
Simple Tips for Better Home Showings

1. Remove clutter and clear off counters. Throw out stacks of newspapers and magazines and stow away most of your small decorative items. Put excess furniture in storage, and remove out-of-season clothing items that are cramping closet space. Don't forget to clean out the garage, too.

2. Wash your windows and screens. This will help get more light into the interior of the home.

3. Keep everything extra clean. A clean house will make a strong first impression and send a message to buyers that the home has been well-cared for. Wash fingerprints from light switch plates, mop and wax floors, and clean the stove and refrigerator. Polish your doorknobs and address numbers. It's worth hiring a cleaning service if you can afford it.

4. Get rid of smells. Clean carpeting and drapes to eliminate cooking odors, smoke, and pet smells. Open the windows to air out the house. Potpourri or scented candles will help.

5. Brighten your rooms. Put higher wattage bulbs in light fixtures to brighten up rooms and basements. Replace any burned-out bulbs in closets. Clean the walls, or better yet, brush on a fresh coat of neutral color paint.

6. Don't disregard minor repairs. Small problems such as sticky doors, torn screens, cracked caulking, or a dripping faucet may seem trivial, but they'll give buyers the impression that the house isn't well-maintained.

7. Tidy your yard. Cut the grass, rake the leaves, add new mulch, trim the bushes, edge the walkways, and clean the gutters. For added curb appeal, place a pot of bright flowers near the entryway.

8. Patch holes. Repair any holes in your driveway and reapply sealant, if applicable.

9. Add a touch of color in the living room. A colored afghan or throw on the couch will jazz up a dull room. Buy new accent pillows for the sofa.

10. Buy a flowering plant and put it near a window you pass by frequently.

11. Make centerpieces for your tables. Use brightly colored fruit or flowers.

12. Set the scene. Set the table with fancy dishes and candles, and create other vignettes throughout the home to help buyers picture living there. For example, in the basement you might display a chess game in progress.

13. Replace heavy curtains with sheer ones that let in more light. Show off the view if you have one.

14. Accentuate the fireplace. Lay fresh logs in the fireplace or put a basket of flowers there if it's not in use.

15. Make the bathrooms feel luxurious. Put away those old towels and toothbrushes. When buyers enter your bathroom, they should feel pampered. Add a new shower curtain, new towels, and fancy guest soaps. Make sure your personal toiletry items are out of sight.

16. Send your pets to a neighbor or take them outside. If that's not possible, crate them or confine them to one room (ideally in the basement), and let the real estate practitioner know where they'll be to eliminate surprises.

17. Lock up valuables, jewelry, and money. While a real estate salesperson will be on site during the showing or open house, it's impossible to watch everyone all the time.

18. Leave the home. It's usually best if the sellers are not at home. It's awkward for prospective buyers to look in your closets and express their opinions of your home with you there.