FSBO LISTED

FREE GUIDE FOR HOME SELLERS

Home Preparation Guide

90 things you can’t afford to skip before buyers walk through the door.

Sell it fast

The best way to sell your house is to sell it fast. When a home isn’t in its best condition, it sits on the market too long and goes stale, and that’s when buyers start to wonder what’s wrong with it.

Your one defense is presentation. Buyers spend their weekends looking at homes. They’ve seen a lot, and the more they see, the more yours needs to stand out. Basic repairs and cleaning aren’t enough anymore. Present your home so buyers can picture everything it could be. Make them dream.

Take a trip down memory lane

You were a buyer once, and something about this home won you over. Remember what it was and make it a selling point. Walk through each room and note one thing you love about it. Ask everyone in your household what they love, too. The more of those features you show off, the more buyers you’ll reach.

Write everything down

One flaw in how your home is presented can cost you a buyer. Walk through the house several times and write down anything that looks old, worn or broken. Recruit your family to help: more pairs of eyes catch more.

Get into the buyer's mindset

Buyers don't take chances. Start at your front door and look at the house as if you've never seen it. What stands out? How does it feel? If you were looking for a place to settle down, would you pick this one? If you don't feel it's the ideal place to live, buyers won't either.

Avoid the "death spiral"

The longer a house sits, the worse buyers think of it, and the worse they think of it, the longer it sits. You've probably wondered yourself what was wrong with a home that had been for sale for months. Don't let that be yours.

Make your home ready on the first day you show it, not the last: clean, neutral, spacious, every repair done, and every room staged with lighting and furniture that show it off.

☐ **How to use this checklist:** walk through your home room by room, check off each item as you finish it, and write down anything that needs a repair or a purchase. Most of these cost little or nothing, and they add up to a home buyers remember.

1–3 REPAIR EVERYTHING

- ☐ **1** Repair everything that needs it. When buyers spot one thing that needs work, they start doubting the whole house. Small things add up to a feeling of neglect, and nothing turns buyers away faster.
- ☐ **2** If a repair is too big to finish before you need to move, be upfront about it. Consider offering buyers a credit toward the repair, share what you know about it, and put it on your seller's disclosure. Hiding a problem always comes out, and it costs you more than the repair.
- ☐ **3** Walk the house and look for peeling paint and wallpaper. Fix every spot.

4–8 DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS THAN SPARKLING

- ☐ **4** Nobody buys a dirty car or a dirty new jacket. Get everything as clean as you can, so the house looks close to new.
- ☐ **5** Make the woodwork and cabinets shine, especially in the kitchen, one of the biggest selling points for most buyers.
- ☐ **6** Have the carpets and rugs professionally steam cleaned. If pets have damaged the carpet, you may need to replace it.
- ☐ **7** Clean every light fixture. Nobody wants to see years of dead bugs.
- ☐ **8** Clean every window, inside and out. Get the ladder out.

9–10 APPEAL TO AS MANY BUYERS AS POSSIBLE

- [ ] **9** What you like doesn't matter; what buyers like does. Choose neutral paint and carpet. Someone might love your taste, but you don't want to wait for them.
- [ ] **10** Think about whether buyers could move their own furniture in without repainting or replacing carpet. Extra work scares buyers off.

11–15 CREATE MORE SPACE

- [ ] **11** Part of the dream of a new home is more space, and it helps buyers justify an emotional decision. Give them the feeling of room to spare.
- [ ] **12** Rent a storage unit for as long as the home is for sale. Collectibles, extra furniture and anything you don't need go there. Keep only what adds a little personality.
- [ ] **13** Rearrange furniture to open up each room. Sometimes a piece has to leave the room entirely.
- [ ] **14** Pack off-season clothes and thin out the closets. Buyers want to see room for their things. Never leave anything on a closet floor.
- [ ] **15** Light makes rooms feel bigger. Open the drapes and add lamps where it's dim. Nothing in the house should ever be dark.

16–21 MAKE BUYERS FEEL AT HOME

- [ ] **16** Smell matters. Your house should smell clean and inviting. Walk each room and take note of every odor. An ozone generator, used carefully and with no one home, can help with stubborn odors.
- [ ] **17** Covering a smell rarely works. Find and remove the source.
- [ ] **18** Pet urine only goes away one way: replace the carpet and pad where the accident happened. It's worth every penny.
- [ ] **19** Steam clean carpets and dry clean drapes to clear out odors that have built up over the years.
- [ ] **20** Don't let laundry pile up in closets and hampers. It gives off a musty smell.
- [ ] **21** Set the stage with smells people tie to good times: cookies in the oven, fresh flowers. Smell tells buyers what life could be like there.

