



How to prepare for an open house

Getting the maximum exposure possible is a key part of any home sale. That's why it pays to sell your home with the help of a Realtor through the Multiple Listing Service (MLS). MLS provides details of your home to all real estate professionals in the area and markets the property to a broad range of potential buyers.

To further maximize exposure, your Realtor may recommend you hold one or two types of open houses as soon as the property goes on the market. The first will be an open house for Realtors only. If your home is attractive and well-priced, many of the Realtors at the open house will make arrangements to bring clients to see your home immediately.

Your Realtor may also recommend one or more open houses for the general public. Although this type of open house tends to attract a lot of "browsers," if your home is clean, attractive, well-priced and in good repair, it could turn a "browser" into a buyer. Some purchasers want to get the "feel" of several neighborhoods before they begin working with a Realtor. Open houses will attract these potential buyers.

Most open houses for the public are held on a weekend afternoon when potential buyers often have more time to drive through neighborhoods. You will have to work out dates with your Realtor that fit your schedule. If you have pets, the Realtor may suggest you remove them from the home during the open house, since their presence could be distracting.

Your Realtor will likely recommend you and your family be away from the home during the open house as well. If you remain home, prospective buyers may feel compelled to rush their visit to avoid disturbing you. You want them to feel relaxed and to take the time to really see the features of your property.

Potential buyers may also feel uncomfortable commenting on your home in your presence. This hampers your Realtor's ability to sell the home since buyer feedback is essential in making any deal.

Your Realtor will suggest ways to prepare your home for an open house to make it a secure, enjoyable experience for everyone. Do ensure that the Realtor asks for the name, address and telephone number of everyone who attends. Your Realtor should also try to walk through the home with each visitor.

Here are some general tips to help you prepare for the big day:

- Attend to any potential hazards — electrical wires crossing open areas, sharp table or counter top corners, slippery stairs and walkways, fragile items that can be easily damaged.

- Lock away or remove valuables such as jewelry, cameras, compact discs, coins and currency.
- Avoid cooking food with strong odors such as fish. The scent of fresh-brewed coffee, home-made bread and cookies can be very welcoming.
- In poor weather, provide a place for overshoes, boots, umbrellas and coats.
- A warm fire on a cold day will make your home feel inviting and cozy. But be sure your Realtor is prepared to look after the fireplace while you're not home.

A tiny hand-print on a wall or the slightest door squeak can be quite distracting to some potential buyers. Use this handy check list to assess what needs to be cleaned, repaired or changed before opening your home to potential buyers:

Kitchen and bathrooms

- Clean all surfaces, including floors.
- Organize countertops.
- Ensure all sinks and faucets work properly.

Other rooms

- Vacuum and dust all areas thoroughly.
- Collect and remove all clutter, including excess furniture.
- Neatly store books, toys and clothes in closets and on shelves.
- Clean all mirrors.
- Open drapes and pull up blinds on windows.

Floor coverings

(Includes carpeting, tile, linoleum, hardwood, etc.)

- Remove all dirt and stains.
- Repair any damaged areas.
- If there is hardwood under old carpeting, remove the carpeting and restore the hardwood--a much desired feature in homes today.

Walls, ceilings, baseboards

- Clean any fingerprints or stains.
- Repair any holes, cracks, chipped paint, ripped wallpaper, water damage.
- If necessary, repaint in neutral or complimentary colors.

Doors

- Fix squeaks and any other problems.
- Ensure the handles secure and work properly.
- Clean any stains.

Windows

- Clean and repair any cracks.
- Ensure they open easily.

Lighting

- Check to see there is sufficient light.
- Attend to any broken switches, exposed wiring.

Pet areas

- These should be clean, organized and odor free.

Outside the home

- Ensure all gates open easily.
- Clean all exterior surfaces, including decks, pools, walkways and driveways and make them tidy.
- Depending on the time of year, lawns should be mowed, walkways and driveway cleared of snow, leaves removed, trees pruned, gardens weeded, hedges trimmed.