

First Impressions Start Outside Your Home

Maybe you can't judge a book by its cover, but jacket art and binding quality can certainly influence your decision to pick up a book and buy it. The same principle applies to homes for sale.

The exterior of a home and the grounds surrounding it create a strong first impression on home buyers — as well as family, friends and neighbors. If a property shows shoddy upkeep, faded paint and unattractive landscaping, prospects viewing it from the curb may assume more shabbiness inside. Buyers won't even go there unless, of course, they're looking for a bargain-priced fixer-upper.

If you're thinking about selling your home in today's market and you want to boost its appeal to drive-by buyers, follow the suggestions here — then sit back and watch your home sell for top dollar!

Take A Walkabout

Pretend you are shopping for a home with a notebook and an attitude. Ask someone to drive you slowly past your home, approaching it from every street that allows a view of the property — front, sides and back. As you cruise by, note your first impressions. Then, get out of the car and walk toward the property critically as a buyer would, jotting down what you notice along the way.

To get a truly objective opinion about your home's curb appeal, ask us to accompany you on your exterior survey. With no emotional attachment to the property, other people see things you might miss — both good and not so good.

See how your home looks after dark, too. Many busy home buyers use weekday evenings to drive by homes and weekend days to visit them.



The Big Picture

As you look at your property, try to find a memorable word or phrase that best describes it. (Buyers will do exactly that.) Is your home inviting, cozy, elegant, well-maintained or interesting? Or, is it run-down, messy, ordinary, dirty or scary-looking?

The overall impression your home makes is really a composite of various elements — location, architecture, landscaping, details and upkeep. By focusing on each element individually, you can create an attractive first impression of your home.

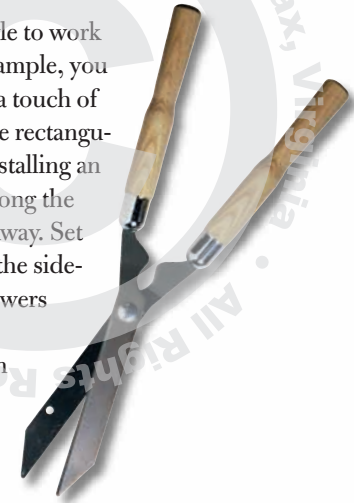
Location

Short of picking up and moving your home to another lot, the only thing you can do about its location is emphasize the good points and minimize any bad ones. For example, if the home sits on a corner lot, you may want to install an attractive hedge or fence to create more privacy in the exposed side yard. That's also a useful approach if an eyesore on a neighbor's lot can be seen from yours.

Architecture

Punch up your home's style by ensuring its attractive architectural features get noticed. Use a slightly contrasting paint color that coordinates with the color of the home to emphasize special features such as columns, trim, porches, shutters, doors and so on. Less attractive features, such as gutter downspouts, can be painted the same color as the home so they blend in and disappear.

Don't have much style to work with? Add some! For example, you can give dimension and a touch of cottage charm to a simple rectangular or square home by installing an L-shaped picket fence along the outside of the entry walkway. Set it far enough away from the sidewalk so you can plant flowers on both sides. Consider adding a railing to a plain front or back porch. Window shutters add a nice touch, too.



Landscaping

Studies show that good landscaping not only attracts the attention of buyers, it can increase the value of your home. If your lawn and garden look helter-skelter, ask a local nursery to draw up a remodeling plan to make the best use of what's already there. Add new plants, trees or shrubs, as needed. You can do the work yourself or hire a team to make changes for you.

Remember, plantings on the property should decorate rather than dominate the home. Remove old shrubs and trees that have over-grown their location, no longer look healthy or block a view of doors, windows or walkways. Substitute a self-maintaining ground cover or flowering shrubs and mulch in hard-to-mow locations. Simplify flowerbeds so they look neat and easy to maintain. Make sure trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and lawn are kept neatly trimmed and weed-free.



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