remove branches, litter or toys
- ☐ Add color and fill in bare spots with plantings
- ☐ Remove mildew or moss from walls or walks with bleach and water or other cleaner
- ☐ Take stains off your driveway with cleanser or kitty litter
- ☐ Stack woodpile neatly
- ☐ Clean and repair patio and deck area
- ☐ Remove any outdoor furniture which is not in good repair
- ☐ Make sure pool or spa sparkles
- ☐ Replace old storm doors
- ☐ Check for flat-fitting roof shingles
- ☐ Repair broken windows and shutters, replace torn screens, make sure frames and seams have solid caulking
- ☐ Hose off exterior wood and trim, replace damaged bricks or wood
- ☐ Touch up exterior paint, repair gutters and eaves
- ☐ Clean and remove rust from any window air conditioning units
- ☐ Paint the front door and mailbox
- ☐ Add a new front door mat and consider a seasonal door decoration
- ☐ Shine brass hardware on front door, outside lighting fixtures, etc.
- ☐ Make sure doorbell is in good working order

General Interior Tips

- ☐ Add a fresh coat of interior paint in light, neutral colors
- ☐ Shampoo carpeting, replace if necessary
- ☐ Clean and wax hardwood floors, refinish if necessary
- ☐ Clean and wash kitchen and bathroom floors
- ☐ Wash all windows, vacuum blinds, wash window sills
- ☐ Clean the fireplace
- ☐ Clean out and organize closets, add extra space by packing clothes and items you won't need again until after you've moved

- ☐ Remove extra furniture, worn rugs, and items you don't use; keep papers, toys, etc picked up--especially on stairways
- ☐ Repair problems such as loose door knobs, cracked molding, leaking taps and toilets, squeaky doors, closets or screen doors which are off their tracks
- ☐ Add dishes of potpourri, or drop of vanilla or bath oil on light bulbs for scent
- ☐ Secure jewelry, cash and other valuables

The Living Room

- ☐ Make it cozy and inviting, discard chipped or worn furniture and frayed or worn rugs

The Dining Room

- ☐ Polish any visible silver and crystal
- ☐ Set the table for a formal dinner to help viewers imagine entertaining here

The Kitchen

- ☐ Make sure appliances are spotless inside and out (try baking soda for cleaning Formica stains)
- ☐ Make sure all appliances are in perfect working order
- ☐ Clean often forgotten spots on top of refrigerator and under sink
- ☐ Wax or sponge floor to brilliant shine, clean baseboards
- ☐ Unclutter all counter space, remove countertop appliances
- ☐ Organize items inside cabinets, pre-pack anything you won't be using before you move

The Bathrooms

- ☐ Remove all rust and mildew
- ☐ Make sure tile, fixtures, shower doors, etc. are immaculate and shining
- ☐ Make sure all fixtures are in good repair
- ☐ Replace loose caulking or grout
- ☐ Make sure lighting is bright, but soft

The Master Bedroom

- ☐ Organize furnishings to create a spacious look with well-defined sitting, sleeping, and dressing areas

The Garage

- ☐ Sell, give away, or throw out unnecessary items
- ☐ Clean oily cement floor
- ☐ Provide strong overhead light
- ☐ Tidy storage or work areas

The Basement

- ☐ Sell, give away, or throw out unnecessary items
- ☐ Organize and create more floor space by hanging tools and placing items on shelves
- ☐ Clean water heater and drain sediment
- ☐ Change furnace filter
- ☐ Make inspection access easy
- ☐ Clean and paint concrete floor and walls
- ☐ Provide strong overhead light

The Attic

- ☐ Tidy up by discarding or pre-packing
- ☐ Make sure energy-saving insulation is apparent
- ☐ Make sure air vent is in working order
- ☐ Provide strong overhead lighting

When It's Time To Show

- ☐ Make sure your property profile folder, utility bills, MLS profile, house location survey, etc. are available
- ☐ Open all draperies and shades, turn on all lights
- ☐ Pick up toys and other clutter, check to make sure beds are made and clothes are put away
- ☐ Give the carpets a quick vacuuming
- ☐ Add some strategically placed fresh flowers
- ☐ Open bathroom windows for fresh air
- ☐ Pop a spicy dessert or just a pan of cinnamon in the oven for aroma
- ☐ Turn off the television and turn on the radio music at a low volume
- ☐ Make a fire in the fireplace if appropriate
- ☐ Put pets in the backyard or arrange for a friend to keep them
- ☐ Make sure pet areas are clean and odor-free
- ☐ Make sure all trash is disposed of in neatly covered bins