

# Preparing Your Home For Sale

## A Collection of Helpful Articles



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## How To Prepare Your House For Sale

From Elizabeth Weintraub,  
Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

Prepping and staging a house. Every seller wants their home to sell fast and bring top dollar. Does that sound good to you? Well, it's not luck that makes that happen. It's careful planning and knowing how to professionally spruce up your home that will send home buyers scurrying for their checkbooks. Here is how to prep a house and turn it into an irresistible and marketable home.

Difficulty: Average

Time Required: Seven to 10 Days

### ❖ **Disassociate Yourself With Your Home.**

- Say to yourself, "This is not my home; it is a house -- a product to be sold much like a box of cereal on the grocery store shelf.
- Make the mental decision to "let go" of your emotions and focus on the fact that soon this house will no longer be yours.
- Picture yourself handing over the keys and envelopes containing appliance warranties to the new owners!
- Say goodbye to every room.
- Don't look backwards -- look toward the future.

### ❖ **De-Personalize.**

- Pack up those personal photographs and family heirlooms. Buyers can't see past personal artifacts, and you don't want them to be distracted. You want buyers to imagine their own photos on the walls, and they can't do that if yours are there! You don't want to make any buyer ask, "I wonder what kind of people live in this home?" You want buyers to say, "I can see myself living here."

### ❖ **De-Clutter!**

- People collect an amazing quantity of junk. Consider this: if you haven't used it in over a year, you probably don't need it.
- If you don't need it, why not donate it or throw it away?
- Remove all books from bookcases.
- Pack up those knickknacks.
- Clean off everything on kitchen counters.
- Put essential items used daily in a box that can be stored in a closet when not in use.
- Think of this process as a head-start on the packing you will eventually need to do anyway.

❖ **Rearrange Bedroom Closets and Kitchen Cabinets.**

- Buyers love to snoop and will open closet and cabinet doors. Think of the message it sends if items fall out! Now imagine what a buyer believes about you if she sees everything organized. It says you probably take good care of the rest of the house as well. This means:
- Alphabetize spice jars.
- Neatly stack dishes.
- Turn coffee cup handles facing the same way.
- Hang shirts together, buttoned and facing the same direction.
- Line up shoes.

❖ **Rent a Storage Unit.**

- Almost every home shows better with less furniture. Remove pieces of furniture that block or hamper paths and walkways and put them in storage. Since your bookcases are now empty, store them. Remove extra leaves from your dining room table to make the room appear larger. Leave just enough furniture in each room to showcase the room's purpose and plenty of room to move around. You don't want buyers scratching their heads and saying, "What is this room used for?"

❖ **Remove/Replace Favorite Items.**

- If you want to take window coverings, built-in appliances or fixtures with you, remove them now. If the chandelier in the dining room once belonged to your great grandmother, take it down. If a buyer never sees it, she won't want it. Once you tell a buyer she can't have an item, she will covet it, and it could blow your deal. Pack those items and replace them, if necessary.

❖ **Make Minor Repairs.**

- Replace cracked floor or counter tiles.
- Patch holes in walls.
- Fix leaky faucets.
- Fix doors that don't close properly and kitchen drawers that jam.
- Consider painting your walls neutral colors, especially if you have grown accustomed to purple or pink walls.
- (Don't give buyers any reason to remember your home as "the house with the orange bathroom.")
- Replace burned-out light bulbs.
- If you've considered replacing a worn bedspread, do so now!

❖ **Make the House Sparkle!**

- Wash windows inside and out.
- Rent a pressure washer and spray down sidewalks and exterior.
- Clean out cobwebs.

- Re-caulk tubs, showers and sinks.
- Polish chrome faucets and mirrors.
- Clean out the refrigerator.
- Vacuum daily.
- Wax floors.
- Dust furniture, ceiling fan blades and light fixtures.
- Bleach dingy grout.
- Replace worn rugs.
- Hang up fresh towels.
- Bathroom towels look great fastened with ribbon and bows.
- Clean and air out any musty smelling areas. Odors are a no-no.

❖ **Scrutinize.**

- Go outside and open your front door. Stand there. Do you want to go inside? Does the house welcome you?
- Linger in the doorway of every single room and imagine how your house will look to a buyer.
- Examine carefully how furniture is arranged and move pieces around until it makes sense.
- Make sure window coverings hang level.
- Tune in to the room's statement and its emotional pull. Does it have impact and pizzazz?
- Does it look like nobody lives in this house? You're almost finished.

