

HOME

Tips for selling your house in winter

Lighting is more important than ever

It's 5 p.m. and a potential buyer is driving down your street looking at your house, the one with the big "for sale" sign in the front yard. They can see the sign, but not much of the house, which is dark and looks dreary and foreboding — not the impression you want to leave with a potential buyer.

If your house is for sale, you need to take extra effort to make it look its best, all the time. You never know when a buyer will drive down your street, and you want your home and your neighborhood to look friendly and inviting.

Purchase some timers and set them so that several lamps will be on as soon as dusk falls. Leave your porch light on; better yet, invest in a timer or sensor and set it to come on when it gets dark. Even if you're home, keep lamps that are visible from the street turned on, and keep your exterior lights on as much as you can.

Until Daylight Savings Time begins April 3, you might not get home in time to turn on all the lights, but timers will make sure your house looks occupied.

Don't forget landscaping

Karen Dobbs, an affiliate broker with Fridrich & Clark Realty, thinks good landscaping is essential to making your home look sellable during cold weather months. "If you can make the outside look any better at all, do it," she says.

Make sure leaves are raked, your shrubs are trimmed and your mulch looks fresh and neat. Consider pine straw mulch: it looks good, adds color and won't add an undesirable smell.

Keep the path from the drive-



LARRY MCCORMACK / STAFF

Don't forget landscaping and window boxes. It's almost more important to have the exterior of a house looking spiffy when you're selling in the dead of winter than during spring and summer, when everything is lush and green and automatically looks good.

COVER STORY

way to the front door clear. You might not think about weed-eating in winter, but manicuring your lawn and the area near the house will make a difference.

"People are a little more forgiving in the summer," says local designer Kelly Coty, whose company, Prix de Solde, handles all aspects of preparing a house for sale, from maintenance work to home staging and styling. "In the winter, they're grumpy and it's cold." And you don't want to give them visions of projects they'll have to complete themselves in the spring.

Air quality counts

When you're getting ready to show your home, pick a warm day and open all of your windows and doors. This will allow your house to really air out as you do your heavy cleaning.

But don't leave them open for

too long; Coty recommends that sellers keep their home warmer than usual, even if they're unoccupied while they're being sold. So when you're dealing with a particularly stuffy room, keep a window open but also crank up the thermostat.

And think twice before imposing your favorite fragrance on potential buyers. "I'm completely against potpourri and fragrance," says Coty. She says that while you may think that spraying air freshener or using another form of scent will help your house sell, that's not necessarily so. First of all, many people are irritated by or allergic to false fragrances. Secondly, some buyers could suspect that a commercial fragrance might be masking foul odors, such as pet damage or mildew.

"False fragrance tells everybody, 'Oh, something's wrong or something might be wrong,'" says Steve Condurelis, broker and co-owner of Keller Williams

Realty in Brentwood.

Also, remember that not everyone shares your love of a particular fragrance. "Scent is so personal," says Coty, who has prepared 450 homes to be sold. "I promote fresh air."

One scent you might not mind having in your home is that of something being baked. This is especially effective right before an open house. Condurelis offers a fabulous, easy tip: If you don't have time to bake, add a few drops of real vanilla on a cookie sheet and keep it in a warm oven. "People know that's not a cover-up, that it just smells like mom and apple pie," he says.

Dobbs bakes pumpkin bread. "I have sold so many houses on the first showing with that bread!" she says.

Address maintenance

Things you haven't done for awhile or have been putting off doing — think cleaning out the gutters, painting the trim on your house, fixing window screens or storm windows — need to be taken care of before you put your house on the market. These are "money in the bank things to do," says Coty.

Condurelis suggests getting your roof cleaned (it will cost around \$300 or so for an average home) to get rid of what he calls "the famous Tennessee grunge mold."

Coty says there's a payoff for the seller paying extra attention to the outside of their home: good photos. "We used to rely on curb appeal," she says. "Now it's Web appeal. Your pictures on the Web better look fantastic. Real estate's Web-based and it's going to get (so) more and more," she says. ■

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