

Welcome potential homebuyers at the door: 10 exterior home showing tips

By Erin K. Witt

Most homeowners trying to sell their property are familiar with the drill: the inside of your home must sparkle at all times. No towels on the floor, no cluttered kitchen counters—and don't even think about not making your bed in the morning. A prospective buyer could be just around the corner, so the house must always be show-ready.

However, a surprising number of sellers do not extend this practice to the exterior of their home—ironically, what people see first. If potential buyers are greeted by a blanket of fallen leaves, peeling paint on the windows and discarded children's toys strewn along the sidewalk, they may not even make it to the front door.

Whether you are putting your home on the market now, or planning to make a move in the spring, the following tips can help your home shine from the outside in.

Tip #1: Plan for perfection. Develop a plan for outside décor, choosing elements that will accent your property. The plan could include simple touches like purchasing pretty hanging baskets for porches and patios, cleaning patio furniture, and maybe investing in some new, bright cushions for that furniture. Remember not to overdo, though—some buyers may not find your collection of yard gnomes as endearing as you do!

Tip #2: Get a green thumb. Homeowners should plant colorful flowers along the sidewalk leading to the front door. Even potted plants can add a nice touch to the front door, and can be maintained easily if you don't have time to devote to gardening. The long life cycle and hardy nature of many potted plants, such as chrysanthemums and geraniums, can also help them decorate your entrance well into autumn.

Tip #3: Welcome! A welcome mat is an easy way to add color. Choose one with a color that coordinates well with your door. Naturally, a mat is also a practical way to keep your home's interior tidy—guests and potential buyers can clean their shoes before entering.

Tip #4: Pay attention to paint. Make sure the trim around windows and doors is in good shape. If the paint is peeling or cracking, scrape it off and apply fresh paint. The front door is especially important—painting it a bright shade such as red or forest green can attract attention and help liven up the rest of the home.

Tip #5: Clean it up. Tidy up. Sweep walkways frequently, and keep all windows clean. If you have children's toys, pet remnants or other “obstacle courses” in the front or back yards, make sure they are taken care of. A simple power washing of the home's exterior, decks, and porches can enhance the view from the street tremendously. It's also a good idea to polish the front-door handle. Remember: The front door is one of the first things guests and potential buyers see when they visit.

Tip #6: Keep it neat. Keep bushes trimmed, and add fresh mulch around trees and shrubbery. Prune trees if necessary, and make sure the entire yard is manicured regularly.

Tip #7: Curb appeal counts—even in the cold. Despite the cold temperatures and threat of inclement weather, don't neglect curb appeal during the fall and winter months. Make sure walkways are cleared of late fall leaves are still littering the ground, and replace the seasonal flowers on your front porch with small, potted evergreens.

Tip #8: Don't get snowed under. Snow removal is one of the most crucial factors to help establish good curb appeal during the winter. It can be a time-consuming and strenuous task, but keeping walkways and driveways cleared can prevent a snowball effect of negative impacts. When snow isn't removed, a mess is typically tracked into the seller's house and can cause carpets to get soiled and then show poorly. And beyond aesthetics, the hassle of trudging through the snow to view a home can cause some potential buyers to carry a grudge, or worse, lead to a slip and fall accident.

Tip #9: Deck the halls—within reason. Although decorations are an important tool in marketing a home during the holidays, keep your efforts on the conservative side. Not all home shoppers may celebrate the holidays in the manner you do. Don't overwhelm potential buyers with abundant displays of holiday cheer—you want your house to be noticed, not your decorations

Tip #10: Look inside. Although curb appeal focuses on the home's exterior, what's inside can be revealing, too. Visually inspect your windows from the street and remove any visible clutter, such as knickknacks that detract from the beauty of your home.