

The ten most powerful improvements to increase the value of your property.

As unappealing as making small home improvements prior to selling a property might seem, US-based research suggests they're a worthwhile investment. And contrary to popular view, homeowners don't need to spend a lot of money to realise a strong return.

After surveying 2000 real estate agents nationwide, California-based HomeGain, came up with a top 10 list of moderately-priced home improvements. As well as boosting the sale price, results also showed improvements reduce the time on the market.

While agents generally advise homeowners to do as little as possible (pre-sale), the condition of certain areas means more extensive work might provide the greatest benefit. In the pressure of getting their home prepared for sale, many sellers overlook some of the most critical items.

The survey argues, most homeowners who make structural improvements, like adding a bathroom or bedroom never recover their investment. Ironically, it's the small improvements which can have the greatest impact on price.

Here's a list of the top 10 home improvements HomeGain recommends:

1. Lighten and brighten

One of the most noticeable, yet economical improvements includes cleaning windows, wiping all light fixtures and pruning trees to maximise natural light.

2. Clean and de-clutter

Clean entry-way, buy new front door hardware, remove excess furniture, board pets and get rid of odours.

3. Landscape

As many buyers highly value "curb appeal", it's advisable to invest money on modest landscaping. Mow, trim and re-sow bare lawn, remove all debris, secure fences and add colourful plants and flowers.

4. Stage the home

This is often the secret to a quick sale. It might include decorating the house with fresh flowers, playing music, removing personal possessions, opening drapes and turning on lights.

5. Repair electrical or plumbing problems

Before showing the house all defects to light switches, overhead lights and plumbing fixtures should be replaced. Repair leaky faucets and ensure all drains are free flowing.

6. Repair damaged floors

Keep clean at all times and if necessary, enhance by: waxing wood or lino floors, replacing worn-out vents and patch repair or replace wooden flooring.

7. Update kitchen and bathrooms

As both rooms receive special buyer scrutiny, make the most obvious improvements first. These include replacing damaged tiles, repainting if colour is dated or poor quality, repairing damaged counter tops, touching up cabinetry and replacing the toilet seat.

8. Replace or clean carpets

If carpets are not faded or damaged, consider shampooing to improve smell and appearance.

9. Exterior touch ups

Touch ups can give the house a fresh look. Give special attention to the garage, front doors and window and door frames. Redo blistering paint, restain fence, repair holes in gutter and replace missing tiles on the roof.

10. Interior touch-ups

Retouching may suffice. Also consider removing dated wallpaper, whitewashing dark panelling, having leaks, watermarks and ceiling cracks repaired.

So what is the pay-off for making the repairs? Results from the HomeGain study show small improvements provide returns of between 34% to 769% on initial investment.