

## Selling this spring? Start cleaning now

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Spring is the busiest time of the year for selling a home. The trees are budding, the grass is green, the songbirds return, and homebuyers feel the urge to begin their home-buying search.

January is one of the best times for home-sellers to begin the home-selling process. If you are planning to sell your home in the spring, January is the time to start moving. Successful home-sellers know there is more to selling a house than simply putting a “for sale” sign in the front yard, negotiating the top price for their home, and handing the keys over to the next homeowner. In today’s economy, your home has to sparkle to differentiate it from the competition. The drive-up must be inviting, the interior must be spotless, and the price must truly be competitive.

January is a good time to put the yard and exterior of the home back in “drive-by” condition. A brisk January day is a good time to clean up the debris blown into your yard by the winter winds. Rake up the stray leaves and trim the dormant bushes and hedges. If it is warm enough, wash the windows and wash or repaint the exterior doors. Clean the rain gutters. And while you have the ladder out, take down the Christmas lights. The lights looked nice in December, but now, some of the bulbs are burned out, so take them down. The new buyers can design their own lighting scheme next year.

January is also a perfect time to spread some weed and feed fertilizer on the lawn. Make sure the grass really is greener at your house than the other houses on the block. A tidy, green lawn will help your house sell quicker.

January is also a good time to get the interior of your home ready for the spring selling season. While preparing to sell your home, take some time to really inspect your home’s interior. Enter your house and look at it the way a new buyer will look at it. Pretend you are visiting for the first time. Now, start removing things. Donate or sell the items you really don’t use, put away the items of sentimental value and remove the items that are truly high-value. Remove everything you don’t want lost, broken, or touched.

The candlesticks you received as a wedding present from Grandma 20 years ago may be nice, and the dusty Kitchenaid mixer, sitting on the kitchen counter, will be handy when you make Halloween cookies in 10 months, but new buyers won’t appreciate them. The same goes for your child’s first-grade drawing proudly posted on the refrigerator door. They all have meaning to you, but put them in storage! They detract from the house.

Donate the sneakers you purchased to run the marathon you never entered. Pack that high school prom dress you will never wear again. No matter how nice your “stuff,” buyers want to see your house, not your possessions or memories. You are planning to move so pack your keepsakes, unused kitchen tools, and clothes that are too small, too old, or too outdated to wear.

You really won't miss the items, and buyers will be able to “see” the house more clearly. You are selling your house, not your stuff ... so remove it. The more you remove, the bigger your home will appear to prospective buyers. Rent a storage space if you have to and clean out the closets. It will be money well spent!

After removing all the clutter (including most of your family pictures), start cleaning. Really clean. A quick vacuum of the carpet will not make your home “showroom ready” to potential buyers. Deep clean. Have the carpets professionally cleaned, scrub the tile and vinyl flooring, clean the baseboards, wipe down the door and window frames, disinfect the bathrooms, and scour the oven and cooktop.

Do it all! If the walls have spots that can't be cleaned, paint the walls. If the carpet can't be cleaned, replace the carpet. Everything you do today to improve your home's appearance will pay dividends when you sell, either through a higher price, a quicker sale, or easier negotiating. Buyers tend to “horrible-ize” any blemish in a house and hold your house to an idealized standard. Remember, the used house you are selling is a buyer's new house, so they expect it to be in new-house condition.

Finally, after all the yard work is complete and the interior pristine, you are ready to begin the most competitive portion of the home selling process ... pricing and marketing. I recommend speaking with a Texas REALTOR® to maximize your competitive edge when marketing your home. According to the National Association of REALTORS® 2011 Profile of Texas Home Buyers and Sellers, only 8% of sellers sold their home without the assistance of a real estate agent, and half of those sellers knew the buyers prior to the home sale. If you don't already know the name of the next buyer of your house (only 4% of sellers do), can you really afford to miss the remaining 96% of the buyers?

Interview several Texas REALTORS®, ask them for their professional opinion of the value of your home, request a comparative market analysis, known in the real estate business as a CMA (and usually provided free of charge) of similar homes in your area, compare marketing plans presented by these Texas REALTORS® ... and, finally, listen to their advice.

To sell your house this spring, start the process now. Dig out the cleaning supplies, de-clutter your house, call a Texas REALTOR®, and get started. Today.