

Curb Appeal

You're driving around South Tampa looking at the many "For Sale" signs, when you notice the perfect Mediterranean-style home. Peach with white trim, a porch with rocking chairs and a swing for two, tropical palm trees and a lush green landscape. Potted gardenias at the front door fill your nose with sweet perfume. Even the mailbox is cute. You've found your dream home—and you haven't even been inside.

This is curb appeal. And Keller Williams Tampa Central realtor, Darren White, says now is the perfect time to improve your home—whether you're looking to sell or just looking to love your home a little more. "New home construction is down 60 percent," he says. "Since there's no new construction, workers aren't busy anymore and can dedicate themselves to renovations at a much lower price than in previous years." From the front lawn to your kitchen, here's what should be at the top of your list when trying to add value to your home and your lifestyle.

A WELL-MAINTAINED LAWN

Co-owner of Lawn Works, Inc., Kevin McCray says replacing sod can cost a new homebuyer between \$1,500 and \$4,000. "If the homeowners have taken care of the lawn, they've taken care of the house also. Maintaining your lawn is a huge value," says Kevin.

LUSH, BUT SIMPLE LANDSCAPING

While English gardens and high-maintenance plants may initially grab homebuyers' attention, it could also scare them away, says Kevin. "People want simple, easy-to-maintain lawns—hedges trimmed, flower beds weeded. They just want everything tidied up."

2-CAR GARAGE

In the Florida heat, garages are a must. And replacing old, tired doors with something dressier such as carriage-house style doors can change the entire look of the home. Garages also provide much needed storage—the bigger the better.

A WELCOMING HOME

Homebuyers want to pull up to a house and think of it as a home. That means a fresh coat of neutral paint (think beiges and lemons), a clean modern driveway, well-maintained roof and even a new doormat. (No "Go Away" or "Wipe Your Paws" mats, please.)

Green Thumb

- When you think landscape, think xeriscape. Stemming from the Greek word xeros, meaning dry, it's the accepted term for using native plants and mulch in a creative design to conserve water. "Xeriscaping" can reduce water consumption 25 to 75 percent.
- Floridians are notorious for over-fertilizing their lawns, and for years, state officials have said this is the cause for Florida's water pollution dilemma. Excess chemicals from fertilizer have been linked to fish kills and harmful algae blooms. Switch to organic.
- Instead of throwing away your leftover asparagus or rotten bananas, toss them in your yard—along with any fallen leaves, twigs and garden clippings you may have. Not only will you reduce waste, but you'll also develop some rich soil.
- Plant an organic garden. **SeedsOfChange.com** specializes in 100% certified organic seedlings and seeds to grow your own fruits, vegetables and plants. It's truly the gift that keeps on giving.

Insider Tips



UPDATED KITCHEN

Keller Williams Tampa Central realtor, Darren White, says new homebuyers expect kitchens to have granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. "Today's buyers are savvy and experienced and they won't accept less than perfection—especially in the kitchen," says Darren. He guarantees a modern kitchen will add value to your home.

REMODEL YOUR BATHROOMS

Many dream homes start with the bathroom. A spa tub with relaxing jets to soothe tired muscles, and roomy enough to fall asleep in is a must. So is a separate shower and double sink.

FABULOUS FLOORING

Green and brown carpets died in the 70s, and top real estate agents are saying that even cream and white should be a

thing of the past. Ceramic tile and wood flooring add major value, and high-end rugs create that soft feel your feet crave.

SAVVY STORAGE

A walk-in closet is a girl's best friend (and a lot of men's too). It's also necessary storage space. Homebuyers are looking for multiple closets, attic storage and shelving to create a clean, uncluttered look and feel.

INSTALL NEW WINDOWS

Replacing old windows will not only improve the look of your home, but will also lower energy costs. On average, 30 percent of energy is lost through windows, so make sure to look for double-pane with spectrally selective coatings to reduce the Florida heat.



How You Can Be A Mean Green Cleaning Machine

The next time you reach for a spray bottle of chemicals to try and get that red wine out of your oriental rug, how about using one of these environment and wallet-friendly options?

- Use vegetable oil to remove those annoying sticky tags from your glassware.
- Vinegar cleans pretty much everything—put equal parts vinegar and water into a spray bottle and go to town on mirrors and windows.



- Sprinkle table salt on top of wine stains, cover with towels and a weighted object, remove the towels in the morning and vacuum. Voila! The stain disappears just like those memories from last night.
- Fabric softener sheets kick dust's butt.
- Shaving cream fights more than razor burn—it kills carpet stains, too.
- Made fish for dinner? Put a teaspoon of vanilla extract in a small pot of boiling water.
- Rubbing alcohol smells just as strong as it is powerful. Germs and dirt be afraid, very afraid. Use it in place of Lysol.

Staging Secrets

To quickly get that "For Sale" sign to read "Sold," you must stage your home in a way that lets buyers envision themselves living there. Here's how:

- While you may love red walls, other buyers may hate it and not buy your house because of it. A fresh coat of neutral paint makes rooms appear larger and brighter.
- Furniture should show off the purpose of each room and allow for easy traffic flow. Renting a storage unit is a good idea if you have too much, and if you don't

- have enough, borrow from a friend or rent.
- Organizing and cleaning your house are the easiest things to do and make the most impact.

- Remember that people are trying to see themselves living in your house. Take the family portraits off the walls and hide the Legos under the bed.

- Make sure your home is well lit. This means opening blinds, replacing dark curtains with lighter ones and being sure your home has enough light fixtures.