

The first step in getting your home ready to sell is to "de-personalize" it. A house can be a place to eat, sleep, park your car and put all your "stuff" (including other family members). A home is where you feel comfortable, warm, safe and protected. A home is where you live.

De-personalizing your home allows a potential buyer to perceive your house as their potential home. Removing family elements such as photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks and souvenirs allows the buyer to picture it with his "stuff", thereby putting his "brand" on the home. You might want to store these prized family items in an air-conditioned storage.

Clutter removal

Part of preparing a house for sale is removing the "clutter." Through the years, you've amassed a significantly large quantity of "stuff." Remember when you first looked at your new home? You opened the cabinets, pulled the drawers and opened closet doors. Your buyers will be doing the same thing, so getting rid of the extra stuff that has gathered over the years will help your house look ready for its next owner.

Areas especially vulnerable to attacks of opening and examining are:

The kitchen – clean out the pantries, cupboards and shelves – keep trashcans hidden and of course emptied.

Closets – Closets are great places for accumulating "stuff". Extra clothes, shoes and accessories that may not have seen daylight for sometime can all be boxed and placed in storage. Cleaning this space out also makes your closets look bigger – a huge item on any buyer's list.

Furniture Clutter – A room can look overcrowded if you have it full of furniture. That big over-stuffed sofa or your favorite worn, but comfortable recliner may need to find a temporary home when showing your house to prospective buyers. Again, remember, the buyer wants to envision his or her own favorite pieces in the house. You may want to tour some builder's models to see how they place furniture in the model homes. You can then get an idea of how to place your own furniture to provide the maximum effect – getting an offer.

Storage Areas – These are favorite places for "stuff" to gather. Like magnets, basements, garages, attics and sheds attract whatever doesn't go into the living room, bedrooms, closets or kitchen. Things like Uncle Henry's old bowling ball, Aunt Hilda's sketches of her parakeet or even your "Elvis is alive and well" poster. This might be the perfect time to have that garage sale you've been putting off. Cleaning up and cleaning out will dramatically enhance your selling efforts.

Plumbing and Fixtures – check all fixtures to make sure they turn easy and that faucets do not leak. The fixtures should look as shiny and new as possible.

Ceilings, walls and painting – Check your walls and ceilings for water stains. Sometimes old leaks leave stains, even after the leak has been repaired. If you should find a leak, of course have it repaired. Painting can be your best investment when selling your house. A neutral color – beige, cream, ivory or standard off-white will allow your buyers to picture your house with their color schemes. The lighter color also adds brightness to the rooms and makes them appear more spacious.

Carpet and flooring – Unless your carpet appears old and worn, or is definitely an outdated style, hiring a good carpet cleaner may be all you need. If you choose to replace the carpet, find something inexpensive in a fairly neutral color.

Windows and doors – Check all windows and doors to make sure they open easily and without noise. Invest in a can of WD-40 and spray all the hinges to ensure that each opens smoothly. Check your windows for cracked or broken windowpanes. Of course, this would be a good time to clean them allowing your rooms to be bright. As potential buyers go from room to room, someone will open each door and you want to do everything necessary to create a positive impression.

Odor Control -- For those who smoke, you might want to minimize smoking indoors while trying to sell your home. You also could purchase an ozone spray that helps to remove odors without creating a masking odor.

Pets create odors that you may have become used to, but are immediately noticeable to those with more finely tuned olfactory senses. If you are a cat owner, be sure to empty the kitty litter box on a daily basis. There also are products that you can sprinkle in a layer below the kitty litter that helps to control odor. For those with dogs, keep the dog outdoors as much as possible. You might also try sprinkling carpet freshener on the carpet on a periodic basis.

The Exterior of the House

Cleaned out closets and cabinets, washed windows, new paint on the walls and freshly cleaned carpets, along with shiny new faucets and replaced light bulbs – the inside of your home sparkles as it entices potential buyers to “take a look”. But we’re not quite finished. Before the buyer steps over the threshold, will he or she need to walk through the un-mown grass, step over the kid’s bicycles or dodge the game of kick ball being played on your front lawn?

Your potential buyer’s first impression of your house will be based on his or her view of the house from the inside of their agent’s car. So, it’s back to work!

Take a walk across the street and take a good look at your house. Look at the houses nearby to see how they compare to yours. If yours already looks better, then you are several steps ahead of the game.

Landscaping -- Is your landscaping at least average for the neighborhood? If not, buy a few bushes and plant them. If you have an area for flowers, buy mature colorful flowers

and plant them. Flowers add a splash of vibrancy and color, creating a favorable first impression.

Your lawn should be evenly cut, freshly edged, well watered and free of brown spots. If there are problems with your lawn, you should probably take care of them before working on the inside of your home. This is because certain areas may need to be re-sod, and you want to give it a chance to grow so that re-sod areas are not immediately apparent. Plus, you might want to give fertilizer enough time to be effective.

Always rake up loose leaves and grass cuttings.

House Exterior -- The big decision is whether to paint or not to paint. When you look at your house from across the street, does it look tired and faded? If so, a paint job may be in order. It often is a very good investment and really spruces up the appearance of a house, adding dollars to offers from potential homebuyers

Choose a color that fits well in your neighborhood. Of course, the color also depends on the style of your house, too. For some reason, different shades of yellow seem to bring out the best response in homebuyers, whether it is in the trim or the basic color of the house.

As for the roof, if you know your house has an old leaky roof, replace it. If you do not replace a leaky roof, you are going to have to disclose it and the buyer will want a new roof, anyway. Otherwise, wait and see what the home inspector says. Why spend money unnecessarily?

The Back Yard -- The back yard should be clean and neat. If you have a pool or spa, keep it freshly maintained and always clean. Dog owners – be sure to consistently keep the area clear of "debris."

Front Door & Entryway -- Your front door should be especially nice, since it is the entryway into the house. Polish the door fixture so it gleams. If the door needs refinishing or repainting, make sure to get that done.

Remove anything with a personal nature, plaques, doormats, name plates, etc. The idea is again, to let your potential buyer visualize the home as his.

Make sure the lock works easily and the key fits properly. When a homebuyer comes to visit your home, the agent uses the key from the lock box to unlock the door. A sticky lock can cause a 'sticky situation'.