❖ **Check Curb Appeal.**

- If a buyer won't get out of her agent's car because she doesn't like the exterior of your home, you'll never get her inside.
- Keep the sidewalks cleared.
- Mow the lawn.
- Paint faded window trim.
- Plant yellow flowers or group flower pots together. Yellow evokes a buying emotion. Marigolds are inexpensive.
- Trim your bushes.
- Make sure visitors can clearly read your house number.

## Home Staging & Staging a House - What is Home Staging?

From Elizabeth Weintraub,  
Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

### Dressing a House for Success - STAGING A HOME

Home staging is about illusions. It's how David Copperfield would sell a house. It's beyond decorating and cleaning. It's about perfecting the art of creating moods. Staging makes your house look bigger, brighter, cleaner, warmer, more loving and, best of all, it makes home buyers want to buy it.

Contrary to what you might think, it's about more than preparing the house for sale. Staging is what you do after you've cleaned, de-cluttered, painted, made minor repairs; it's all about dressing the house for sale.

It's about adding the small details: the lipstick, mascara and, for simplicity, a stunning, single strand of Tahitian pearls.

### What is a Professional Home Stager?

Professional stagers are highly skilled artists.

They can take a blank canvas and paint a sensuous portrait without ever lifting a paint brush. Stagers possess the skills of a top-level designer and they create dramatic scenery that appeals to all five senses. Here are some of their secrets:

- Arrange sparse pieces of furniture in an appealing grouping known as a vignette
- Showcase a generous usage of soft fabrics such as silk, lambs wool, satin
- Display unusual knickknacks in units of 1, 3 or 5
- Drape window coverings with simple lines
- Add unique elements to shelving, bookcases and fireplace mantels, which draw attention to predetermined areas

### What Accessories Does a Stager Use?

Stagers bring in a vast array of items to spruce up the house. Here is a small sampling of items professional stagers often use to dress each room. How they are utilized is limited only by the creativity and vision of the stager.

- Mirrors
- Plants
- Silk Flowers
- Floor & Table Lamps,
- Area and Throw Rugs
- Small Love Seats
- Ottomans
- Afghans
- Pillows
- Inflatable Queen-Size Beds
- Baskets
- Plastic Tables & Chairs

### **Professional Staging Tricks & Tips**

An artist for 35 years, Dawna Johnson, is an Accredited Staging Professional Master (ASP) and owner of Sacramento Staging Solutions. She says the idea behind staging is to allow rooms to show themselves. "If your home is vacant, it's soulless," Dawna warns. "Without staging, it will probably remain on the market for many months." She calls the kitchen the "heart of the home," and offers this practical advice for making that space sparkle:

- Apply orange oil to cabinets that appear dry, which will renew their original luster
- Put out large bowls of fruit such as polished apples, bright oranges, luscious grapes
- Arrange colorful and fun cookbooks on the counters

Dawna believes in bringing the outdoors inside through the use of greenery and plants; in creating clean, crisp spaces and arranging furniture with plenty of room to walk around. She says bathrooms are essential to dress well. "Bathrooms should look open, airy and delightful," says Dawna. One of her favorite tricks is to add baskets filled with spa treatments such as:

- Towels, tied with ribbons
- Scented soaps
- Creamy lotions

- Moisturizing & Facial jars

The back yard needs staging, too. For patios and decks, Dawna brings in plants and potted flowers, and adds additional color by setting the picnic table with bright, plastic dinner plates.

## Top 10 Ways to Make Home Buyers Hate Your House

by Janet Wickell

### Selling a Home? Avoid these Home Buyer Turnoffs

Are you selling a home? Did you know that even though home buyers are all looking for something different, the majority of them will turn around and walk back out of your door if they notice one or more of these Top 10 problems.

#### 1. Odors

House odors are number one on the home selling *uh-oh* list. And narrowing it down, odors from cigarette smoke and pets take top billing, with mildew not far behind.

If you smoke indoors--the house smells like cigarettes. If you have pets, the house *might* smell bad--even if you don't notice it. Ask someone who doesn't live there to take a sniff, and don't get angry when they tell you the truth.

*Eradicate* the odors so that you can present potential buyers with a clean, fresh atmosphere--*not* a house that's full of perfumes to cover up the odors.

#### 2. Dogs that Meet You at the Door or in the Driveway

Dogs frighten some people and irritate others. You'll have a much better response from showings if you control your pets--dogs, cats, whatever.

You say you plan to put them in a bedroom or garage and then ask people not to open the door to that area? Bad idea. Would you buy a house you can't inspect? Of course not.

Remove pets during showings if possible. If you can't, contain them in crates for their own safety and to show respect for the feelings of potential buyers.

#### 3. Dirty Bathrooms

Grimy bathrooms are an instant turnoff. Scrub them, paint them, buy a new shower curtain, rugs and towels--do what it takes to make them shine. If you're serious about selling the home, the extra work is a must.

