

How to effectively 'show' your home

By [Alana Klein](#) • Bankrate.com

Showing your home is a lot like a first date: You get your house all gussied up, put the prettiest face possible on the property and try to impress the heck out of someone you barely know -- the potential buyer. The objective, however, is not to get a phone number or a peck on the cheek. It's to make a sale, which in most cases, is a far greater challenge.

But showing a home does not have to be an overwhelming, costly process. Regardless of your home's size, age, style, and location, there are ways to spruce it up and effectively showcase its assets. So grab your paintbrush, carpet cleaner, lawn mower, and Lysol -- the four ingredients to a great first date -- and get to work on your house.

The condition of your home is one of three factors that influence a buyer's decision, says Judy Wakeley, an accredited staging professional and owner of [Refined Spaces](#), a real estate staging and interior redesign company based in Westchester, Pa., and Lewes, Del. "Unlike location, this is one factor you can control," she says. But the idea is "not to improve the condition of your home to your liking, but to improve it to sell it."

Creating good flow

There are four main areas of the home sellers should focus on, according to Lori Matzke, owner of [Center Stage Home](#), a home presentation company based in Minneapolis, Minn. The first is the entryway. "That is your first impression of the house. Anything visible from this standpoint needs to look great," Matzke says. "If you don't impress them immediately it will be an uphill battle from then on to regain their interest." The family/living room, kitchen, and master bedroom are the three other crucial areas.

The key to showcasing these rooms is to create good flow. "Buyers want to move easily from one room to the next," she says. But at the same time, they need direction. "It's important to assign each room a purpose -- a commonplace purpose," she says. "Even though you may use your formal dining room as your office, you must show the dining room with its intended purpose."

De-personalizing

Sellers should personalize the experience for the buyer. "The buyers have to be able to see past your life and your stuff so they can visualize what it would be like for them to live in your home," says Allyson Bernard, regional vice president for the National Association of Realtors' New England region. "Minimizing clutter and packing up personal belongings helps them do that."

There are two schools of thought on de-personalizing your home. "A lot of people say to take down the family photos, but I disagree. You're not fooling anyone by pretending you don't live there," says Matzke. She does, however, recommend that wedding and graduation photos, as well as collections (i.e. stuffed animals, teapots), be removed. "Those are too personal," she says.

Wakely, on the other hand, believes anything that could potentially pose a distraction should be put away. "Buyers only spend 10 to 15 minutes in a home. You don't want them to be distracted by unimportant details like personal mementos. That won't help you sell your house," she says.

Cleanliness is godliness

At the same time, it's not possible to fully neutralize a home that's being occupied. Furthermore, "vacant houses do not show well. A room looks smaller without furniture and stuff in it," says Wakeley. But it must be understood that each person has a different sense of style. That style is often reflected in the type of furniture one chooses and in the way that it is arranged. "As long as the house is clean and well-maintained, buyers can look beyond the purple bathroom or the floral wallpaper in the bathroom, which might not be their style," says Bernard.

Ultimately, a homeowner is selling his or her space, not his or her things. "Rearranging the furniture can help showcase important features of the house or minimize less attractive features," says Wakeley. She also stresses the importance of accessorizing. "Adding a burgundy throw to a neutral-colored couch, or a vase of fresh flowers on the coffee table or fresh towels in the bathroom creates a welcoming environment."

Boosting curb appeal

As far as the home's exterior, it's important to pay attention to curb appeal. "Here is where you can get the most bang for your buck," says Terry Hankner, a Realtor for Comey & Shepherd Realtors based in Cincinnati, Ohio. "It's relatively inexpensive to de-clutter your garage, sweep the driveway, paint the front door, mow the lawn, and plant some flowers," she says. "But it goes a long way and means a lot to the buyer psychologically."

Landscaping is also key. "You don't want to have a lot of brand new plants. You want something that looks more mature and established. Stay away from starter plants -- they look like they've just been dropped in the ground," says Matzke. She says to avoid the other extreme, which is to have too many plants and flowers to the point where the yard looks overgrown.

It's also important to be aware of the condition of your neighborhood. "For most buyers, it's all about location, location, location," Bernard says. While you can't control other people's yards, she says you can make sure there's

no garbage in the streets or suspect abandoned cars. But she assures, "If you really take pride in your house, that can be contagious," she says.

10 showing tips

- Don't mask smells with candles or potpourri. There's no sense in replacing one odor with another. Buyers will wonder what odor you are trying to hide. But keep the exotic spices and fish to a minimum when cooking the night before a showing. Work towards achieving a "clean" smell.
- Remove animals and litter boxes from the property. Find "Spot" a temporary home. Dog smell is not going to entice potential buyers.
- Don't turn on all the lights. Nobody looks his or her best under stark light, including your house. Offer a nice balance of natural lighting, table and floor lamps, or tasteful overhead lights. The idea is to create a mood.
- Don't paint all walls white. White walls can look too institutional. Besides, colored walls are en vogue. Try a neutral color like beige with yellow undertones or a mossy green.
- Get rid of dated wallpaper. While wallpaper is making a comeback, dated wallpaper will always be, well, dated. Since it's not easy to paint over wallpaper, removing it is the best option.
- Be mindful of the carpeting. If the carpeting is in bad shape, shampoo it or replace it. Never give the buyers an allowance to replace the carpets. Do it yourself and do it before the showing.
- Remove window screens. Screens take away from allowing natural light inside. Plus, no one will notice they are missing.
- Remove all knick-knacks under 10 inches tall. We all have random, small objects that clutter our home. Pack them up and put them under the bed.
- Put away holiday decorations. Unless you are showing your home during the holiday season, make sure to put away all holiday paraphernalia.
- Don't spend a fortune on improving your home. It's worth the investment to spend some money on enhancing your home, but don't go overboard.

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