

The Knowledge Resource

FOR

Selling Your Home for Top Dollar



Home Repairs Pay Big Dividends

Little Things Mean a Lot

Lighten Up

Noticeable Results

Get Rid of Clutter

Simplify Your Life and the Sale

Landscape Front and Back Yards

Curb Appeal Creates a Winning First Impression

Stage Your Home for the Sale

Having a Party!

Electrical and Plumbing Problems

Do It Right

Damaged Flooring

Clean, Repair or Replace

Replace or Shampoo Carpeting

Shabby or Cozy?

Update Kitchen and Bathrooms

They Can Make or Break a Sale

Paint Exterior and Interior Walls

Talk about a Facelift!

Do It Yourself or Hire Out?

To Do or Not to Do

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A Few Words about Preparing Your Home for Sale

If you're like most people, your home is probably your largest and most important asset. If you're getting ready to sell it, there is good news: it's not necessary for you to spend a lot of money on upgrades and repairs to realize an impressive return on your investment.

After speaking with numerous agents as well as doing extensive Internet research, we've come up with suggestions to upgrade your home for the least money possible. As you look around the inside and outside of your home, you may find that you only need to follow a few of our suggestions or you may need to implement most of them.

If you follow our guide, your home will be at its most attractive, functional and welcoming when you finally roll out the red carpet to buyers. The goal of this booklet is to help you find a buyer for your home quickly and for the most money. To accomplish this, your home needs to stand apart from the rest of the real estate inventory. It needs to look and work better than the others; in other words, it must be a star in its price range.

Review the top ten reasonably priced improvements that we suggest, and increase your chances of selling quickly and for more money. While not all upgrades and repairs can be expected to improve the price of your home, many will surely reduce the time it will take to sell.

You should discuss your home improvement strategy with your real estate agent, who is well qualified to advise you, based on your local marketplace, economy, trends and your particular property.

Home Repairs Pay Big Dividends

Typically, a house in good condition will sell faster and for more than a comparable house that appears in poor condition and is badly maintained. When a home is in good condition, the asking price is more easily justified, just as the unusual or special features in the home add to its appeal.

First, you'll need to decide what type of seller you are: some want to fix or upgrade absolutely everything and some don't want to do anything. A moderate approach is usually best.

An important bit of advice – Do only what you need to do. You want to prepare your home for its showing and selling, not for the next 10 or 20 years. When buying paint, carpeting, fixtures or plants, spend as little as you can. This may be difficult for you if you usually buy top of the line items, but it's essential if you are to realize the greatest profit from your sale.

Unless certain areas of your home are in terrible condition, we advise touch-ups and cleaning. When working on this project, do not think in terms of long-lasting quality or brand names; buy the least expensive; remember your goal, which is to reap the best return.

The following pages contain detailed information about the top ten identified areas of home improvements. These improvements or repairs are listed in order of highest return for the least expenditure:

- Lighten Up
- Get Rid of Clutter
- Landscape Front and Back Yards
- Stage Your Home for the Sale
- Correct Electrical and Plumbing Problems
- Repair Damaged Flooring
- Update Kitchen and Bathrooms
- Replace or Shampoo Carpeting
- Paint Interior Walls
- Paint Exterior Walls

Opinions regarding the ranking of the suggested improvements may vary based on several factors such as climate, region and property condition. Seek the advice of your real estate agent, who has been through this many times before.



Lighten and Brighten

The least expensive item on our list will bring you the highest return for your money. Light and bright is the ticket! Have you ever walked into a dark and dingy building or home...ever notice how, as a result, your mood and attitude changed for the worse? Buyers looking at your home will certainly feel cheerier and imagine a happier life when they walk into a home that is light, spacious and comfortable.

Start by brightening the entryway for a light impression as your buyers enter. Use brighter lighting in the areas you want to appear larger and warmer lighting to add a comfortable feel to areas that might seem cold and empty. These improvements cost next to nothing and are easy to do.

