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Simple summer steps to sell your home

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If you plan to put your home up for sale this summer, or if it has been on the market for some time, you might consider investing in a few key updates to improve your odds of attracting a buyer. Of course, you don't want to sink a load of cash into a place you aren't going to stay in, but focusing on a few influential fixes can drastically improve the home's overall appearance - and your chances of selling.



Freshen up

Making your home look like new again can be as simple as applying a fresh coat of paint on the walls. Cooking, smoking and everyday living can discolor and fade your ceilings and walls, making your home seem old and unattractive. It's amazing what a fresh coat of color can do to improve a home's appearance.

Stay grounded

As much time as they spend looking up, potential buyers also spend time looking down. Old, dingy carpets can overshadow any other improvements you make and give the home an unkempt feel. If your

home has hardwood floors, remove old carpeting and refinish the wood beneath it. If you do not have hardwood floors, update your old carpeting with a neutral shade.

Shower power

You may have heard that bathroom updates have some of the biggest returns when it comes time to sell a home, and it's true. According to CBS MoneyWatch.com, homeowners can expect to recover about 75% of minor bathroom remodel costs. Have a half-bath? Consider adding a shower to make it a full; this will make your home much more marketable.

Curb appeal

First impressions can have a huge impact on buyers' decisions. Remember, your front door is the first thing a buyer will see. Consider repainting it a bold color that invites them in, and don't overlook replacing your doorknob if it is in poor shape. Summer means color, and adding bright flowers to your front entry or garden will make any visitors feel welcome.

Green ways to freshen outdoor spaces, without breaking the bank

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Sprucing up outdoor spaces doesn't have to cost a lot to create a big impact. Rather than buying new, consider refreshing or upgrading furnishings, equipment and features you already have. You will save some green and give new life to items that might otherwise wind up in the trash - and ultimately in the landfill. Here are some summer spruce-up ideas:

Reviving patio furniture

Time, use and weather can leave outdoor furnishings looking withered and faded. Whether your patio set is wooden, painted aluminum, cast iron or even wicker, you can make it look new again with a fresh coat of paint. Gentle sanding and the right type of paint will have your set looking new in no time. Add in new cushions in bright colors and you've created a whole new look at a fraction of the cost of buying new.

Winning water features

Water features can add a splash of beauty and relaxation to an outdoor environment. Consider repurposing a flower pot or large colorful vase into a fountain by waterproofing it and adding a pump. Or if you bought a fountain a few seasons ago and it's sitting there unused because the original pump has burned out, it's actually simple and cost-effective to get it going again with a replacement fountain pump found at your local home improvement store.

Keeping your grill great

New gas grills can cost from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. You can refurbish your old grill for a fraction of the cost. Start by cleaning all parts and surfaces by following the manufacturer's instructions. If you no longer have the manual



that came with your grill, check the manufacturer's website to see if you can download one. It's possible to repaint rusted, faded or scratched parts as long as you use a paint rated for high temperatures. For stainless steel surfaces, use an appropriate polish to freshen the shine.

Fences and decks

Large surface areas such as fences and decks are the first to get noticed. Improve the aesthetics of worn, neglected surfaces with a new coat of waterproofer and stain. First, inspect for damaged boards and replace with appropriate materials when necessary. Check to be sure deck fasteners are secure and tighten them if they've come loose over the winter. If a fastener can't be tightened, you may need to replace it. Next, power wash and waterproof (either in clear or stain finishes) decks and fences.

With a few cost-effective upgrades, it's possible to spruce up the outdoor equipment you have, so you can enjoy it - and the savings you'll reap - for another season.

Quick tips for summer entertaining made easy

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- Keep it simple. Focus on easy recipes to save time in the kitchen so you can spend more time with family and friends.
- Plan ahead. Begin preparing as many recipes as possible the day before the party to allow for easy and quick preparation the day of the event.
- Keep it light. Serve lighter foods during the warmer weather. Grilled vegetables, a variety of pasta and green salads, and an assortment of chilled dips and spreads - such as easy-to-make guacamole in a Vitamix - create a delightful summer buffet.
- Make it colorful. Add interest to your buf-

fet table with a variety of colorful foods as well as decorative tableware, such as a bright tablecloth, fun napkins and fresh cut flowers.

WHOLE FRUIT MARGARITA

Preparation time: 7 minutes
Processing time: 45 seconds
Yield: 8 cups

Ingredients:
1/4 cup water
6 ounces tequila
2 ounces Grand Marnier
1 medium orange, peeled, halved
1 lime, peeled, halved
1 lemon, peeled, halved, seeded



1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
6 cups ice cubes

Place all ingredients into your blender in the order listed and secure lid. Blend for 45 seconds or until smooth. Pour into salt-rimmed margarita glasses and enjoy.