22–26 OPEN THEIR MINDS TO THE POSSIBILITIES

- [ ] **22** Buyers want to see what they could do with your home. Accessories, lighting and color make the difference. Visit a few professionally staged open houses and jot down ideas.
- [ ] **23** An open book on the coffee table, fresh logs by the fireplace, a basket of fruit in the kitchen: use touches like these where they fit.
- [ ] **24** Let in as much light as you can. Swap heavy curtains for lighter blinds or sheers, clean every window, and add lamps to dark corners. Make sure every fixture works and is clean.
- [ ] **25** Show buyers the home through all four seasons. Set out a few photos of the yard in spring, summer, fall and winter where buyers will see them.
- [ ] **26** If there's something you can't change, don't apologize for it or try to hide it. Buyers will notice it anyway. Let them decide for themselves, and disclose any known defects on your seller's disclosure as the law requires.

27–35 MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

- [ ] **27** The outside of your home is the buyer's first impression. If it isn't neat and attractive, they'll expect less from the rest of the house. Give the exterior your best effort.
- [ ] **28** Start with the front door. Is it clean? Freshly painted? Make sure every door opens and closes smoothly. Buyers notice the little annoyances.
- [ ] **29** Set the stage with colorful flowers and plants. Don't settle for a bare entry.
- [ ] **30** A seasonal wreath, a pumpkin or a pot of flowers can brighten the entry. Plants with earthy scents, like pine, work well.
- [ ] **31** Put out a doormat that says "Welcome Home." It's a subtle suggestion that buyers can stop looking.
- [ ] **32** Every window and screen should be intact, with no holes. Don't let buyers start adding up replacement costs.
- [ ] **33** Check that every lock opens smoothly. A stuck lock is the kind of thing buyers remember.
- [ ] **34** Look over the roof and clean the gutters. Replace loose or missing shingles. Buyers do look up.
- [ ] **35** Wash the outside of every window and replace any broken glass. Cracked glass is a big turnoff.

36–39 GIVE BUYERS A LUSH GREEN YARD

- [ ] **36** Keep the yard as neat as possible. Rake, mow and edge, and don't leave debris lying around.

- [ ] **37** Keep shrubs trimmed and shaped to flatter the house.
- [ ] **38** Add seasonal flowers along the front walk. An old iron bucket or a wagon full of flowers is easy to care for and catches the eye.
- [ ] **39** Set the scene out back: a table, chairs and the grill, even the table set with plates and glasses. The more real it looks, the more buyers picture themselves there. Put big items like a trampoline in storage so the yard feels open.

40–41 A PERFECTLY CLEAR DRIVEWAY

- [ ] **40** Buyers see the driveway before anything else, so it has to be perfect. Fill cracks, sweep away debris, and wash away stains.
- [ ] **41** Clear every toy, bike and piece of equipment off the driveway. They're unsightly and a tripping hazard.

42–45 THE FRONT ENTRY

- [ ] **42** Buyers notice everything as they walk in. Pay extra attention to the floor and walls here. A plant or flowers on the entry table helps.
- [ ] **43** Make the entry closet roomy. Pack away out-of-season coats and add a little potpourri. Don't let a musty coat be the first thing buyers smell.
- [ ] **44** Buyers are picky about entry flooring, so a nice rug is a wise investment.
- [ ] **45** Big or small, the entry can always look bigger. Hang a mirror to add the illusion of space.

46–50 LIVING ROOMS

- [ ] **46** Want to know how to set up your living room? Visit a furniture store and copy their showrooms, personal touches and all.
- [ ] **47** Decorate the mantel with something colorful and attractive. Skip anything tacky.
- [ ] **48** Remove extra furniture. If a piece blocks the way or makes the room feel cramped, it goes to storage.
- [ ] **49** Show off high ceilings with an eye-catching light fixture.
- [ ] **50** Clean out the fireplace and keep it swept. In fall or winter, a fire is irresistible, but only light one when you'll be home the whole time.

51–52 THE DINING ROOM

- [ ] **51** Remove extra chairs and take a leaf or two out of the table. A smaller table that fits the room makes the whole room look bigger.
- [ ] **52** Set the table with your best plates, glasses and flatware, with fresh flowers in the middle. Know when to stop: don't pour so much into the dining room that the rest of the house is neglected.