Further brightening can be accomplished by:

- Cleaning windows inside and out to remove any built-up film.
- Cleaning and polishing brass and glass fixtures and collectibles.
- Opening all drapes, blinds or curtains.
- Cleaning window coverings.
- Trimming trees and bushes obstructing views and light.
- Installing dimmer switches in dining rooms and living rooms for mood lighting when it's called for.
- Updating window treatments if they're dated.
- Making sure all outdoor lighting works.
- Repairing windows that stick so you can open them for air and light.
- Cleaning or replacing switch plates.
- Turning on outdoor lights if it's dark or overcast.

Get Rid of Clutter

When preparing to sell, one of the most important improvements relating to your home is surprisingly the least expensive. Clearing your home of clutter will cost you very little money. It's important to provide prospective buyers a clean and bright canvas that lets them picture themselves, their family and their furnishings in your home.

Keeping your home clutter-free will be an ongoing project. It's not enough to do it once; you and your family must commit to keeping the home clean and free of clutter. For how long? For as long as it takes to sell your home. This may be a difficult and stressful situation but in the long run, it will be well worth the extra effort.

If you've accumulated too much over the past few years, consider donating some items to a thrift store, having a garage sale, or perhaps even renting storage space to help maintain order and cleanliness.

Approaching the project logically will make it easy:

- Let your sparkling clean front door and entryway create a fabulous first and lasting impression of your home.
- While you're at it, check working order of doorbell.
- Depersonalize – remove personal mementos and other items from sight.
- Consider storing excess furniture to make your home appear larger.
- Clean (or hire a professional to do it) every surface of your home.
- Make bathroom sinks, toilets and tubs shine.
- Kitchen and bathroom counters should be free of clutter (no appliances, blow-dryers or cosmetics).
- Don't forget to organize and clean closets, cabinets and drawers in all rooms—make sure all will open smoothly.
- Polish woodwork and furniture.
- Are front, side and back porches and patios clutter-free?
- Get rid of bugs and odors.
- As lovable as your pets are, remove them from the premises when buyers view your home.
- Inspect and vacuum, dust and wash every inch of your home—it's *showtime* and there's money riding on it!



Landscape Front and Back Yards

The “curb appeal” of your property will determine whether people will want to explore the interior. Remember, if they don’t look at it, they can’t buy it. It’s time to spend a little money sprucing up your home’s landscaping to enhance the appearance of your front and back yards.

Neatly manicured lawns and garden areas can significantly increase your home’s appeal and its ultimate sale price.

- ❑ Mow, trim and fertilize your lawn and garden—re-seed as necessary.
- ❑ Edging the lawn will give it a neat and manicured look.
- ❑ Plant new flowers or shrubs for increased eye-appeal.
- ❑ Mulch, pebbles and bark look good and help retain water in your flower beds—don’t forget to weed.
- ❑ Trim and prune trees and bushes into neat and attractive shapes.
- ❑ Add colorful flower pots on walkways, porches and patios.
- ❑ Remove dirt and stains from patios, driveways and decks – stubborn stains may need to be removed by a professional.
- ❑ Repair or replace torn screens and awnings.
- ❑ Keep trash containers neat and out of sight.
- ❑ Repair broken-down fences.
- ❑ Sweep, rake or hose down all surfaces.
- ❑ Do a complete sweep of the area—no detail should be left to chance.
- ❑ Get rid of “no trespassing” or “beware of dog” signs—they inspire fear and apprehension.
- ❑ Make sure your home presents a welcoming front to buyers.



All the World Is a Stage!

Staging homes for sale is a fairly recent marketing strategy and one that can help sell your home faster and for more money. You can hire a professional to do this or you can do it yourself. Ask your real estate agent for advice on improving your home's appearance through the magic of staging. Serious and qualified buyers are more likely to buy homes that display true pride of ownership.

Just as theatrical staging involves the moving and arranging of props, home staging frequently involves rearranging furniture or even renting or borrowing appropriate furniture, plants and art pieces to show your house in the best possible light.

