

Did you know? Easy ways to boost home value

Though ceiling fans are most associated with warm-weather seasons, most can be effective throughout the winter months as well, helping circulate warm air throughout a room in much the same way they circulate cool air during the warmer weather. Most of today's fans have a switch near the motor housing that alters the direction in which the fan's blades turn. When a ceiling fan is used in the summer, its blades push the air downward, moving cool air around the room. The air blowing around

the room is what cools people within the room. When the blades' direction is altered, the blades then push the air upward toward the ceiling. This drives the hot air, which typically rises to the top, down toward the edges of the room. This helps circulate warm air throughout a room, making for more even heating. What's more, this improved heat circulation helps combat window sweating that results from condensation on the glass when hot air is not effectively circulated throughout a home.

Though the housing market might not be booming, there are still buyers out there looking for a place to call their own. Some potential sellers might prefer a patient approach to selling their homes, choosing to do so when the market rebounds and homes regain some of their lost value. Other sellers might not have a choice and must make due with selling in a lackluster market.

Regardless of which category you're in, there are easy ways to boost your home's value. Making minor changes to a home can add to your

asking price, whether you're putting your home on the market this week or waiting for the market to rebound. The following tasks might not take much effort, but they pay dividends.

*** Work on the yard.** An appealing lawn is still a great way to catch a prospective buyer's eye. When a home boasts a lush lawn and well-maintained trees, it's hard to ignore that For Sale sign out front. If landscaping has proven an Achilles' heel in the past, make an effort to take better care of your property in the months ahead. It doesn't take long for even the

most neglected lawn to rebound from disrepair. By the time you feel confident to put that for sale sign out front, you might just be putting it up in a lush lawn no buyer can resist.

*** Upgrade appliances.** Prospective buyers won't be thrilled if they walk into a home and see outdated appliances. Some might even feel older appliances indicate a homeowner who cared little about appearances and might begin to wonder if there are any additional areas that might have been neglected around the house. Stainless steel appliances in

the kitchen and even new fixtures in the bathroom are aesthetically appealing and tend to excite buyers. Homeowners who aren't immediately putting their property up for sale can gradually upgrade their appliances to lessen some of the financial toll such purchases take.

*** Replace the carpet.** A clean carpet might make a world of difference to a home's inhabitants, but a new carpet will be more appealing to prospective buyers. Choose a neutral-toned carpet that will boast a more universal appeal.

*** Paint the home.** A fresh coat of paint or new siding is always attractive to prospective buyers. If your home hasn't had a new coat of paint in awhile that might make buyers feel the home is musty or old. Many buyers judge a book by its cover, and sellers want their home's exterior to be as attractive as possible. Homeowners can also paint rooms inside the home to give it a fresh and welcoming feel.

*** Clean up around the house.** A cluttered house will almost certainly repel buyers. Buyers want a home that's roomy and well kept, but clutter creates the opposite impression. Organize the closets to make them appear more roomy and clean up any areas that have become cluttered -- consider temporarily renting a storage unit to house excess stuff from closets. Basements or utility closets might be handy for storage, but they should be open and clean before hosting an open house. The less clutter a home has, the more spacious it will appear and the more money sellers can likely demand for the home.

Easy ways to winterize your home

When summer draws to a close and autumn arrives, homeowners must place a precedent on readying their homes for the winter months. Often referred to as "winterizing," the process is meant to ensure a home can withstand harsh winter weather while proving a safe haven from the elements.

As autumn arrives, homeowners can take several steps to get their homes ready for whatever winter has to offer with the following tasks.

*** Fix the leaks.** A leaky home will prove an expensive home during the winter months. A home with many leaks will be much colder to inhabit, and homeowners typically turn up the heat to counter drafts that can make a home feel like a meat locker. But turning up the thermostat isn't the answer. Instead, fix leaks in the fall before the cold weather arrives.

Leaks should not be very hard to find. On the first breezy autumn afternoon, walk around the house in search of

any drafty areas. These drafts will be noticeable and often occur around doors and window frames, electrical outlets and even recessed lighting.

Homeowners have a host of options at their disposal to plug leaks, be it door sweeps that block air from entering under exterior doors to caulk applied around leaky windows. When using caulk outdoors, be sure to use a weather-resistant caulk or, if sealing brick, use masonry sealer.

*** Add insulation upstairs.** Homeowners who have an attic in their homes might want to consider adding some insulation up there. Experts recommend a minimum of 12 inches of insulation in the attic. That might prove costly, but a poorly insulated attic is akin to opening the front door and letting the heat out. It might be best for less-than-handy homeowners to hire a professional to insulate the attic. But do-it-yourselfers might

find it good to know that if the ceiling joists, which are often 11 inches or less, are visible, then the attic is in need of additional insulation. Such joists won't be visible in an adequately insulated attic.

*** Put up the storm windows.** It's nice to open the windows in the spring and summer and let the warm air waft in through the screens. But when summer is over, it's time to put up the storm windows once again. Storm windows add an extra layer of protection from the elements and are especially valuable in homes with single-pane glass windows. Homeowners who don't have storm windows should consider upgrading their existing windows. Such a project isn't cheap, but newer windows will almost certainly lead to lower heating costs, meaning the project will essentially pay for itself over time. Homeowners who can't afford to replace all of their windows don't have to replace

them all at once. Instead, replace them a few at a time and make the rooms where you spend the most time each winter the first on the list to receive new windows.

*** Be diligent with the gutters.** Leaves falling from trees is an idyllic image associated primarily with autumn. Unfortunately, when leaves fall they often fall into the gutters. Routinely clean the gutters once the leaves start to fall. Clean gutters will allow snow and rain to effectively drain through the gutters. If the gutters are clogged, snow might have nowhere to go when it begins to melt, and roof damage might result. Such damage is costly but preventable in most instances. One of the easier preventive measures to take is to routinely clean the gutters of leaves and other debris that accumulate during the fall.

When cleaning the gutters, make sure they are properly aligned. Poorly aligned gutters

can lead to a host of problems. One such problem is flooding. If downspouts are not properly aligned with the rest of the gutters, then water might not be directed away from the home as it's intended. Instead, water might be directed toward the home, resulting in flooding or additional water damage.

*** Have the furnace cleaned.** Experts recommend annual furnace cleanings. Before cold weather arrives, turn the furnace on to make sure it's still working. An unpleasant odor should appear when first turning on the furnace, but it shouldn't last very long. If the odor sticks around, turn the furnace off and call a professional. Once winter arrives, routinely replace the filters. This makes the furnace operate more efficiently and can also reduce the risk of fire.

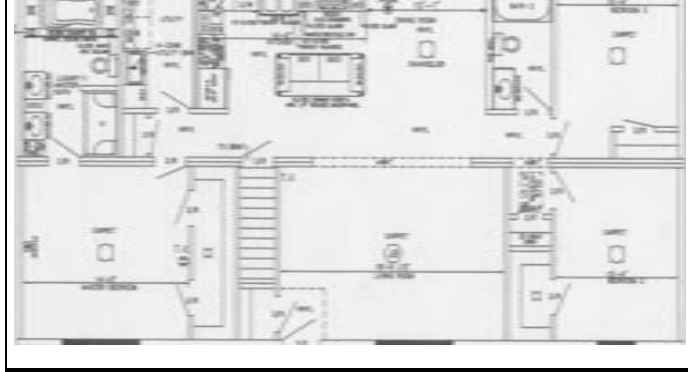
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