



The Quick-Guidebook For Sellers

A collection of how-tos, checklists,
and worksheets to help sellers
understand what to expect during
the real estate experience.

CHECKLIST

Before Putting Your Home up for Sale

Here are a few items to take care of before listing your home. This can make the sale process quicker and easier in the long run.

Consider a pre-sale home inspection.

An inspector will be able to give you a good indication of the trouble areas that will stand out to potential buyers, and you'll be able to make repairs before open houses begin.

Organize and clean.

Pare down clutter and pack up your least-used items, such as large blenders and other kitchen tools, out-of-season clothes, toys, and seasonal items. Store items off-site or in boxes neatly arranged in the garage or basement. Clean the windows, carpets, walls, lighting fixtures, and baseboards to make the house shine.

Get replacement estimates.

Do you have big-ticket items that will need to be replaced soon? Find out how much it will cost to repair an older roof or replace worn carpeting, even if you don't plan to do so. The figures will help buyers determine if they can afford the home, and they'll be handy when negotiations begin.

Locate warranties.

Gather up the warranties, guarantees, and user manuals for the furnace, washer/dryer, dishwasher, and any other items that will remain with the house. It may seem like this task can be left until closing, but you don't want lost paperwork or last minute scrambling to cause the deal to fall through.

Spruce up the curb appeal.

Walk out to the front of your home, close your eyes, and pretend you're a prospective buyer seeing the property for the first time. As you approach the front door, what is your impression of the property? Do the lawn and bushes look neatly manicured? Is the address clearly visible? What do you

see framing the entrance, if anything? Is the walkway free of cracks and impediments?

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 move. But make sure you plan ahead; they can take on a life of their own.

Don't wait until the last minute.

Depending on how long you've lived in your home and how much stuff you want to sell, planning a garage sale can take a lot of time and energy. And that's on top of the effort of putting your home on the market!

Contact your local government.

Most municipalities will require you to obtain a permit in order to hold a garage sale. They're often free or cheap, but the fines for neglecting to obtain one can be hefty.

See if neighbors want to join in.

You can turn your garage sale into a block-wide event and lure more shoppers. However, a permit may be necessary for each homeowner, even if it's a group event.

Schedule the sale.

Sales on Saturdays and Sundays will generate the most traffic, especially if the weather cooperates. Start the sale early — 8 or 9 a.m. is best — and be ready for early birds.

Advertise.

Place an ad in the newspaper, free classified papers, and websites, including the date(s), time, and address of the garage sale. Add information about what will be available, such as kids' clothes, furniture, or

special equipment. On the day of the sale, use balloons and signs with prominent arrows to grab attention.

Price your goods.

Clearly mark rounded prices (50 cents, 3 for \$1, or \$5, for example) with easily removable stickers.

If it's junk, recycle or donate it.

If it's truly garbage, throw it away or place it in a freebie bin. Don't try to sell broken appliances, and have an electrical outlet nearby in case a customer wants to try plugging something in.

Display items nicely.

Organize by category, and don't make customers dig through boxes.

Stock up on supplies.

Having a stock of old shopping bags that can be reused encourages people to buy more items. Newspapers are handy for wrapping fragile goods.

Manage your money.

Obtain ample change for your cashbox, and have a calculator on hand. Assign one person to man the "register," keeping a tally of what was purchased and for how much.

HOW TO Hire a Remodeling Contractor

- Shop around for the right company. Get at least three written estimates. Ask for and check references. If possible, look at jobs the contractor recently completed.
- Check with your local chamber of commerce or Better Business Bureau for complaints.
- Be sure that the contractor has the necessary licenses and insurance, as well as the ability to obtain permits.
- Ask if the contractor's workers will do the entire job or whether subcontractors will be involved.
- Read the contract carefully. Be sure the contract states exactly what is to be done and how change orders will be handled.
- Check that the contract states when the work will be completed and what recourse you have if it isn't.
- Make sure the contract indemnifies you if work does not meet building standards and be sure that the contract specifies who will clean up after the job and be responsible for any damage.
- Ensure that the materials meet your specifications.
- Remember that you can often cancel a contract within three business days of signing it.
- Make a small down payment so you won't lose much if the contractor fails to complete the job. Don't make the final payment until you're satisfied with the work.

HOW TO Add Curb Appeal

Trim bushes and branches so they don't block windows or architectural details.

Set a pot of bright flowers (or a small evergreen in winter) on your porch or front walkway.

Install new, matching locks and knobs on your front door.

Repair any cracks or holes in the driveway, and clean oil spots with degreaser and a steel brush.

Edge the grass around walkways and trees.

Stow your garden tools and hoses out of sight, and clear kids' toys from the lawn.

Buy a new mailbox.

