



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.

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.

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. **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.
3. **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.

4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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.)
7. **Check for mistakes.** Make sure that items you want to keep don't accidentally end up in the garage sale pile.
8. **Create an organized display.** Lay out your items by category, and display neatly so customers don't have to dig through boxes.
9. **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.
10. **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.
11. **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!