

5 Tips to Prepare Your Home for Sale

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Working to get your home ship-shape for showings will increase its value and shorten your sales time.

Many buyers today want move-in-ready homes and will quickly eliminate an otherwise great home by focusing on a few visible flaws. Unless your home shines, you may endure showing after showing and open house after open house-and end up with a lower sales price. Before the first prospect walks through your door, consider some smart options for casting your home in its best light.

1. Have a home inspection

Be proactive by arranging for a pre-sale home inspection. For \$250 to \$400, an inspector will warn you about troubles that could make potential buyers balk. Make repairs before putting your home on the market. In some states, you may have to disclose what the inspection turns up.

2. Get replacement estimates

If your home inspection uncovers necessary repairs you can't fund, get estimates for the work. The figures will help buyers determine if they can afford the home and the repairs. Also hunt down warranties, guarantees, and user manuals for your furnace, washer and dryer, dishwasher, and any other items you expect to remain with the house.

3. Make minor repairs

Not every repair costs a bundle. Fix as many small problems-sticky doors, torn screens, cracked caulking, dripping faucets-as you can. These may seem trivial, but they'll give buyers the impression your house isn't well maintained.

4. Clear the clutter

Clear your kitchen counters of just about everything. Clean your closets by packing up little-used items like out-of-season clothes and old toys. Install closet organizers to maximize space. Put at least one-third of your furniture in storage, especially large pieces, such as entertainment centers and big televisions. Pack up family photos, knickknacks, and wall hangings to depersonalize your home. Store the items you've packed offsite or in boxes neatly arranged in your garage or basement.

5. Do a thorough cleaning

A clean house makes a strong first impression that your home has been well cared for. If you can afford it, consider hiring a cleaning service.

If not, wash windows and leave them open to air out your rooms. Clean carpeting and drapes to eliminate cooking odors, smoke, and pet smells. Wash light fixtures and baseboards, mop and wax floors, and give your stove and refrigerator a thorough once-over.

Pay attention to details, too. Wash fingerprints from light switch plates, clean inside the cabinets, and polish doorknobs. Don't forget to clean your garage, too.

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