

How to Get Your House Ready to Sell in 4 Steps

Wondering how to get your house ready to sell? If you're looking to sell your home during prime [house-shopping season](#) this spring, you'd better get cracking now.

How to get your house ready to sell

Unfortunately, getting a house ready to sell is not as easy as slapping an ad on Craigslist. If you want your humble abode to stand out from the competition that could take months to do right. So, here's how to whip your place into shape by fixing any problems and upgrading the eyesores. Because like it or not, your home has sustained some wear and tear over the years. Here's how to assess the damage and find out which renovations will pay off down the road.

1. Tally the age of various items

No matter how great your home looks at first glance, any savvy buyer will point to various parts and pop the question: How old? And since guesstimates won't cut it, you will need to gather some paperwork to get your house ready to sell. If you've purchased your home in the past few years, check your home records or seller's disclosure for the age or last repair of big items (namely your roof, HVAC system, water heater, and gutters), or dig up copies of your own maintenance records or receipts.

How long items last depends on a lot of factors such as the model and how well it's been maintained, but you can get a general idea of average lifespan from the [National Association of Home Builders](#). For example:

- Wood shingle and shake roof: 15 to 30 years
- Central air-conditioning unit: 15 years
- Electric water heater: 14 years
- Gutters: 30 years

2. Do your own walk-through

Channel Sherlock Holmes and go through your home, room by room. Look for signs of damage that might drag down its value. **Chandler Crouch**, broker for Chandler Crouch Realtors in Fort Worth, TX, suggests looking for these common problem spots:

- Wood rot around outside door frames, window ledges, and garage doors. Condensation and rain can cause these areas to weaken and rot.
- Water stains on the ceiling or near doors and windows. This can indicate a leaky roof or rain seeping in from outside.
- Leaks under sinks or around toilets.

Source [realtor.com](#)

- Bulges under carpet or discoloration on hardwood floors, which can indicate flooding problems or an uneven foundation.

Next, test what's called the “functionality” in every room. For example, “Cracks visible in the walls and floor, doors that don’t shut right, broken handles on cabinetry, basically anything that doesn’t work perfectly should be repaired,” Crouch says. And don’t forget to inspect the outside.

“A lot of sellers skip the outside, but it is so important. That is where buyers will make their first impression,” says **Darbi McGlone**, a Realtor® with Jim Talbot Real Estate in Baton Rouge, LA.

3. Bring in the pros

Once you’ve done your own walk-through, you may want to have a pro take a second look before you decide you're ready to sell. These people can spot flaws you overlooked, because either you're used to them or you didn't realize they could cause trouble. You can enlist a Realtor or hire a [home inspector](#) to do an inspection (or pre-inspection) to pinpoint problems from bad wiring to outdated plumbing.

While the cost varies, people pay [\\$300 to \\$500 for a home inspection](#). Go to the [National Association of Home Inspectors](#) to find an inspector in your area. It may cost a bit, but it will buy you the peace of mind of knowing you're not in for any surprises down the road. In fact, having a home inspection report handy to show buyers can inspire confidence that they (and you by association) aren't in for any nasty surprises as you move toward a deal.

4. Decide what needs renovating

Once you know what in your house could stand for repairs or [upgrades](#), it's time to decide where to infuse some cash. Don't worry, not everything needs to be done before your home is ready to sell. And while you're probably not jumping at the idea of renovating a property you're going to sell, certain fixes will give you an edge over the competition, which means more/better offers. Remember, real estate is an investment!

But don't just obsess over the obvious—e.g., your kitchen could stand for new cabinets. After all, many buyers will want to tweak cosmetic details to their own tastes, so you could be throwing money down the drain. Instead, focus on fix-its that are less susceptible to personal preferences that buyers like to know are in good shape.

For example, a recent study by the National Association of Realtors® found that upgrading hardwood floors reaps an estimated 100% return on investment, essentially paying for itself. Upgrading your insulation can net you a 95% ROI, a new roof a whopping 105%! Because what buyers don't like to know they've got a solid roof over their heads?