#### 4. Dimly Lit Rooms

Dark homes are a turnoff to most home buyers, so try to brighten them up:

- Replace dim light fixtures
- Install additional light fixtures
- Install (quality) sun tunnels or skylights
- Remove heavy drapes to let the light stream through windows
- Repaint some rooms with colors that reflect light
- Trim tree limbs that shadow the house

Dirty and fogged windows are another buyer turnoff. Clean them inside and out to bring in more light. If possible, replace any double-pane windows with broken seals. You can find them by looking for a foggy residue that cannot be removed.

#### 5. A House Full of Busy Wallpaper

Busy wallpaper in every room turns off *most* buyers, and even people who love wallpaper rarely like what you've chosen. It's a personal decorative touch that they want to select themselves.

It's the masses you must appeal to when you're selling a home, so take a hard look at your wallpaper and decide if it should be removed and replaced with paint. *Don't paint over it*, because it will be obvious that you did--and buyers know that makes removing it even more difficult.

#### 6. Damp Basements

Dampness or damp smells in the basement throw up a red flag to buyers that *the foundation leaks!*

Most problems we see are not caused by faulty foundations. They occur because rainwater is being diverted towards the foundation instead of away from it.

- Clogged underground drains
- No rain gutters along roofline
- Downspouts aimed the wrong way

Go outside the next time it rains and determine where runoff water is going.

#### 7. Bugs

Roaches, spiders, *any* insect that shouldn't be in the house. Get rid of them.

## 8. Poor Curb Appeal

You *must* grab a buyer's interest from the curb if you want to sell the home for top dollar. Home buyers often refuse to go into a house with an unkempt yard, sagging doors or peeling paint. You say you can't afford to paint? Okay, but get that yard in tip-top shape and grab a screwdriver to fix those doors.

## 9. Gutters with Plants Growing in Them

I'm serious. Some people never clean their gutters, and it *always* makes buyers wonder what else hasn't been maintained.

Remember the drainage issue in #6? Cleaning packed gutters might help.

## 10. Sellers Who Hang Around for Showings

Yes, you... leave the house during showings. Home buyers feel awkward about opening closet doors and lingering for a really good look at the house if the seller is home.

If you're selling by owner, give them some space, don't hover.

## Parting Words

Most of the Top 10 problems are home selling issues you can correct without spending a lot of money. Do it now, either before or just as you put your house on the market, because if your house develops a reputation among agents as the *house that smells*, the *house with the huge barking dog* or the *house where the owner won't leave people alone*, it will be too late. Your house will be last on their list to show potential buyers.

## How to Improve Curb Appeal

by Janet Wickell

### Home Selling Advice to Help You Attract Potential Buyers

A large percentage of home buyers decide whether or not to look inside a house or take it seriously based on its curb appeal – the view they see when they drive by or arrive for a showing. You can help make sure they want to come inside your house by spending some time working on the its exterior appearance.

It's difficult to look at our own house in the same way that potential home buyers do, because when we become accustomed to the way something looks and functions, we can't see its faults. Decide right now to stop thinking of the property as a home. It's a house – a commodity you want to sell for the highest dollar possible.

### Curb Appeal Exercise

The next time you come home, stop across the street or far enough down the driveway to get a good view of the house and its surroundings.

1. What is your first impression of the house and yard area?
2. What are the best exterior features of the house or lot? How can you enhance them?
3. What are the worst exterior features of the house or lot? How can you minimize or improve them?

Park where a potential buyer would and walk towards the house, looking around you as if it were your first visit.

Is the approach clean and tidy? What could you do to make it more attractive?

Take photos of the home's exterior. If you have a digital camera, view the color versions first, then remove the color and look at it in black and white, because it's easier to see problems when color isn't around to affect our senses.

Make a list of the problem areas you discovered. Tackle clean up and repair chores first, then put some time into projects that make the grounds more attractive.

- Kill mold and mildew on the house, sidewalks, roof, or driveway.
- Stow away unnecessary garden implements and tools.
- Clean windows and gutters.
- Pressure wash dirty siding and dingy decks.

- Edge sidewalks and remove vegetation growing between concrete or bricks.
- Mow the lawn. Get rid of weeds.
- Rake and dispose of leaves, even if your lot is wooded.
- Trim tree limbs that are near or touching the home's roof.

### **Don't Forget the Rear View**

Buyers doing a drive by will try their best to see your back yard. If it's visible from another street or from someone's driveway, include it in your curb appeal efforts.

