

Moneytalk

Best ways to boost your home's value

by Bob Trebilcock

The number of houses on the market is the highest in 13 years. So how do you attract buyers if you've decided to sell? "The name of the game is differentiating your home from your neighbor's," says Everett Collier, president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. In other words, make your house look like a million bucks without spending a million bucks. Here, the best remodeling ideas for \$1,000 or less, from real estate agents and "home stagers" who help owners prep their houses for sale:

Free fixes

- **GET YOUR HOME Q-TIP CLEAN** That means wiping along the baseboards and windowills as well as around the faucets and switch plates. You'll also want to get rid of odors, including those of pets, mildew, cigarettes, and cooking. "If we can smell it, we can't sell it," says Barb Schwarz, founder of stagedhomes.com.
- **SPRUCE UP THE YARD** Trim shrubs from the top down, and round them off at window level. If needed, remove dead plants and buy inexpensive replacements.
- **DECLUTTER, DECLUTTER** Say goodbye to knickknacks, family photos, refrigerator magnets—and your husband's prized collection of *Star Wars* action figures. "You want buyers to visualize the space in your home, not your stuff," says home stager Jodi Polibero of Columbus, OH.

Spend a little

- **REMOVE OUTDATED WALLPAPER** (It's a turnoff, say our pros.) Paint the walls a neutral color. Creams and beiges help a buyer imagine her furniture in the home. And



neutrals make rooms look larger. "Strong colors shrink a room by half," says Schwarz.

- **GET RID OF DATED LIGHTING** Reasonably priced fixtures from Target, Lowe's, or Home Depot will look best if they're of a consistent style throughout the house.
- **REGROUT BATHROOM TILE AND REPLACE CAULKING** Home stagers say that fresh grout and caulking are almost as appealing as a paint job.
- **REFINISH YOUR FLOORS** Shiny hardwoods can sell a home, say our experts. Plan on spending \$500 to \$1,000 a room. Pricy, yes, but a fresh coat of varnish makes the whole room look richer.
- **INSTALL NEW FAUCETS** They can help you instantly update an older kitchen or bathroom.
- **DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE GARAGE** "Make sure the door is in excellent shape; if that's not possible, get a new one," says Collier. Also, repair any masonry cracks and paint the floor to cover up messy oil stains. ■

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