While the effect of a blank canvas can be helpful to some buyers, many others need help in seeing what a jewel a house is when it contains furnishings. Almost all buyers will be turned off by a house that is furnished and decorated in an unattractive and uncreative manner.

Even if you hire a professional to do the staging of your home, you will have to perform some staging duties on a continuing basis until the house sells. Take a look at some small and easy things that can lift the mood of buyers and help sell your home faster... they really work:

- Play soft music.
- Fresh flowers, subtle plug-in deodorizers, cedar hangers in closets.
- Open drapes and curtains.
- Turn on air conditioning in summer and fireplace in winter.
- Depersonalize: remove personal items such as photos and trophies.
- Hang tasteful artwork.
- If possible, use new towels in the bathrooms.
- Don't forget to stage the garage—clean oil-stained floors, put away tools, bicycles and sports equipment.



Electrical and Plumbing Upgrades and Repairs

Electrical

In helping you prepare to show your home, we've discussed topics designed to make your home cleaner and more attractive, inside and out. It's time now to make your home more efficient and safer. Prospective buyers will be impressed by a home that not only looks good, but is fully functional as well. It will differentiate your home from the many others they may have seen.

- Light switches and overhead lights should be in working order.
- Replace broken or dated light fixtures and clean all others.
- Replace defective electrical switches.
- Bring your electrical outlets up to code.*

Cost to fix or replace these items is negligible but can have a very positive impact. You may prefer to have a licensed electrician handle some of these chores as well as to examine all wiring, although clearly this will be more expensive.

Plumbing

One of the first things to do when attempting plumbing repairs is to turn off the water. The second thing that you should know is where to draw the line between do-it-yourself plumbing chores and those needing professional attention. The results could be costly water damage to your home and furnishings.

Make sure these items are in good working order:

- Bathroom and kitchen faucets
- Toilets
- Sprinkler system
- Smoke and burglar alarms
- Doorbells

Other issues you may want to address:

- Clean and clear drains
- Replace rusted and corroded plumbing pipes (may require plumber)
- Upgrade old plumbing fixtures in all bathrooms
- Remove rust stains and repair chips in sinks and tubs
- Remove mildew stains and re-caulk tile, showers and tubs
- Inspect septic tank

*Consider installing GFCI protection to receptacles in the following areas: outdoors, bathrooms, garage, kitchen, as well as crawl spaces and unfinished basements. "GFCI" is a ground fault circuit interrupter designed to protect people from serious or fatal electric shocks. It can also prevent some electrical fires. It's inexpensive and could help prevent over two-thirds of the approximately 300 electrocutions still occurring each year in and around the home, as well as thousands of burn and electric shock injuries yearly.

Repair Damaged Flooring

How many times have you heard, “Their floors are so clean, you could eat off them”? Well, that’s the way they should look while you’re showing your home. You may need to make some minor repairs if you have broken tiles, torn linoleum or stained carpeting. Again, don’t overdo—fix the problem and move on to the next item on your list.

See whether these treatments can help your floors:

- Clean and wax kitchen, bathroom and entry floors.
- Replace missing or damaged linoleum or ceramic tiles.
- If you upgrade your floor coverings, choose a neutral color.
- Restore damaged hardwood flooring to its former beauty.
- Use dirt-trapping mats at all exterior doors to prevent dirt or sand from entering your home.
- Use area rugs on high traffic pathways.



Replace or Shampoo Carpeting

You may have to do nothing more than have your carpeting professionally cleaned. From then on, vacuum frequently and make sure that spills and stains are taken care of immediately. Carpets should be secure. If they’ve been down for some time, they may have gotten loose or may be curling and should be re-stretched. Drive finishing nails through the carpet in any creaky area.

If carpeting is in poor condition, shop for sales and buy the best available at the lowest price. Carpets should be clean, vacuumed and completely stain and odor-free.

Update Kitchen and Bathrooms

Kitchens and bathrooms can often make or break sales. While most buyers would love to buy a home with a new kitchen and new bathrooms, it's not always possible. Buyers will pay special attention to these areas and you should too as you decide what needs to be done.

