



On The Outside Looking In

Make sure your home has the curb appeal it deserves.

If you want to increase the value of your home, the best thing you can do is to stand outside—way outside, across the street—and view your property as if seeing it for the first time. Would you want to knock on the door?

Common sense dictates that when you are out cruising neighborhoods looking at houses, you'll judge on what you see first—a home's outer attributes, or curb appeal. If the outside doesn't catch your fancy, then you will drive on by to greener lawns. Add to that the latest phenomenon, the 7 people in 10 who use the Internet to identify homes enticing enough to visit in person. Follow these suggestions to ensure your home has appeal at the curb and the computer.

START BY CLEANING UP

Walk around the perimeter of the yard to pick up litter left over from trash day, leaves, garden tools, pieces of projects not yet completed, weeds and foliage gone wild. Cleaning up is pretty basic, and yet when we live in an environment, we tend to stop seeing it as a newcomer as a potential buyer will.

ASSESS THE SITUATION

With a critical eye, tour the sidewalks around your house, walkways leading to it, the yard (all sides) and landscaping, and scour any portion of the house visible from outside, including siding, roof, gutters, doors, windows, window treatments, porch, deck, garage and sheds. Make a list of anything that needs to be cleaned up, repaired, painted, planted, trimmed, etc.



MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

Once you've completed your assessment, determine what tasks are truly just a matter of cleaning up, what will need repairs or muscle work, and what may need professional help or significant investment.

NEXT LEVEL CLEAN-UP

- :: Power-wash siding, walls and roof tiles.
- :: Wash windows.
- :: Sweep walkways, mow lawn, clean up plant beds, add flowers.
- :: Accessorize, especially in front areas.

MINOR REPAIR WORK

- :: Re-pave or fill cracked sidewalks.
- :: Re-hang dangling gutter pipe.
- :: Trim tree branches that touch buildings or block needed views.
- :: Green up patchy lawn, fill bald spots in border plantings.
- :: Check lighting.

MAJOR REPAIR WORK

- :: Commit to extensive landscaping.
- :: Add a new roof.
- :: Refinish the driveway.
- :: Paint or refinish the exterior.



TIPS:

Real estate and home improvement experts say the most important key areas to spiff up are: main entrance, front door, exterior walls, roof and landscaping. In fact, good landscaping has been shown to hasten the sale of a home by as much as six weeks. **In terms of investment, however, be careful not to "over-improve" for the neighborhood, as buyers won't pay more than what other homes in the neighborhood are worth.**

Curb Appeal in a Hurry Checklist

Use this checklist to help you evaluate your home's curb appeal and find easy improvement solutions.

Yard and gardens

- Pick up litter, pooper-scoop.
- Weed, prune and mulch garden beds.
- Mow lawn, trim edges, rake.
- Prune shrubs and trees.
- Sweep sidewalks, clear weeds from cracks.

Main entry

- Clear sidewalks and driveway.
- Clear and clean walkway to front entrance.
- Clean porch. Repaint if needed. Accessorize with a new mailbox, potted flowers, stylish outdoor furniture, wall plaque or sculpture.

Front door

- Clean surface, glass and handle.
- If scratched or scuffed, repaint or refinish.
- Make sure knob, lock and doorbell work and door doesn't stick.
- If screen door isn't steel or tempered glass, remove it.

House exterior

- Power-wash siding and roof—but not so hard that paint peels off.
- Wash windows, inside and out. Replace worn or cheap curtains with treatments that look stylish from both sides of the window. Consider window boxes with flowers.
- Clean deck or patio. Refinish if necessary, and accessorize.



Design Tip:

To refinish a weathered wooden patio or deck, start by taking off the old finish with a deck stripper and power washer. Scrub it with a deck-cleaning solution. Be thorough in cleaning and drying before refinishing. Top it off with simple, attractive accessories, such as nice cushions and umbrella, sculpture, a potted tree, etc.

Design Tip:

Grassless dirt areas of lawn under heavy-canopy trees can be spruced up (and disguised) by creating a small garden. Arrange cast-concrete blocks to create an even, level wall around the dirt. Fill in with topsoil and plant shade-tolerant flowers or plants. Or fill with attractive rocks or mulch and set in potted plants.

