

10 Inexpensive Outdoor Fixes to Help Sell Your Home

Contributed by Eric Rogers
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{bot_wrgoogle}Several popular TV programs focus on improving the exterior appearance of homes. Often, properties showcased on these programs undergo amazing visual transformations after very small changes. We can use this attitude – more for less – to improve your own home.

First, a tip: remember our motto – more for less. We want to focus on small, inexpensive changes that impact the VISUAL appearance of your home. Fixing that broken sprinkler head in the back corner (things that will not be seen by visiting buyers) or spending big bucks for major improvements like adding mature landscaping will surprisingly yield less than you think.

1. Mow, Trim and Water

Perhaps the cheapest of all fixes – if you have a yard, you more than likely already have the tools. Plan on mowing 2 days before an open house (this gives the grass clippings a chance to dry up and blow away – sweep up whatever is left before your visitors arrive). Trim those hedges and cut away dead or unsightly tree branches. Also, if you tend to save money by not watering, now's the time to spend a little – just a couple good soaks a week can really make a difference. You can also invest in a bag of fertilizer. You really want your grass to be as green and nice as possible.

2. Keep the Yard Neat

Some buyers can be turned off by clutter in the yard. This can include:

Scattered toys – clean them up and ask your children to help clean and keep things tidy – maybe offer an incentive like a trip for some ice cream

Excess lawn ornaments – as a general rule, no more than 2 in the front and 2 in the back. Seriously. If you have more, time to start packing them up for the move.

Jumbled or neglected lawn furniture – if you're keeping it, put it in the shed or an off-site storage shed. If this isn't possible, do your best to clean it and keep it stacked or placed nicely. Of course, if you have a nice deck or patio and your furniture is in good repair, you can highlight the use of this space for entertainment – unfurl the umbrella for your open house.

Visible yard equipment – keep the mower, trimmer, shovel, rake etc. in the shed or in the garage, or if possible, in an off-site storage shed. Coil up that hose and keep it out of site (but at hand for watering).

Trash – give your yard the once-over – look for stray pieces of trash in and under the bushes, near the fences and wherever you feel trash might collect.

Animal waste – if you have a pet, really work hard at removing all pet waste. Buyers want to walk around the yard, and stepping in something is never good – even worse if they track it into your nicely cleaned house. This is a big one and only takes an hour or so of unpleasantness.

3. Freshen the Mulch and Remove Weeds

If you have beds with mulch, get a bag or two of fresh mulch – changing the washed-out grey of old mulch to the light-brown of new is a big visual improvement. Also, do your best to keep your planters weed free. You can save by staying away from weed killers or other chemicals – the last thing you want is brown, dying weeds. Two hands, a small trowel and some sturdy gloves are the way to go.

4. Flowers Sell

An oldie but a goodie – if it's an appropriate time of the year, plant some nice flowers in the front of the house. Go for rich colors – reds, purples, blues – and low-maintenance types. Impatiens are hardy, pretty and fairly inexpensive – that's just one suggestion. Hanging baskets or potted flowers on the porch create a warm and inviting entry to your home.

5. Wash that House

You'd be surprised at the amount of dirt a house naturally attracts and how much brighter it looks without it. If you have a hose nozzle, put it on the stream setting and give your house a bath. Even better, spend a few bucks on one of those spray-on, wash-off house cleaners – just make sure you get one suitable for your type of siding (read the product specifications before you buy). For a real revelation, borrow a pressure washer from a friend, just be careful you don't strip paint – we're trying to save, not start a month-long painting project. Speaking of which....

6. To Paint or Not to Paint

That is the question. On one hand, paint is fairly inexpensive and can make things really look fresh and new. On the other, some houses have LOTS of areas to paint, and painting one or a few only draws attention to those areas that didn't get treated. Here's where you have to use your own judgment. Exterior painting can really get to be a can of worms, especially when you have to deal

with scaffolding and such. My rule of thumb is: if you can do it yourself without using expensive equipment (scaffolding) and do it quickly and relatively cheaply, go for it. If not, focus your energy on other areas.

7. Fix any Obvious Repair Issues

Things like broken shutters, missing shingles that are visible from the ground, badly dented or missing siding and all other random and general repairs should be taken care of if possible. Remember our motto: more for less. If something will take too long or cost too much, unless you feel it is a major visual distraction, best to leave it alone. I usually take a few circles around the outside of the house and just write down any negatives I can see. Go stand out at the curb and take a look – note anything out of order. Afterwards, I take the list and prioritize. I put the things that are big visual distractions or cheap/easy fixes at the top and begin there.

8. Wash the Windows

You don't need to get all the way up to the highest ones, but the ones on the ground floor should be washed. This will allow visitors to see into the house from outside and gives it the appearance of being more inviting as opposed to drawn curtains and closed blinds.

9. Ask the Neighbors to Help Out

Many don't even think about this, but make sure your neighbors know you'll be holding an open house – they might even help you with some word-of-mouth advertising. If your neighbors are thinking of having the drive resurfaced, doing heavy yard work, painting the exterior of the house, parking a garbage truck in the driveway, (etc. etc.) the day of your open house, politely ask that they do those things on another day. You don't want buyers to come away with any negative impressions about your home or neighborhood and neighbors are a big thing to new buyers.

10. Prepare the Home for Showing

Remove all personal items from the exterior of the house – those plaques that read "The Smith Family" should be taken down and packed away, same thing with personalized mailboxes – either replace them (you will have to if you want to take it with you) or remove any personal identification. Take a few minutes and sweep the porch, steps, deck, patio, driveway and sidewalk before visitors arrive – a good once-over is fine. Put your cars in the garage, or better yet, the street. If you have heavy oil or grease spots, try to get your hands on a degreaser – you can find them at your local home improvement stores. A little scrubbing will really improve the look of your driveway or garage. Finally, turn on all exterior lights, even during the day. If you have landscaping lights, turn these on as well. Do any last-minute pick-ups or put-aways, and then head out. It's always better to NOT be home when visitors come to look at your house – it feels like an imposition for many people. You want them spending as much

time as they want in your home.

Congratulations – you have now set yourself up for success! After completing all of these things, you have greatly increased your chances of a sale and also increased your chances of realizing more money at closing. Many home buyers take visual appearance very seriously when choosing a new home. By making sure your house looks as nice as it can be from the outside, you have left a positive and lasting impression on your potential buyers.

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