

The Comprehensive Guide to Preparing a House for Sale

Mar 20, 2020 by [Aly J. Yale](#)

Listing a home isn't like putting an item on **eBay** (NASDAQ: EBAY). Though a few clicks of a button could put your home live on listing sites like **Zillow** (NASDAQ: Z) (NASDAQ: ZG) and Realtor.com, it won't position you for success by any means.

The truth is that the sales process starts much earlier than that -- with careful preparation and some good, old-fashioned elbow grease.

Why should you prep your home for sale?

Selling a house is already a lot of work. You have showings to deal with, you have to keep the place clean, and the inspections, [appraisals](#), and [negotiations](#) are a hassle. Why should you put in more effort before your home's even on the market?

For one, it helps you command a higher sale price. Homes that are clean, appealing, and in top shape simply sell for more than properties in less desirable conditions. Buyers know the home won't require a ton of work upon move-in, and for that, they're willing to pay a premium.

A prepped home is also just more marketable. That usually means a faster sale, and maybe even a bidding war -- which equals more profits at the closing table.

The basic rules of prepping your house for sale

Before we dive into the steps of prepping your home for sale, let's go over the general rules first -- the guidelines you'll want to adhere to as you go about your preparations.

In general, the goal of prepping your house should be to:

- **Create a clean, clutter-free environment.** Nothing makes a home look more poorly maintained than dirt, clutter, and overall messiness. A clean environment gives buyers confidence in the property and its condition.
- **Offer a neutral color palette.** Prospective buyers need to be able to envision themselves in the home, and that's hard to do if there's a bright green wall and crazy, patterned wallpaper staring them in the face.
- **Put yourself in a buyer mindset.** Think like a buyer when prepping your home. What would they like? What would give them pause? Let that drive your preparations.
- **Minimize where possible.** The less furniture, decor, and personal items you have out, the better. In fact, it might even make your home look larger.
- **Emphasize curb appeal.** First impressions are everything. Make sure your home's [curb appeal](#) makes a good one.
- **Ensure your home is photogenic.** A picture's worth a thousand words, and in real estate, maybe even a little more. Make sure your home lends itself to [high-quality photos](#) that will really make your listing shine.
- **Address obvious repairs.** If there's a broken window, dent in the door, or nonworking faucet, fix it -- before you list the home. You can bet it will show up on the buyer's inspection and need fixing anyway.
- **Add little details and touches that matter.** At the end of the day, the property needs to feel like a potential home to buyers. Small touches like fresh flowers or the smell of warm cookies can make all the difference.
- **Prep yourself and your family** -- particularly for the showing aspect of selling a house. What's your exit strategy? Where will you go during showings, and how will you keep the place clean? Having a plan in place is vital before you open your doors to prospective buyers.

When in doubt, rely on your [real estate agent](#). They're the expert, and they'll have a good pulse on what local buyers are looking for and how to get your home up to speed for the current market.

Prepare to sell your house in 6 steps

Now, it's time to put in the work. Give yourself at least a few weeks to prep your home -- more if you know it needs a good amount of repairs.

Use this checklist to guide the way:

1. Make necessary repairs

Your first step is to make any obvious or large-scale [repairs](#) that are necessary -- think [roof repairs](#), problems with the floor, doors, and windows, or issues with any fixtures or plumbing. If you're not sure what needs repairing, or you just want to be thorough, you can also consider a

pre-listing [home inspection](#). This is a full-scale, comprehensive inspection of your property that will detail any defects or issues found.

2. Declutter, donate, and minimize

Next, go through your closets, cabinets, and drawers, and donate anything you don't need or no longer use. Then depersonalized the house. Remove any personal photos and artwork, put any bold decor items away, and think about putting some furniture and unnecessary items into storage until you're ready to move. The more spacious your home looks, the better.

3. Touch up and repaint

Time to freshen up those walls next. Go room by room, and if you have any bold or bright colors, go buy some white or eggshell and paint completely over it (you might need primer, too, depending on how dark the original hue is). You should also touch up any areas that are smudged or dirty, including on doors, baseboards, door frames, and window sills. A fresh coat of paint can go a long way in making a home look clean and full of possibilities.

4. Upgrade your curb appeal

Take a walk outside and assess your home's exterior. If it's looking messy, or just plain boring, you'll probably want to invest a little into sprucing it up before listing. To start, mow, edge, and trim the whole property, and weed the garden as well.

You also might want to:

- Repaint your front door.
- Replace your welcome mat.
- Plant some flowers.
- Add some hanging plants.
- Install a kickplate or new doorknob.
- Upgrade your garage door.
- Update your mailbox.
- Add address numbers to your house or curb.

5. Clean it from top to bottom

Once the heavy lifting is done inside, it's time to deep-clean the place. If you can afford it, swing for a professional cleaning, as they'll get super detailed with it -- down to scrubbing the grout and hand-wiping the baseboards.

If you do it yourself, just make sure to be thorough. Don't forget to clean the appliances (inside and out), as well as inside the cabinets, drawers, and closets. They might not be on full display at all times, but buyers will definitely take a peek in these areas when touring the property.

6. Add the final touches

Finally, it's time for the little details: fresh flowers in the bathrooms, a wreath on the door, and a cute welcome mat on the front stoop to make buyers feel welcome. Setting the table with a runner, cloth napkins, and a full set of dishes is also nice, though you might want to save this until just before a showing.

If all this sounds a little overwhelming, feel free to bring in some professionals to help.

A [contractor](#) or handyman can help with the repairs and exterior updates, and you can even consider a professional stager to get your home in tip-top shape for photographing.

Can't bear to part with the cash? Think of it as an investment in your eventual sales profits.

According to [a survey from the National Association of Realtors](#), more than a third of buyer's agents said staging increased a home's dollar value anywhere from 1% to 10%. On a \$200,000 home, that could mean an additional \$2,000 to \$20,000 more in returns.

The bottom line

Properly prepping your home is critical if you want your home to sell fast and at the maximum possible price point. And if you're not sure where to start, ask your real estate agent. They're well-versed in both the local market and the listing process. They can point you in the right direction preparation-wise.