

CREATING CURB APPEAL

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The old saying goes 'you can't judge a book by its cover'. But when it comes to selling or buying houses, the exterior can be just as important as the interior.

When selling, it is the home's outside appearance, or *curb appeal* that often determines whether the inside is ever seen. How a house 'shows' from the street can tell a potential buyer a lot about what it may be like inside. Even if the inside is the dream home they've been searching for, buyers will not forget the cracked driveway or the overgrown grass and flower beds. This is why most REALTORS recommend that a house not be seen for the first time at night. If you have no choice but to view homes in the evening, always be sure to drive past them during the daytime before making any final decisions.

For sellers, there are many ways to enhance the exterior of a home to achieve the curb appeal necessary to attract prospective buyers. Start by taking an objective look at your home from the curb. Be sure to view it from different angles. Ask friends and neighbours for their unbiased opinions. What are the appealing features? What's not so appealing? What can you do to improve its appearance?

Here are some tips for making the outside of your home attractive and inviting.

Clean up the yard

Mow the lawn, trim the hedges, weed the flower beds and get rid of dead trees and shrubs. Remove any broken lawn furniture, shovel the walk and driveway in the winter and rake the yard in the fall.

Repair any problems

If the roof is damaged, repair it. Also repair any doors and windows that have loose hinges or other damage, fix storm doors and window screens, caulk window exteriors, clean and repair siding and fix any other structural flaws (such as loose railings).

Eliminate clutter

If you have yard and construction debris piled up along the side of the house, or elsewhere, get rid of it. The exterior of your home should be as uncluttered as possible. This includes cleaning out the garage -- a major breeder of clutter. Be ruthless. If you haven't used something in a year, give it to charity or recycle it.

Give siding a fresh new look

Cleaning the exterior surface of your home may be all it needs for a fresh new look. Before rushing to paint siding, try

washing it. For painted wood siding and aluminum siding, use a solution of one cup of strong detergent and one quart chlorine bleach in three gallons of water (be sure to wear rubber gloves, goggles and other protective garments). Work from the bottom up and rinse thoroughly. Vinyl siding can be sponged with a mild liquid detergent and rinsed.

Use paint to brighten or re-proportion the exterior

A paint job can do wonders for the exterior of a home. A low house can look more tall from the curb by emphasizing its vertical features. Paint elements such as doors, shutters and corner trim in a colour that contrasts with the siding or stucco. On a high home, emphasize the horizontal by using a contrasting paint colour on window sills and fascia boards. You can also make a tall house look lower by painting it a dark colour. Conversely, a light colour will make a home look larger.

Coordinate the exterior look

The more coordinated your house looks from the outside, the more appealing it will be. Coordinate the look of your home by painting the garage, tool shed or other outdoor structures the same colour schemes as the house.

Use flower power

Well placed flowers, trees and shrubs can really make the outside of a home look inviting. Not only does attractive landscaping invite buyers, it can increase the value of a home. Even without major landscaping, flowers can make a yard look colourful and pleasant. Plant them in garden beds, hang them from railings and porch ceilings or add flower boxes to window sills.

At night, highlight garden features with spotlights and floodlights. Well-lit paths and entrances promote safety and are an added feature to any home. A pretty wreath on the door and a welcome mat will finish things off.

Creating curb appeal is making your home inviting to prospective buyers from the outside -- where first impressions begin. This doesn't mean spending a great deal of money remodelling and renovating. With a little creativity and some effort, your home can become a buyer's dream home.



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