

The top ten ways to add home value

By Erin K. Witt

As spring approaches, many homeowners will begin home improvement projects. But which are best for adding home value—or attract the most potential buyers? Experts from all facets of the home industry suggest the following tips.

Tip #1: Lean on landscaping. Landscaping is a key part first impressions. Average returns can be significant, in some markets upward of 100 to 200 percent. Choosing to do nothing or allowing shrubs to become overgrown—which blocks out natural sunlight and obstructs the exterior of the home—can negatively affect the price of a home.

Tip #2: Brighten up your bathroom. According to REALTORS[®], one of the most important rooms in the home is the bathroom. Statistics back up this belief: *Remodeling* magazine's annual cost versus value report revealed that major bathroom-remodeling jobs saw between 88 percent and 91 percent of their costs recouped. Even simply replacing towel racks, light fixtures or the sink can make a major difference to potential buyers. Remove stains from toilets, tubs and sinks. If fixtures are outdated or leak, replace them. Inspect, repair and replace any worn out grout in tiles, and caulk all joints for a watertight seal.

Tip #3: Give your kitchen a facelift. The most important thing to buyers about the kitchen, say REALTORS[®], is that it appears spacious. If the kitchen counter is full of appliances, leave one or two appliances there, but put the rest in storage. Make sure the faucet works properly, shuts off quickly and is attractive. Clean the cabinets. If they're dark, consider repainting them to give the entire kitchen a fresh, new look. It is also a good idea to upgrade the cabinet hardware, adding new knobs and other fixtures.

Tip #4: Crank up the curb appeal. Beyond landscaping, basic curb appeal can increase home's value, and when selling, can attract potential buyers. Windows, French doors, shutters, window boxes and architectural shingles are a few curb appeal features that can help augment a home's other positive features. And not all are expensive either. When replacing a roof, select architectural shingles. For a few hundred dollars more, you'll add a whole new dimension to your house. The same thing goes for plantings, bushes and bright flowers. Surrounding your home with colorful flowers goes a long way toward adding curb appeal.

Tip #5: Put on some paint. One of the best ways to increase home value and enhance appeal to sellers is to put a fresh coat of paint on all the walls: Your home will look clean, fresh and new. Stick with neutral colors like beige, cream and white.

Tip #6: Finesse the front door. A more attractive entrance can considerably increase the perceived value of a home. According to the NFO WorldGroup's National Home Valuation Study, an enhanced entryway can add as much as \$24,000 to a home's perceived value in some markets.

Tip #7: Pretty up the porcelain. In the kitchen and bathrooms, keep the sinks spotless. If you can't remove stains, consider replacing sinks with a more modern look. Quality porcelain sinks made with cast iron are a good choice since they're available in many colors, are quiet and stand up well over time. If you replace the sink, update the faucet at the same time—you'd be surprised how much this will improve the appearance of your kitchen or bathroom.

Tip #8: Establish exterior excellence. Have your siding, stucco or brick professionally power-washed and then touch up walls and trim with paint. Give your front door a fresh coat of paint, and add a highly polished brass doorknocker and clearly visible brass address numbers. Replace any broken or missing shingles, and repair any damaged storm windows or screens.

Tip #9: Enhance energy efficiency. There is clear evidence that investments in energy efficiency lead to higher home resale values. A recent study published in *The Appraisal Journal* shows that the market value of a home increases by \$10 to \$25 for every one dollar decrease in annual fuel bills. The study confirms what many have believed for years: Energy efficiency substantially increases the market value of owner-occupied homes.

Tip #10: Remodel—within reason. Remodeling can increase the value of a home—but maybe not as much as expected. In some cases, you may not even recover the costs of the renovation. The Remodelers' Council suggests remodeling projects that bring the value of your home up to the value of your neighbors' homes. A good rule of thumb is to keep the total of the value of your home before remodeling and the value of the remodeling projects to within 10 to 15 percent above median sales prices for a home in your neighborhood. Avoid projects that make your home the most expensive in your neighborhood or different from the other homes, such as a large outdoor swimming pool.