

Prepare Your Home to Sell

By Marci Swanson, marci@mycoloradodream.com, 720-371-2468



Before you put your house on the market, there are several important things you can do to make all the difference in selling your home in a timely way, and for a better price.

First, let's take you through the example of selling a car. In selling a car we do a few things to shine it up, detaching ourselves from ownership. We remove personal items like the charms hanging from the dashboard rear-view mirror, we take out all the stuff in the glove box leaving just the car manual. We wipe down the seats, clean the carpets, wash/wax and shine the exterior and detail the wheels.

We do the same when selling our home. Our "home" becomes a "house" for sale. We must detach personal feelings from it. We'll remove personal items, stage the home to show how areas of it are used, clean it from top to bottom and brighten and clear the exterior to make it shine.

Let's jump in! The first thing to do is to see your home through a buyer's eyes. This will include the exterior and lawn as well. Start at the front door and walk through it as if you were seeing it for the first time. Be objective and consider inviting a friend to join you for objectivity. What do you see, and smell? Are the pathways clear? Run the water, flush toilets, turn burners on, try every light switch, window and lock. Note everything that is not working properly.

Next, step outside to view your home from the front and walk around it. What do you notice? Is there paint peeling? Are bushes overgrown, are there blank patches in the grass, are there weeds, is the front door light broken? Is the driveway or front walk cracked and causing a tripping hazard, is pavement un-level and needing a lift? Does the fence need re-stained or repaired?

Your developing list may feel overwhelming, know that you can get it done, just take one step at a time. Prioritize your list from large "must do" items to "hire it done" to "would be nice to do if I have time."

MAKE A PLAN

There are two kinds considerations to address – cosmetic repair and structural/mechanical fixes. If your house is old, you may want to invest in a pre-inspection with a reputable company. They will review the home with you and check major systems – heat/AC, plumbing, electrical, as well as the foundation, exterior and roof. They will advise you on what needs addressed. It will cost a few hundred dollars, but will give you the advantage of fixing the majors that the buyer's inspector will most likely find once you've accepted an offer. Knowledge is power, and, wouldn't it be great to be feel more in control of the unknowns?

Cosmetic repairs can largely be done by yourself. If there are squeaks and creaks, cracks and dents that you can't fix or have time to address, hire a local handyman – worth every penny spent!

Keep any receipts and reports completed on your home and make them readily available to the potential buyers. * In fact, a great gift to the buyer is a collected binder of appliance manuals, notations on home improvements, receipts, reports and a list of the top 10 reasons you loved this home and/or neighborhood.

PURGING

De-cluttering can be a huge job. Get every family member/friend to help! Set up containers for giveaways, garage sales, and big garbage cans for the throw-aways. (Get a dumpster if needed.) Gather garbage bags, scissors, sharpies, tape, and packing boxes.

Organize closets, cupboards and drawers. Closet floors should be clear. Fold clothing tightly and stack neatly to make closets appear smaller. Shelves should be neat.



Face labels to the front in the pantry and spice racks, same for refrigerator items. Nest pots and pans, plastic ware. Toss what's stained, old, worn. Consider packing everything but what you absolutely need to live with for the next 2 months.

Remove, store or sell furniture and accessories that make the place feel crowded or too personalized. This can be subjective, so have a friend provide their opinion.

The ideal is to remove almost everything so your buyer can get the best idea of the space with their own furniture and art in mind.

Contrary to the opinion of many, a handful of personal items in the home is ok and provides warmth. A drawing in a kid's room, a family photo on a desk. A big caution on religious relics, crosses, wall phrases and statues – keep these to the bare minimum, if at all. Carefully pack up the majority of collections, this includes book collections. Free up shelves and surfaces to give an impression of space, plenty of space for the buyer's things. Keep enough to decorate; mirrors, scenic art, a pottery piece, a candle, table lamp. Clear the kitchen countertops of unnecessary appliances, knife blocks, utensils, all that kitchen "stuff" that collects. While the journey of removing personal items may be emotional, remember that it allows buyers to envision your house as being their next home.

Consider short term storage. While you can keep things neatly stacked in the garage, it might impede sellers from seeing what the garage offers. We want your home to look light, bright and spacious, even the garage!

