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“Drive-Up Appeal”: Get your Property Ready to Show

When preparing your property to show, work your way from the outside in. It is essential that your home possess a certain “drive-up appeal.” Remember, a potential buyer’s first impression of your house is formed while s/he is still sitting in the realtor’s car. So, first you need to view your house from this perspective. Go stand on the opposite curb and observe your property. Compare it to surrounding properties. Concentrate on the following three areas:

Landscaping:

How does your landscaping measure up compared to the rest of the neighborhood? If you guess it would rate below-average, make a few adjustments. You might want to consider buying some bushes and planting them around the property. Do not buy trees, however—mature trees are expensive, so you will not see a return on your investment. And immature trees don’t tend to significantly improve the immediate appearance of your home.

If the problem with your yard isn’t a case of too little greenery, but rather too much, get out the pruning shears. The purpose of landscaping is to complement the home, not hide it. Overgrown shrubs should be sheared to a height near the bottom of the windows. Remove any ivy clinging to the side of the house. Tree limbs should be high enough that you’re able to walk beneath. Trim any branches that bar the way.

Your lawn should be freshly cut and watered, and an even color. If there are brown spots, make sure you begin to remedy this well in advance of putting the house on the market. You may want to re-sod areas, and you need to make sure these spots are given enough time to grow, so they will match the existing lawn. Also, if you decide to use fertilizer, you’ll want to allow enough time for it to take effect. Rake up any leaves or grass cuttings.

Planting a few flowers is an easy way to add color and vibrancy to your yard, enhancing the first impression of your home. Invest in a full flat of mature, colorful flowers, such as petunias or periwinkles, which last the length of the growing season. Do not buy bulbs or seeds—they won’t necessarily grow enough by the time you begin showing to achieve

the desired effect. If you don't have an area in which to plant flowers, consider purchasing a few flowerpots for your porch and planting flowers or blooming plants.

If you have a pool, keep it sparkling and leaf-free.

House Exterior:

When you view your house from across the street, does it appear weathered or faded? If so, it's probably time to treat it to a fresh coat of paint. This is usually a sound investment; new paint can do wonders to increase a home's perceived value.

Stay away from unusual or loud colors. The new color should fit in with surrounding houses and complement the style and structure of your house.

Examine the roof closely. Old or leaking roofs should be replaced. If there are leaks, you'll have to disclose this detail to the homebuyer anyway, and they will want it replaced. If there isn't any apparent damage, however, wait for word from the home inspector before making repairs.

The Front Door and Porch:

The front door and surrounding area should look particularly fresh and welcoming, as this will be the buyer's first up-close impression as they enter the house. If you paint nothing else, at least give the door a new coat. Replace the doorbell if it is broken and polish the door fixture until it gleams. Wash the mailbox. Keep the porch swept and buy a new plush door mat. All of these little things will contribute to the overall effect of a well cared-for and welcoming home.

Ensure the lock works smoothly and the key fits properly. When a homebuyer visits your house, the Realtor will open the front door with a key. You don't want the buyers' first experience to be of waiting on the doorstep while the Realtor fumbles with the lock.