### **Evening Curb Appeal**

Do your curb appeal exercise again at dusk, because it isn't unusual for potential buyers to drive by houses in the evening.

One quick way to improve evening curb appeal is with lighting:

- String low voltage lighting along your driveway, sidewalks, and near important landscaping elements.
- Add a decorative street lamp or an attractive light fixture to a front porch.
- Make sure lighting that's visible through front doors and windows enhances the home's appearance.

### **Landscaping Decisions**

There are times that adding elements to your landscaping can improve curb appeal, but there are other times when *removing* something is even more effective.

For example, we had a listing for a large brick house with large white columns. Tall evergreens, planted in front of each column, had grown taller than the roof. They obscured the columns and windows and made it difficult to see the front of the house.

We suggested that the owner remove them. She trimmed them back, but it didn't do the trick – they were unattractive and still kept potential buyers from seeing the true character of the house.

I sold the house to a couple who could see past the trees. One of their first tasks after closing was to yank them out of the ground, instantly boosting the home's curb appeal.

Most buyers cannot visualize changes, and often won't take a second look at a house if the first look doesn't appeal to them. Home buyers who can visualize changes, and are prepared to make them, expect *you* to reduce the price of the house to compensate for the work they plan to do.

## A Few Curb Appeal Tips

- If you can budget it, a fresh paint job does wonders for a dingy house. Drive around your town to find color schemes that are appealing.
- Install a more attractive front door, maybe something with leaded glass inserts.
- If you can't justify the cost of a new door, consider replacing plain doorknob hardware with something more attractive.
- If new hardware is beyond your budget, repaint or stain the door and polish the hardware?

If you brainstorm, you'll find that there's a solution to most problems – one that lets you stay within your budget. The trick is to find the areas where improvements are needed, then work on them as best you can.

## While Your Home is on the Market - Protecting Your Privacy

From Elizabeth Weintraub,  
Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

### What Does Your Home Disclose About You?

Are your secrets safe? Before a home goes on the market and home buyers start to traipse through, savvy sellers will relocate confidential information. Even so, you might be astonished to learn what home buyers can figure out about you.

#### Private Documents

- **Is it snooping to open a drawer?**

Not if the drawer is part of a built-in such as a kitchen cabinet or a dining room china cabinet. Buyers can innocently tug on a drawer to inspect its construction or depth and find important documents that you might not intend for anyone to see.

I once opened a drawer and discovered the seller's net sheet sitting on top of her comparative market analysis, in plain view. It clearly indicated a lower price was expected, so you can guess what my buyer offered.

- **Don't leave mail where anybody can find it.**

Lots of sellers leave piles of opened mail neatly stacked on the kitchen counter.

Buyers could find out how much you owe department stores or other credit cards. They can tell if you're late on your mortgage payments or if the I.R.S. is after you. Heaven forbid should you file bankruptcy or be sued and leave those documents on the table, but sellers do it. They must believe that buyers will not read someone else's personal mail, even when that mail is taped to the refrigerator door, begging to be read.

I've also shown vacant homes where the mail was tossed all over the floor in the entryway. Neither the seller nor his listing agent bothered to stop by and pick up the mail. It wasn't hard to figure out that much of the mail contained collection notices. If a buyer was armed with that information, guess what price the buyer would be thinking about. It wouldn't be list price.

#### Remove Diplomas and Wedding Photos from Walls

Notwithstanding that all personal items should be removed, sometimes sellers overlook the obvious and leave diplomas on the wall. People form biases and can carry a bias too far. For example, the seller might be a lawyer, and there are buyers who might not feel comfortable buying a home from a lawyer. For whatever reason. Diplomas also give away a seller's age or a close estimate. If a buyer see a recent medical diploma, for example, the buyer might assume the

seller is saddled with student loans and needs to sell to pay them off.

Wedding photos might give away the seller's religion, as do certain religious artifacts left in the home. Buyers can be prejudiced. Don't give buyers a way to form any opinion about you at all. Don't let buyers form ideas about you from the type of music you like or the literature you read.

### **Contents of Closets**

Often sellers who are separating or getting divorced feel a lot of pressure to sell quickly, especially if the partner who remains in the home cannot afford to continue to maintain it. But that is not information most sellers want to share with buyers. Yet they do. They may as well toss their wallet out the car window doing 80 on the freeway.

They do this by hanging either all men's or all women's clothing in the closet. Once a buyer finds out a seller desperately needs to sell, the buyer won't make an offer anywhere near list price. So don't leave any telltale clues around that could give away your motivation to sell.

Before you put your home in the market, please, prep it; empty out drawers, stage closets and pack up anything remotely personal. If your house speaks to a buyer about you, it's probably saying the wrong thing.