

Landscaping tips & tricks

Potential home buyers form their first impression of a home from its curb appeal. Yet often a home's outdoor landscaping is overlooked, or underdone, in the preparation for the sales process. An attractive and well-maintained landscape can add as much as 10 percent to the value of your home.

Ideally the time to get started cleaning up your yard is about a month before you plan on showing your house. That should give you enough time to get everything looking just right and not leave the impression that you simply waited until the last minute to put things in order. Follow these tips for sprucing up your yard to help your home sell quickly.

Spruce up outdoor containers

Container plants, especially large tropicals, add considerable interest to patios and doorways where would-be buyers enter and exit the house. Such displays also demonstrate the endless possibilities for designing with container plants.

Touch up the mulch

Nothing spruces up a place like a new application of mulch, so apply a fresh layer in all your garden beds. The color enhances the contrast of the surrounding plants and makes everything pop. What's more, mulch is relatively cheap and easy to apply.

Plant some instant color

Seasonal color makes the landscape pop as well, and flats of annuals are also relatively inexpensive. Go for a splash of several colors or a more monochromatic scheme, whatever fits in with the look of your home.

Shape unsightly or overgrown trees and shrubs

Regardless of the season, it's a good idea to tackle any overlooked pruning chores because nothing says neglect like a bunch of dead branches. The idea is to show how well not only your house, but your garden has been maintained. It's okay to prune deciduous trees and shrubs any time of the year.

Tend to perennial beds

Tidy up herbaceous plants, such as annuals and perennials, that don't look as good as they should. If a plant is in such bad shape that it needs to be removed, either replace it or stick a decorative pot in its place.

Now is also a good time to dig up any plants that you want to take with you to your new home. If you intend to remove any landscape plants and haven't already done so, you have an obligation to inform the buyer exactly which plants you plan on digging up. That's only fair, and in many states there are restrictions on removing plants from the landscape.

Clean up water features

Get rid of any visible algae, remove leaves and clean filters so that the water is crystal clear. After all, a water feature that doesn't look good or function properly can be an instant turnoff.

Take care of any irrigation issues

If there are any problems with an irrigation system, fix them. Irrigation system repairs can be expensive, and you don't want to lay the cost of those repairs on the buyer. Provide information about your irrigation schedule, especially if you have an automatic system. Include instructions as to how the system operates and recommend the same watering schedule that's worked for you.

Repair faucet leaks

A leaking faucet suggests that there may be other problems elsewhere in the plumbing, and that can be an instant turn-off to buyers.

If you receive sufficient notice that your home is about to be shown, water a half-hour or so before the appointed time. The water reduces the glare of paved surfaces and sends the message that your plants are well-maintained. You might even consider running your irrigation system just to show that it's working properly.

Consider labeling as many plants as possible

That way the buyer will at least know the name of each plant and can then research their growing needs. Also consider creating a complete plant inventory in scrapbook form and leaving it out on a table for prospective buyers to browse through as they tour your home. This relatively simple step can have a powerful effect on buyers, whether they're gardeners or not.

Power-wash dirty surfaces

Consider buying or renting a power washer to clean paved surfaces. With very little time or effort, you can make grungy, grimy surfaces look brand-spanking new. Power washers also do a great job of cleaning fences, as well as brick and vinyl siding.

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