If you have the time, hold a garage sale with purged items. Use the money to prep your home.

COSMETICS

Carefully patch any holes, gouges, scratches and cracks on your walls, sand them, vacuum, then paint. This can take more time than you expect. Now paint. Choose neutral colors! Even if in good condition, repaint over dark and bold colors. Consider that white can be very stark. Pastels may feel too babyish or feminine.

Replace cracked electrical socket covers, burnt out bulbs, affix loose handles and doorknobs, etc.



Wipe down nearly everything, even walls in some cases, baseboards and doors. Scrub floors, corners, and window sills. Re-grout tiling where needed, re-caulk sinks, showers and windows where needed. Address stains, and, let google be your go-to for advice.

KITCHENS/BATHS

It's true! Put your money into kitchens and baths. These two areas can drastically affect a home's desirability and price. If these rooms are really outdated, consider a full or partial renovation.

BIG BANG FOR THE BUCKS

Tight on money but need updates? Consider these affordable options:

- Change out all the hardware – handles, faucets, lighting fixtures, hooks and rods.
- Sand and paint kitchen and bath cabinet doors, stair railings if old and outdated.
- New countertops in kitchen and baths, shop around as prices can be all over the place.
- Update with new blinds and curtains, replace old shower curtains, rugs, and towels.
- Replace cracked toilet seats. Re-grout tiled areas where needed, re-caulk sinks.
- Consider new flooring if you have severe wear/stains, resurface wood floors if worn.
- Upgrade/update the entire home by installing new lighting fixtures. (HUGE impact!)
- A fresh coat of paint on the interior or exterior can make all the difference.
- Upgrade to stainless steel appliances by purchasing on Craigslist and local on-line ad sites.
- Crown molding, wainscoting, and decorative trim above doorways will finish a room.
- Would a new front door or a freshly painted one dress up the entire home?

STAGING

Set the table with neutrals and use fresh flowers as the centerpiece.

Bathrooms can and should be presented with a minimalist mindset, remove everything but maybe one picture on the wall and a basket of rolled bath towels placed near the tub. Put out new soap, a new toilet paper roll and a fresh hand towel in its holder. Be certain to shut the toilet seat lid. Done.

Let in all the light that you have. Open the curtains and roll up the blinds. Make windows shine!

Step back and consider what each room is used for. Is this an office, a bedroom, a living room? Show how each room is used, not with multiple uses. Do not confuse a buyer as to your use for a space. (Is this an office/craft room/workout space? Be intentional. The master should be restful, garage is for cars, kid's areas open and fun yet with a sense of order for their toys.

Metaphorically speaking, the front view should say “Welcome Home.” Use flowers to provide a pop of color, place in a large pot, possibly along the front path or in window boxes. Do not overdo, keep it simple. Weed and spread mulch in any garden bed, a highly attractive visual improvement. Trim bushes, seed or sod blank patches in the lawn. Remove pet poo!!

Power wash and re-stain the patio if needed. Repaint old patio furniture and purchase new cushions. Place furniture to face a focal point which could be around a fire pit, towards a view or water feature. Again, use a pop of flowering color to dress it up.

Consider painting the front door, double check the garage door and trim and framing pieces of the home for touch-ups. If it really needs it, you may have to repaint the house. Typically, the sales listing price point should improve and you’ll get a good return on closing day.

The garage should be uncluttered, neat and swept. Would a coat of paint improve the appeal?

Lastly, the very first impression is the entryway. This is your buyer’s ultimate first impression and it must say an immediate “WOW!” The home should smell clean, look clean and draw the buyer in. A well-built piece of furniture as a focal point, dressed with a vase of fresh flowers, a mirror or appealing artwork on the wall above can make a dramatic statement that says “this home has class, the sellers really put and saw luxury in this home.” The Bentley of homes at first glance!

These projects may take longer than you expect. If time is short, or you are just not handy with certain things, hire someone as your budget allows. Improvements will help you get your desired price, so weigh and balance the pros and cons in choosing what to do and what will remain as is. Some things are write-offs, consult your tax advisor. Know that you CAN do this!