53–64 THE KITCHEN

- [ ] **53** The kitchen is a top priority. It's where families gather and holidays happen, and buyers look at it harder than any other room. Everything in it should work perfectly.
- [ ] **54** Space sells kitchens. If buyers see gadgets everywhere, they'll think it's too small. Store everything you don't use every day.
- [ ] **55** Make everything shine, especially the appliances.
- [ ] **56** Polish the wood cabinets.
- [ ] **57** Clear the top of the refrigerator. It isn't a storage shelf.
- [ ] **58** Keep the kitchen table simple, like a bowl of apples or strawberries.
- [ ] **59** Bake bread or a pie before a showing. Those smells remind buyers of holidays and happy times.
- [ ] **60** When it's too hot for fall and winter smells, set a bowl of fresh lemons or oranges on the counter.
- [ ] **61** Put away small appliances that eat up counter space. Before every showing, put away the dish soap, sponges and utensils, and clear the clutter from the cabinets too.
- [ ] **62** Show off the windows. Buyers love a bright kitchen. If the blinds or curtains need replacing, do it now.
- [ ] **63** Show buyers what the counter space is for. Pull up a few stools and set a couple of places.
- [ ] **64** A little staging goes a long way: an open cookbook, a bowl with a whisk, a tray of fresh cookies.

65–69 THE LAUNDRY ROOM

- [ ] **65** Many sellers hide the laundry room, but it's an asset. If it's dark, brighten it with fresh paint.
- [ ] **66** Dress up the floor with a nice rug.
- [ ] **67** Keep the storage areas organized.

- [ ] **68** Make the washer and dryer spotless.
- [ ] **69** Make it feel roomy. Clear away extra items and dirty clothes.

70–71 STAIRWAYS

- [ ] **70** Stairs need to be safe. Clear everything off the steps, add light if it's dim, and make sure every railing is tight and secure.
- [ ] **71** Dress up the stairway with pictures and a nice light fixture. Fresh paint helps.

72–79 BEDROOMS

- [ ] **72** Open up the primary bedroom by removing extra furniture and things. Put the nicest sheets you own on the bed. If the walls are dark, consider a lighter color. Aim for calm and relaxing.
- [ ] **73** Make the primary bathroom match the bedroom's colors and decor so buyers see the two as one suite.
- [ ] **74** Get the whole household involved. Explain that the home needs to appeal to as many buyers as possible, and have everyone help tidy before each showing. Rewards for great teamwork help.
- [ ] **75** Have everyone go through their things and donate or toss what they don't use.
- [ ] **76** Light every closet. If a closet has no light, add a battery-operated one. Dark closets feel cramped; bright ones feel roomy.
- [ ] **77** Thin out the closets. Store clothes you don't need right now, organize the shelves, and keep the floors clear.
- [ ] **78** Get rid of any laundry smell in the closets. Wash everything and use a cedar freshener if needed.
- [ ] **79** Put any questionable wall hangings or posters into storage until the house sells. Anything unusual distracts buyers.

80–87 BATHROOMS

- [ ] **80** Buyers look at bathrooms closely. Make every one spotless. The extra time pays off.
- [ ] **81** Replace worn shower curtains, redo cracked caulk around the tub and shower, fix leaky faucets, and clear away calcium, lime and rust stains.
- [ ] **82** Put personal products away after every use. They clutter the room and make it feel smaller.
- [ ] **83** Organize the cabinets and toss old products you don't use.

- [ ] **84** Use a fresh fragrance. One spritz is enough.
- [ ] **85** Keep the floors clean and shiny, and add a rug.
- [ ] **86** Add a few nice touches: flowers, scented soap, fresh towels. Set it up as if very important guests are coming to stay.
- [ ] **87** If one bold color dominates, tone it down for wider appeal. If the room is all white, a few colored towels add life.

88–90 THE GARAGE

- [ ] **88** Organize the garage and store tools, toys and anything you don't need, so it looks as big as possible.
- [ ] **89** Move the cars out before every showing. An empty garage always looks bigger.
- [ ] **90** Garages are usually poorly lit. Add lighting so it feels more spacious.

SHOWTIME

How to handle showings

- [ ] Say yes to showings whenever you can, even on short notice. It might mean pizza out that night, but it's worth it.
- [ ] Make a quick-showing plan with everyone in the house, so when a last-minute request comes in, everyone knows their job.
- [ ] Turn on every light before each showing. Try different combinations and use the one that looks best.
- [ ] Keep the home at a comfortable temperature.
- [ ] Turn off TVs, radios and computers. Play soft background music instead.
- [ ] Leave a short info sheet in the kitchen: distances to groceries, parks and work centers, your average monthly utility costs, internet and trash providers, and any warranties on appliances that stay with the house.
- [ ] Take your pets with you, or have a friend keep them. Pets distract buyers, and some buyers are afraid of animals.
- [ ] Lock up valuables, prescriptions and anything with personal information before every showing.
- [ ] If you're home for a showing, relax and let the house speak for itself. You've worked hard to get it ready. Answer questions honestly, and give buyers room to talk.

A final note

Nobody said it was easy. Getting a home ready takes weeks of hard work. But if you've worked through this list, you're in great shape to sell your home fast.

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