Upgrade your outdoor lighting.

Purchase a new doormat for outside your front door.

Clean your windows, inside and out.

Polish or replace your house numbers.

Mow your lawn. Also, turning on the sprinklers for 30 minutes before the showing will make the whole yard sparkle.

Place a seasonal wreath on your door.

HOW TO

Clean When Your Home is For Sale

Executing a deep clean before putting your home on the market will not only help it shine, but it will make tidiness easier to maintain between showings. Here are some power-cleaning tips to try.

Clean windows make a huge difference.

Remove window screens and place them outside on a tarp or other clean, waterproof surface. Use a garden hose, an all-purpose cleaner, and a soft brush to gently clean the screens. You don't need anything special to polish up window glass; just mix a solution of one part white vinegar to eight parts water, plus a drop or two of dishwashing liquid in a spray bottle. Wipe with newspaper to avoid streaks. (Washing on a cloudy day also reduces streaking.)

The fridge is the most common source of kitchen smells.

Check the drip tray underneath your refrigerator and wash out any standing water from defrosting. Scrub the inside of the fridge with a baking soda and water solution. Activated charcoal in the fridge can help keep odors at bay.

Think outside the house.

It's amazing the difference a sparkling entryway makes to your home's [curb appeal](#). Wipe down your front door; give the doormat a good shake/vacuum, and make sure dust and dirt haven't collected on outdoor-furniture. Use a pressure washer to give your driveway and garage floor a good cleaning. The acidity in dark cola drinks can help remove oil, rust, and grease stains, along with a little elbow grease.

Target the Bathroom.

For tile floors, apply your usual cleaner and then run a wet/dry vac, which will suck contaminants out of the grout. Pour a quarter cup each of baking soda and vinegar down the drains, leaving the concoction overnight, then flush with boiling water. Clean soap scum and mildew from plastic shower curtains by tossing them into your washer on the gentle cycle in cold water, with detergent and ½ cup vinegar (if mildew is present, add ½ cup of bleach instead of vinegar). Put a couple of large towels into the machine to act as scrubbers. Allow the curtain to drip-dry on the rod.

Make your bed better.

Vacuum mattresses and box springs, and then rotate and flip over. Do the same for removable furniture cushions. This is also a great time to wash or dry-clean the dust ruffle and mattress pad. Add new loft to a lumpy comforter by having two people vigorously shake the quilt up and down to redistribute stuffing.

Wash the walls.

Grease, smoke, and dust can adhere to walls and make even the best decorating look dingy. Resist the temptation to spot-clean since it will make the rest of the wall look dirtier. Mop walls using a general-purpose cleaner diluted with hot water. Start at the top corner of the wall to avoid drips. Don't press too hard, and rinse the mop head frequently in clean water. Use melamine foam cleaner to erase scuffs and stains.

HOW TO

Prepare for the Photoshoot

With the majority of buyers shopping for homes online, high-resolution slide shows and video tours are a must. Here's how to make your home shine on camera.

Understand the camera's perspective.

The camera's eye is different from the human eye. It magnifies clutter and poor furniture arrangement so that even a home that feels comfortable in person can look jumbled online.

Make it spotless.

Cameras also tend to magnify grime. Don't forget floor coverings and walls; a spot on a rug might be overlooked during a regular home showing, but it could become a focal point online.

Know what to leave.

You want to avoid clutter, but try to have three items of varying heights on each surface. On an end table you can place a tall lamp (high), a small plant (medium), and a book (low).

Snap practice pictures with your own camera.

This will give you an idea of what the home will look like on camera before the photographer shows up. Examine the photos and make changes to improve each room's appearance, such as opening blinds to let in natural light, removing magnets from the refrigerator, or taking down distracting art.

Pare down.

Removing one or two pieces of furniture from each room, even if just for the shoot, can make your space appear larger on screen.

Rearrange.

Spotlight the flow of your space by creating a focal point on the furthest wall from the doorway and arranging the other pieces of furniture to make a triangle shape. The focal point may be a bed in a bedroom or a china cabinet in a dining room.

Accessorize.

Include a healthy plant in every room; the camera loves greenery. Energize bland decor by placing a bright vase on a mantle or draping an afghan over a couch.

Keep the home in shape.

Buyers who liked what they saw online expect to encounter the same home in person.

HOW TO

Attract More Buyers

These tips will help you convince buyers your property offers top value for their dollar.

Amp up curb appeal.

Look at your home objectively from the street. Check the condition of the landscaping, paint, roof, shutters, front door, knocker, windows, and house number. Observe how your window treatments look from the outside. Something special—such as big flowerpots or an antique bench—can help your property stand out after a long day of house hunting.

Enrich with color.

