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How Can I Prepare My Home for Sale on a Budget?

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Question: How Can I Prepare My Home for Sale on a Budget?

A reader asks: "Our REALTOR® says we have enough equity in our home to make a small profit after selling (thank God), but he wants us to [prepare the home for sale](#). He's got some pretty grand ideas of what we should do to make it more attractive to buyers, but the truth is we don't have enough money saved up to do everything he wants. He says the carpeting is dirty and should be replaced. Our kitchen counters have older tile, and he suggests we put in granite. Plus, he wants us to paint the entire house. My husband and I have about \$3,000 to spend, and that's it. How can I prepare my home for sale on a budget?"



It's not always necessary to spend a lot of money to prepare your home for sale.

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Answer: All homes tend to sell for more money after they are prepared properly for the market, and I would not let a small budget for home selling dissuade you. After all, in some areas such as the bathrooms, buyers spend about 2 seconds peeking into those rooms.

From the information you have given, I would suggest that you start on the outside. Ask a friend or neighbor to come over and give you objective advice. Because after you live in a home for a while, you might not see the things that will distract home buyers.

Home Selling on a Budget Starts With the Exterior

First impressions count. That's why your yard needs to be inviting. Trim back the bushes and trees, especially if they block views from the windows and make your home difficult to see from the street. Here are a few other low-cost [curb appeal](#) improvements that you can do for less than \$500:

- Keep the lawn mowed, preferably on the diagonal.
- Plant yellow flowers such as marigolds along the walk or by the front door. The color yellow sells.
- Wash the exterior windows.
- Paint or replace the front door and buy new hardware.
- Power spray the house to get rid of dirt and cobwebs.
- Buy a new welcome mat for the front steps.
- Paint or replace the mailbox.
- Paint your house number on the curb or buy a plaque displaying your house number and install near the entry.
- Wash or replace a front porch light fixture.

Remove Excess Clutter and Furniture

Many homes contain too much furniture. You may benefit from removing 2 to 3 pieces of furniture from each room. Less furniture will make the rooms appear bigger. You can pay about \$100 a month to place the furniture into storage or simply stack it neatly in the garage for free.

- Remove all personal photographs from tables and walls. Patch holes in the walls or hang non-personalized artwork over the existing nails.
- Pack up your bookcases (you're going to move anyway).
- Clean out the closets and store non-essential items.
- Rearrange your kitchen pantry, kitchen cabinets and bedroom closets in an orderly manner.

Thoroughly Clean the House Before Selling

You can hire a professional cleaning crew for about \$300 or do it yourself for free. Be sure to wash the inside of the windows.

- Rent a carpet steamer and clean the carpets. You may find they do not need to be replaced.
- Dust the tops of your doorways and window frames.
- Polish all wood / ceramic flooring.
- Wash all light fixture coverings and ceiling fan blades.
- To give your home a more open feeling, consider removing a few doors that open into each other or otherwise block the flow of traffic.

Updating the Kitchen on a Budget

Kitchens are the most important room in the house. It's the heart and soul of the home. Even if a buyer is not much of a cook, the kitchen is still where family and friends tend to gather.

- If new granite is out of your budget, consider either re-grouting the kitchen counter tiles, which is surprisingly cost effective, or covering them with granite tiles instead of granite slab.
- For wood cabinets, stripping the finish and re-staining or painting will save you more money than re-surfacing the cabinets.
- Buy new knobs and / or pulls for the cabinet doors. If you have 40 or so knobs on your kitchen cabinet, at a cost of about \$5 per knob, your total outlay for new hardware will be about \$200. New hardware will transform the appearance of your cabinets.
- Replace a worn kitchen faucet for about \$100 to \$200.
- Buy new kitchen sink basket strainers for less than \$25 each.

- Consider installing kitchen pendant lights over the sink. Cost: About \$500.

Painting the Interior

Professional painters will probably charge you anywhere from \$300 to \$500 to paint each room, but with a little patience, you can paint the rooms yourself. This is not the time to get creative.

- Choose a soft color in a light brown tone (never white), and paint every room the same color.
- The painting will go faster if you paint the ceilings the same color, but ceilings really pop if they are a lighter color than the color of the walls. Lighter colors also make the ceilings appear higher.
- For a 10 x 10 room, you will need 2 one-gallon cans of eggshell paint. Each one-gallon can of paint should cost no more than \$25. For the amount of money a professional painter will charge you to paint one room, you can probably paint the entire house yourself.

Freshening Bathrooms on a Budget

If you have wallpaper in the bathroom, it's most likely peeling and should be removed. You can rent a steamer to remove the wallpaper or strip it yourself.

- Consider replacing the toilet and vanity, especially if they are stained or particularly outdated. A new toilet and vanity will cost less than \$500, and it's easy to [replace a toilet](#).
- Buy a two-light wall fixture or a light bar for over the sink. Cost: About \$200.
- If the tub is stained, hire a professional to refinish it. Cost: About \$200 to \$300.
- Replace water-stained shower doors or clean them with a lime dissolving detergent.
- Buy a new shower curtain and tie it back with ribbons.
- Hang fresh towels and lay down a new bath rug.
- Place scented candles near a basket of tightly rolled wash cloths to create a spa-like environment.
- Stash all personal items under the bathroom sink.

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