

## The top ten exterior home improvements

By Erin K. Witt

According to the National Association of REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, curb appeal sells more than half of all houses that go on the market. Many buyers fall in love with their “dream home” at the curb. An attractive exterior has the power to lure a potential homebuyer inside for a showing. Unfortunately, a less-than-stellar exterior can sour buyers to all other aspects of the home—even if the peeling paint and broken shutters are hiding marble bathrooms and a stainless steel kitchen.

Buyers often look for homes that they can enjoy immediately, so remodeling the exterior can often provide an advantage over other sellers. And, because the exterior appearance of a house can dramatically impact the final selling price, a wise investment now will pay off at resale time.

To make sure your own property gets high marks for exterior aesthetics, here are several improvement tips from the Web site DoItYourself.com that will help strengthen the impression that your house makes.

**Tip #1: Curb appeal** is crucial. A home’s exterior begins at the curb, not at the front door. Pay attention to worn fences, mailboxes and lampposts, all of which can turn buyers away before they even reach your doorstep. A home with curb appeal can make people stop and take notice — and it makes a much stronger impact than an interior feature, like a great kitchen or fireplace.

**Tip #2: Decks** can blend the best of interior comforts with the great outdoors. By incorporating features such as built-in seating, outdoor kitchens, and fireplaces, families can relax, play, dine and entertain while experiencing what has always made decks popular: being outside. According to the Southern Building Material Association, 2-3 million decks are built every year in the United States—more than 235 an hour.

**Tip #3: Outdoor lighting** is not only a beautiful addition for your backyard, it’s functional, too. For enhancing landscaping, install lighting that is low voltage to provide illumination. Other benefits of outdoor lighting include safety, and overall ambience.

**Tip #4: Painting** is the least expensive way to get the biggest return on your investment. According to a national survey by Sears Weatherbeater Paints, more than 37 percent of all Americans (23 million households) would choose white as the primary color in painting the exterior of their houses. In order of preference, the choices remaining choices were gray, blue, tan, brown, cream, beige, green, yellow and, finally, red, Sears said. Although color choices vary from person to person, the appeal of a freshly painted home is universal.

**Tip #5: Walkways** that are cracked and broken should be replaced, and framed with flowerbeds, decorative edging or other embellishments. Flowers are a quick, inexpensive way to improve any entry. Masses of bedding plants along a pathway or pots of roses flanking your front door can make a big difference in your home's outlook.

**Tip #6: Driveways** are often overlooked in home improvements, but just switching to a different paving material may be enough to work a magical transformation. Multi-hued brick paving will soften in time for a used, aged look. Pebbles can add some graceful

curves and give an off-putting driveway a softer edge. Even grass can make a durable paving material when you "pave" your driveway with a concrete grid—you can cut grass short to expose the grid underneath, or leave it long and let your drive merge with the lawn.

**Tip #7: Roofs** should be routinely inspected twice a year. From the ground, use binoculars to look for missing, loose, or damaged shingles. Then trace any leaks from inside the attic. In fall, you may need to replace missing shingles, cement down curled edges, and recaulk where plumbing stacks, cable brackets, or antennae penetrate the roof. If you're hesitant about scaling the heights, hire a reputable roofer.

**Tip #8: Residing and window replacement** are two of the more costly repairs, but both garner a good return on investment. Homeowners can expect approximately a 51-percent return on investment for residing and a 43-percent return on investment for replaced windows, according to the National Association of Real Estate Appraisers.

**Tip #9: Clean and straighten** your entire property area. Grease or oil spots on driveways and walkways also can draw unwanted attention. Make sure that you remove these spots, as well as all debris like fallen tree branches and leaves, to create a clean, unobstructed view of your home.

**Tip #10: Simple architectural accents** can give a plain-looking home instant charm. Shutters, decorative millwork, window trim, and scallops or shakes easily change appearances for a relatively small investment.