Paint is cheap, but it can make a big impression. The shade doesn't have to be white or beige, but stay away from jarring pinks, oranges, and purples. Soft yellows and pale greens say “welcome,” lead the eye from room to room, and flatter skin tones. Tint ceilings in a lighter shade.

Upgrade the kitchen and bathrooms.

These are make-or-break rooms. Make sure they're squeaky clean and clutter-free, and update the pulls, sinks, and faucets. In a kitchen, add one cool appliance, such as an espresso maker.

Add old-world patina to walls.

Crown molding that's at least six to nine inches deep and proportional to the room's size can add great detail on a budget. For ceilings nine feet high or higher, consider dentil detailing, which is comprised of small, tooth-shaped blocks in a repeating ornamentation.

Screen hardwood floors.

Refinishing is costly, messy, and time-consuming, so consider screening instead. This entails a light sanding — not a full stripping of color or polyurethane — then a coat of finish.

Clean out and organize closets.

Remove anything you don't need or haven't worn in a while. Closets should only be half-full so buyers can visualize fitting their stuff in.

Update window treatments.

Buyers want light and views, not dated, heavy drapes. To diffuse light and add privacy, consider energy-efficient shades and blinds.

Hire a home inspector.

Do a preemptive strike to find and fix problems before you sell your home. Then you can show receipts to buyers, demonstrating your detailed care for their future home.

CHECKLIST

For Better a Home Showing

Remove clutter. Clear off counters and pack unnecessary decorative items. Put extra furniture in storage, and remove out-of-season items. Don't forget to clean out the garage, too.

Let it shine. Cleaning windows and screens will help bring more light into your home. Replace burnt bulbs, and consider higher wattage in low-light areas. Clean the walls or brush on a fresh coat of bright, neutral paint. Replace heavy curtains with sheer ones and show off your view.

Keep it clean. A deep clean before listing your home will make upkeep easier. Consider hiring a cleaning service to help.

Maximize comfort. In summer, shut A/C vents on the first floor so more air will get upstairs. Reverse the process in winter.

Perform a sniff test. Clean carpeting and drapes to eliminate odors. Open the windows to air out the house. Consider potpourri or scented candles and diffusers. For quick fixes in the kitchen, cotton balls soaked in vanilla extract or orange juice can instantly make the fridge a nicer-smelling place. Boil lemon juice in your microwave, then add it to your dishwasher to eliminate odors. You can also run lemon rinds through the garbage disposal for a similar effect.

Take care of minor repairs. 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.

Tidy up outdoors. Cut the grass, rake the leaves, add new mulch, trim the bushes, edge the walkways, and clean the gutters. A pot of bright flowers near the entryway adds great curb appeal.

Set the scene. A bright afghan or new accent pillows easily jazz up a dull room. Pretty dishes or a simple centerpiece on the tables can help buyers picture themselves living there. Try staging a chess game in progress. If you have a fireplace, lay fresh logs or a basket of flowers there.

Make the bath luxurious. Make sure your personal toiletry items are out of sight, along with old towels and toothbrushes. Add a new shower curtain and fancy guest soaps.

Send the pets to the neighbors. If that's not possible, crate or confine them to one room, and let the real estate practitioner know where they'll be to eliminate surprises.

Lock up valuables and medication. Agents can't watch everyone all the time.

Head out. It can be awkward for everyone if you're home at the time of a showing.

HOW TO

Use Feng Shui Concepts in Staging

Feng Shui is a Chinese system of beliefs that govern spatial arrangement in relation to the flow of energy or “life force” (known as *chi* or *qi*) in a building. Learn how to appeal to buyers who follow such principles.

Chi flows in.

Pay special attention to the front door, which is considered the “mouth of chi” and one of the most powerful aspects of the entire property. Make sure the area is swept clean and free of cobwebs and clutter. Ensure all lighting is straight and properly hung. Consider lighting the path leading up to the front door to create an inviting atmosphere.

Chi can flow out, too.

Energy can be flushed away wherever there are drains in the home. To keep the good forces of a home inside, always keep the toilet seats down and close the doors to bathrooms.

Consider the bedroom carefully.

The master bed should be in a place of honor, power, and protection. Place it farthest from and facing toward the entryway of the room. The optimal placement is diagonal in the farthest corner of the room. Paint the room in colors that promote serenity, relaxation, and romance, such as soft tones of green, blue, and lavender.

Offer a formal dining space.

The dining room symbolizes the energy and power of family togetherness. Make sure the table is clear and uncluttered during showings. Use an attractive tablecloth to enhance the look of the table while also softening sharp corners.

Get a clear perspective.

Windows are considered to be the eyes of the home. Getting your windows professionally cleaned is a good idea anyway, but for buyers, your home will sparkle all the more brightly and your view will be optimally displayed.