

THE RECEPTIONIST

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The Importance of Curb Appeal

From Janet Wickell, Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

Home Selling Fact: Curb Appeal Deserves Top Priority

A large percentage of home buyers decide whether or not to look inside a house based on its curb appeal—the view they see when they drive by or arrive for a showing. You can help make sure they come inside your home by spending some time to freshen up its exterior appearance.

First, You Have to Get Detached

It's difficult to look at our own house in the same way that potential home buyers do. When we become accustomed to the way something looks and functions, we cannot see its faults. Decide right now to stop thinking of the property as a home. It's a house—a commodity you want to sell for the highest dollar possible.

Curb Appeal Exercise

The next time you come home, stop across the street or far enough down the driveway to get a good view of the house and its surroundings. *View the property from the same position as a home buyer who is doing a drive-by.*

1. What is your first impression of the house and yard area?
2. What are the best exterior features of the house or lot? How can you enhance them?
3. What are the worst exterior features of the house or lot? How can you minimize or improve them?
4. Park where a potential buyer would and walk towards the house, looking around you as if it were your first visit. Is the path clean and tidy?
5. Start making a list of your positive and negative feelings about the property's appearance.
6. Take photos of the home's exterior. If you have a digital camera, view the color versions first, then switch the photos to greyscale, because it's easier to see problems when color isn't present to affect our senses.

Evening Appeal is Important

Do the curb appeal exercise again at dusk or just after dark, because it's not unusual for potential buyers to drive by houses in the evening.

Lighting is Always a Plus

- String low voltage lighting along your drive way, sidewalks, and around landscaping elements.
- Add a decorative street lamp or an attractive light fixture to a front porch.
- Solar versions of outdoor lights are quick and easy to install, but only work when they receive full sun each day.
- Lighting that's visible through front windows should enhance the home's appearance.

Don't Forget the Rear View

Buyers doing a drive by will try their best to see your back yard. If it's visible from another street or from someone's driveway, it should be a part of your curb appeal efforts.

Curb Appeal Starters

Start with these basic curb appeal tasks:

- Kill mold and mildew on the house, sidewalks, roof, or driveway.
- Stow away unnecessary garden implements and tools.
- Clean the windows and gutters.
- Pressure wash dirty siding and dingy decks.
- Keep sidewalks and driveways clean.
- Edge sidewalks and remove vegetation growing between concrete sections and bricks.
- Mow the lawn regularly. Get rid of weeds.
- Rake and dispose of leaves, even if your lot is wooded.
- Trim tree limbs that are near or touching the roof.

Landscaping Decisions

There are times that adding elements to your landscaping can help curb appeal, but there are also times when *removing* something is more effective.

Bad Landscaping Can Delay a Sale

We had a listing for a large brick house with white columns in front. Tall evergreens, planted in front of each column, had grown taller than the roof. They obscured the columns and windows and made it difficult to see the front of the house.

We suggested that the owner remove them. She trimmed them back, but it didn't do the trick—they were unattractive and still kept potential buyers from seeing the true character of the house.

I sold the house to a couple who could see past the trees. One of their first tasks after closing was to yank them out of the ground, instantly boosting the home's curb appeal.

The Moral of the Story

Most buyers cannot visualize changes, and often won't take a second look at a house if the first isn't appealing to them. Those who can visualize changes, and are prepared to make them, expect YOU to reduce the price of the house to compensate for the work.

The seller was comfortable in the house and couldn't understand why leaving the trees in place made a difference. She forgot that *you have to show buyers the best aspects of a property*—you cannot expect them to imagine improvements on their own.

More Curb Appeal Ideas

- If you can budget it, a fresh paint job does wonders for a dingy house. Drive around your town to find color schemes that are appealing.
- How about a more attractive front door, maybe something with leaded glass inserts?
- If you can't justify the cost of a new door, consider replacing plain doorknob hardware with something more attractive.
- If new hardware is beyond your budget, how about repainting or staining the door and polishing the hardware?

If you brainstorm, you'll find that there's a solution to most problems—one that lets you stay within your budget. The trick is to find the spots where improvements are needed, then follow through to complete the tasks as best you can.