- Immaculate kitchen and bathrooms are a *must*.
- Make these rooms appear larger and more open by removing *all* clutter.
- If your appliances will be included in the sale, make sure
 - they are clean.
 - operating properly.
 - have owner's manual.
 - have warranty and repair information.
- Missing or broken kitchen and bathroom tiles should be repaired/replaced.
- Paint or touch up kitchens and bathrooms if the paint is in poor condition.
- Remove rust stains and fix porcelain chips.
- Repair or replace damaged countertops.
- Replace toilet seats and shower curtains.
- Make sure all grout lines are absolutely clean.
- Re-caulk if necessary.
- Remove mildew stains.
- Re-stain or re-paint all cabinetry, replace knobs and pulls, and tighten hinges.



Should You Paint Your Interior Walls?



What a difference this can make! However, keep in mind the advice we discussed earlier—paint only if your house needs it. Washing your walls, or light touch-up, may be sufficient, if your walls are in great shape. Nail holes left when taking down pictures and nicks caused by furniture should be spackled. This will assure a professional-looking paint job.

While you have that paintbrush in hand, use it to touch up any surface damage or stains behind the washer and dryer, refrigerator, under the kitchen and bathroom

sinks, on the ceilings, window and door frames. Other areas that will benefit from paint or stain include doors, cabinets and woodwork.

If you have wallpaper, unless it was put up recently, get rid of it. Wallpaper can be very personal and very likely will not fit someone else's taste. It may seem repetitious but we recommend selecting neutral color paint for your walls.



Painting Exterior Walls: Time Consuming and Costly

Keeping an eye on the budget, you should probably not tackle the monumental project of painting the entire outside of your house. Whether you contract it out, or do it yourself, this is a major undertaking and an expense that is not necessary in most cases.

Saving both the expense and stress of this project will keep the process of selling from becoming overwhelming. Touching up both siding and trim with the existing colors will make the job faster.

Paint or stain these areas:

- Front and other doors and window frames and ledges
- Shutters or other trim
- Fences and patio covers
- Garage doors
- The mailbox
- Porches
- Exterior light fixtures

Other areas that may need attention:

- Rust spots and holes on rain gutters
- Cracks in concrete paths, patios and driveways
- Missing bricks on house or chimney
- Missing roof shingles or tiles



Do It Yourself or Hire Out?

Obviously, you will save more by making your own repairs and/or improvements and your profits on the sale of your home will be greater. On the other hand, there are factors you may want to consider.

Should you be your own repairman?

- What type of repairs must be made?
- How extensive are the repairs?
- Do you have or can you acquire the necessary skills?
- How long will the repairs take?
- How important are the repairs compared to your time?
- How much will it cost?
- Are reputable repairmen readily available in your area?
- How are their prices?
- Are the necessary materials readily available to you?
- Will the repair involve more materials than labor, or more labor than materials?
- How much will you save if you do the work yourself?

Did you decide to hire a professional repairman?

- Make sure you communicate your wishes and your needs very clearly to avoid misunderstandings.
- Beware of bait and switch in both services and materials or products.
- Enter into a written agreement describing
 - All material, labor and equipment necessary for the job.
 - When the job is to be completed.
 - Who cleans up the mess that results from the job.
 - The degree of responsibility that the repairman or contractor shall assume for damage to your property or that of your neighbors.
 - That any changes in the contract shall be made in writing and agreed to by both parties.
 - That the agreement frees you from all liens for failure of the contractor/repairman to pay for materials, labor, equipment, etc.
 - The schedule of how and when payments are to be made.
- Try to select someone whose work you know.
- Examine some of his previous work and ask for references.
- Get at least three bids before you make a decision.
- Price, down payment, amount financed and number of payments should be clearly defined and written in the agreement.
- Check on progress periodically.
- Inspect the finished project with the repairman.
- Sign off on the contract and make final payment after all the work has been completed to your satisfaction.

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