

It's show time: 10 tips for making the most of an open house

By Erin K. Witt

The house is immaculate. Fresh flowers grace the dining room table in a cut-glass vase. The smell of homemade cookies wafts gently from the kitchen. In the master bedroom, a Chopin melody plays softly. The windows sparkle, the front walk has been swept and every light in the house burns with a warm glow.

It's time for an open house.

For many selling their home, an open house plays an essential part in marketing a property. In an open house, a REALTOR® is on hand to show a listed home to the general public, often on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and almost always without appointment. Although it is a slight variance from the traditional personalized walk-through, many potential homebuyers enjoy the no-pressure atmosphere an open house can provide.

Here are a few tips to help make the most of your own open house:

Tip #1: Get inspired. Go tour model homes in new developments. They will show you great examples of tastefully (but sparsely) furnished homes that anyone could live in. There may be “personality”—but no person.

Tip #2: Make your home anonymous. You want buyers to view your home as their future home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it may momentarily shatter their illusions about living in the house themselves. Put away personal items, such as family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs.

Tip #3: Rethink and rearrange your furniture. Rooms easily become overcrowded. If you had planned on discarding any furnishings before moving, do it before your home goes on the market. If you simply have too much furniture, move it to the basement, garage or put it in storage. This will free up the room and make it seem more spacious and airy—an appealing selling point. Well-placed furnishings can also open up a room. Avoid lining furniture along all four walls. Instead, try placing a piece or two on an angle. In the living areas, include an area for cozy conversation or an out-of-the-way corner for reading.

Tip #4: De-clutter. Since you want potential buyers to be noticing the house and not your belongings, this is the perfect time for significant collections such as knick-knacks, trophies, and books to be boxed up for the move. Also, clear small appliances, little jars, bottles, and any clutter off kitchen and bath countertops to create a feeling of spaciousness in a room.

Tip #5: Use aromatic appeal. Just as certain smells can trigger memories in a person, the scent of your home can leave a lasting impression on a potential buyer. For this

reason, avoid cooking strong-smelling foods such as fish, liver, garlic, onions, or anything fried or spicy before showing your home. Open windows and doors to let in fresh air. Baking a frozen loaf of bread, cookies, or pie can create an inviting fragrance. And though you never want to over-perfume your home, you may want to light a candle as a quick and aromatic remedy. Stay away from sharp floral scents and stick with a vanilla or cinnamon fragrance.

Tip #6: Put your home in the best light. If heavy drapes, curtains or blinds block appealing views, leave them open. Natural light makes a room seem bright and cheery. For evening showings, turn on all possible lights for a warm glow.

Tip #7: Don't neglect details, like linens. Stained, dingy towels are a no-no for an open house. In the kitchen and bath, consider setting out guest towels and soaps. Inevitably, a visitor or two will need to use your facilities during the showing. Throw rugs and carpets should also be in good condition—and if they are not completely necessary, they should be removed altogether. Never place a rug over carpeting. Tattered or worn bedspreads should be removed, and beds should always be made.

Tip #8: Bring the outdoors in. In spring and summer, potted plants or a lush hanging planter are appealing and can add a lot of impact. If your house is going on the market early in the season, consider purchasing mature plants rather than starting from scratch. A home's interior can benefit from flowers and greenery, as well. A simple vase and bouquet can brighten up any room of the home.

Tip #9: Pay attention to appliances. This is especially important if appliances are built-in, or being sold with the home. Ovens, stovetops, and range fans should be well cleaned and grease-free. If drip pans have burnt-on grease and are unsalvageable, they should be replaced with new ones. Clean out the refrigerator fan grate, which can collect a lot of dust. It is easy to remove and may be cleaned with a damp cloth.

Tip #10: De-emphasize pets. Not every potential buyer will be an animal lover. If you have pets, keep cages, dishes, and litter boxes clean at all times. Pet hair should be frequently vacuumed. Dog droppings should be scooped up from the front lawn and disposed of. And always cage or kennel pets when your house is being shown.