

8 tricks to give your house curb appeal

By [Dana Dratch](#) • Bankrate.com

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In the home-selling market, curb appeal is better than cash. If you can get buyers through the front door, you've passed the first hurdle in selling your home.

"If they don't like what they see outside, they'll never walk inside," says Michael Love, president of Interior Options Inc., a New York interior design firm.

Curb appeal can often mean the difference between a house sitting for months or selling in a few weeks.

"Our region is still trying to get out of the economic doldrums -- we have many homes on the market," says Scott Griffith, president of ERA Griffith Realty in Brighton, Mich. "Curb appeal is going to be a big issue. With more homes competing for your eye, the home with curb appeal has the advantage."

And the view from the street can net you more traffic than you might think. Seventy-four percent of all home buyers use the Internet to shop for a new home, according to 2004 figures from the National Association of Realtors.

"The first impression is key," says Dan Lee, vice president of First Weber Group Inc. in Madison, Wisc. "People shopping on the Internet give it one look. If they don't like what they see, that's it."

Want to improve the view from the other side of the curb? Here are a few tips:

1. Look at the big picture. Some things should go without saying. But the truth is that after you've lived with fading trim -- or that shutter that hangs at a jaunty angle -- for a year or two, you probably don't even see it anymore. "People are not going to look at it the same

way you will," says Myra Zollinger, an owner/broker with Coldwell Banker Realty Center in Chapel Hill.

Ask your real estate agent or a trusted friend to look at the front of your home with a new set of eyes. Would they be interested in the home if they didn't know you? If not, what are the turn-offs?

And always do the obvious: keep the lawn mowed and the gutters clear. Trim the bushes, get rid of any dead branches and fix anything that's hanging or broken. And keep outdoor lights on in the evening and in good working order, the better to show off your house 24-7.

2. Shine. Got a brass doorknob? Make it shine. If you have wrought iron, clean it or paint it. Wash the windows so that they gleam. "It looks cared for," says Love.

Plus, "If a house really sparkles," real estate agents will like to show it, says Zollinger.

3. Fit into the community. If there are tons of kids in the neighborhood, it's OK to have a bike in the yard, says Griffith. Not so if your neighborhood is mostly retirees. Keep your audience in mind as you show your house.

4. Use flowers. If you have room, go for the traditional two large planters -- one on either side of the door or walkway, says Love. Fill them to overflowing with flowers if it's spring or summer or evergreens in the cooler months, she says.

This will create a focal point, forcing home buyers to focus on one area rather than the whole home at once, says Love.

Consider hanging a colorful flag out front, says Richard F. Gaylord, a Realtor with RE/MAX Real Estate Specialists In Long Beach, Calif.

Or put a seasonal wreath on the door. "You want it to say, 'Yes, you're welcome, come on in,'" says Joan Isgro-Grant, a Realtor with Weichert Realtors in Kingston, N.Y.

5. Apply pressure. If the exterior needs a fresh look, consider getting it pressure washed. (This is a great way to clean trim or walkways and give them a clean, white look.)

6. Get an edge. Want the look of a manicured yard? Put some fresh mulch or bedding material around the plants in the yard and use a hoe to make the edges of the bedding sharp, says Love.

7. Paint. Want to make the house look great without painting the whole thing? Just paint the trim and the front door.

Or paint the shutters a color. "It really catches [the] eye," says Love.

And since the porch frames the front door and is the first part of the house buyers will actually visit, make sure it looks freshly painted. "If you have a porch that doesn't look fresh, you'll notice that more than the siding," she says.

But if it needs it, don't be stingy. Paint the whole house. The outlay will be well worth the money if you get a clean looking home that moves fast.

8. Invest in landscaping. If you have just a little money to spend, consider landscaping. "A landscaped front yard is a good jump on selling your home," says Dick Koestner, a partner in Koestner McGivern & Associates in Davenport, Iowa.

If you have a small yard, "plant it with flowers and greenery," says Gaylord, who has transformed his own quarter-acre yard into a traditional English garden.

Or, if you don't have a lot of time or a green thumb, Koestner recommends creating one or two informal garden areas in the front yard, perhaps with a birdbath. "It looks warm."

Dana Dratch is a freelance writer based in Atlanta.