
Curb Appeal

Getting Top Dollar!

The NW Home Lifestyles Team Newsletter
Tip #3 Curb Appeal

Get More Spend Less

- Don't have the time to keep the house clean? Consider hiring a cleaning service to keep your house in shape while it's on the market.
- If your wall-to-wall carpet looks fine except for a couple of worn spots, have it professionally cleaned and cover the imperfect areas with small rugs.
- Make sure stairways are safe by freeing them of toys or slippery mats, securing the handrail, and installing good lighting.
- If possible, plan to put your home on the market during peak real estate periods – spring and autumn.
- Don't wait until the last minute to call professional painters because their schedules may be filled. Hire them as soon as you make the decision to sell.
- Keep your lawn looking thick and green by fertilizing during the appropriate season.
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The huge, dark gray house was more than unkempt; with a crumbling front wall, missing shingles, thigh-high grass, broken window panes, and household items scattered in the yard it looked sickly. THIS was Pam's dream house?

"Ummmm, Pam, with all due respect," I said with my usual candor, "This place looks like it should have a black cloud and thunderbolt over it." She sighed.

"But it was cheap, really cheap. You just have to look past the rundown condition and see the potential. How else could I afford a house this size?"

Though Pam, an artist with an incredible eye, was able to look into the future and see what the house could be after cleaning and repair, I was more like the average home buyer – extremely dubious. If I had been the one looking to buy a house, I wouldn't have stepped a foot on that property. I wouldn't have even slowed down the car.

Pam did get the house for about half the price of similar homes in comparable neighborhoods, which means the seller made 50% less on the sale because he was unwilling to do the repairs necessary to improve its curb appeal. It also took him over two years to find a buyer.

"Curb appeal" is real estate talk for the initial appearance, and the

impression it makes, of the house as seen from the road. It's what the buyer sees and feels as she parks her car across the street, crosses the road, strolls up the front walkway and pauses to knock on the door. Curb appeal includes the overall neighborhood, the house's location on the block, condition of landscaping, the overall look of the house, and attention to details.

A house needn't sport a cloud and thunderbolt look for prospective buyers to bypass it for another one. Sometimes little irritants – weeds, peeling paint, or tacky lawn ornaments – can create enough doubt to make them go elsewhere.

Luckily, most of the little irritants can be corrected with a little time, a bit of money and an open mind.

Most real estate experts agree that the most important steps to take in preparing a house for listing include fixing the driveway, landscaping the yard, painting the exterior, and painting or replacing the front door.

Improving the appearance of the driveway can be as easy and inexpensive as cleaning up oil spills, pressure washing to remove mildew or moving extra cars to another location.

(Continued on reverse)

For damaged driveways, excessive cracks may be more unsightly if they're filled with patches. In this case, resurfacing the driveway may be necessary.

Landscaping and lawn maintenance create the backdrop for the house. Like the scenery in a play, it showcases the main attraction. In his book, *Sell It Yourself*, Ralph Roberts vividly describes the ideal lawn. "You want your yard to look like a golf course fairway – lush, green and meticulously maintained." This requires filling bare spots with grass plugs or sod, applying fertilizer and bug killer, and regularly watering the lawn.

For those with little spare time, it may be worth the money to hire a maintenance service to shape up your

yard and keep it maintained as long as your house is on the market.

Add some color with a flowerbed or two of various annuals. A newly mowed and edged lawn accented with flowers makes a good first impression. The yard should look clean and green...with a few splashes of color.

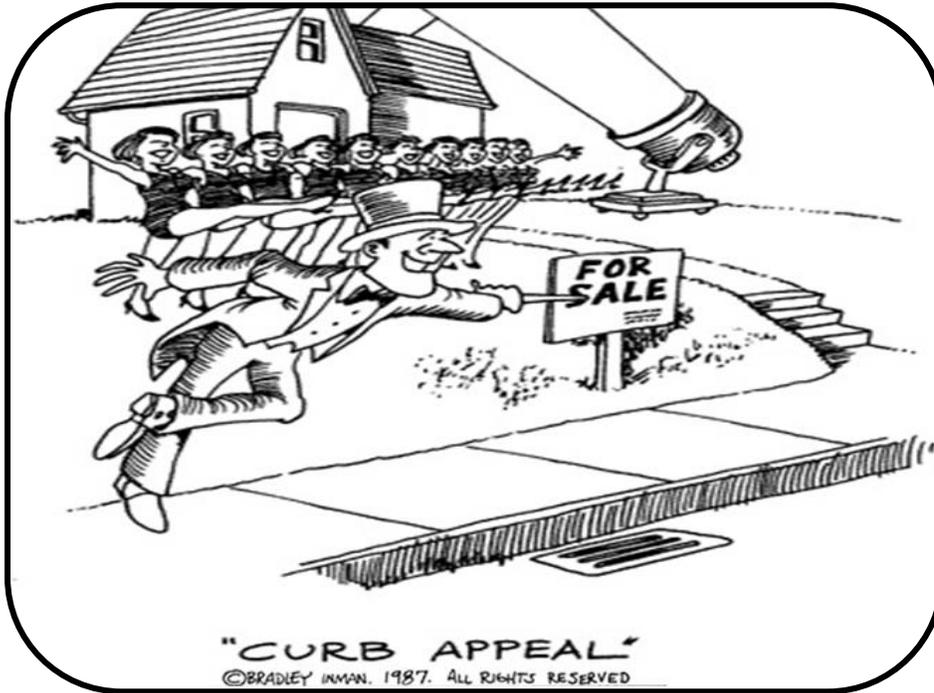
Of course, once the lawn is golf course quality, you don't want to spoil the effect with a cluttered yard. Neatly trim bushes and hedges so they accent the yard. Keep leaves raked and walkways swept daily. Trash cans, hoses, yard tools and toys should be stored in the garage or a shed. And while lawn ornaments – pink flamingos, elves, concrete geese or a statue of David – may make your life brighter, someone else might find them offensive. Put them in storage.

Want the most dramatic improvement in appearance for the best value? Paint the exterior of your house, including trim, window frames, shutters, gutters and downspouts, mailbox and front door. Opt for neutral shades of white, light gray, or pale beige, which are more universal.

If the existing paint on the outer walls is in good shape, consider touching up everything else in the list. This will make the house look brighter.

The front door is the transition area. At its best, it carries the pleasant look of the lawn – and the opinion of the buyer – over the threshold of the house. At worst, it undoes everything you achieved with the lawn and casts a pallor on the rest of the house. The buyer won't miss the entryway, so the seller must not overlook it. Pressure clean the front steps, railings, and door. Clean out light fixtures, replace burnt-out bulbs and fix the broken doorbell. If the door is solid and in good working condition, give it a fresh coat of paint. If it's damaged, cheaply made or otherwise unsightly, invest in a new, hardwood door. When this is done, add the final touch to the threshold: A brand-new doormat. After all, with all the work you just finished doing to spruce up the place, you want buyers to feel welcome.

By the way, Pam's place now looks like a European country house, complete with shadow boxes, a wrought iron gate and English gardens. But the very first thing she did was paint the exterior...soft beige.



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