

If you're thinking of selling your house, now is the time to get serious about the prep work. While the process can seem overwhelming, here's a getting-ready-to-sell checklist that'll take you through the most critical tasks.

Depersonalize the space. Start by taking the "home" out of your house: family pictures, kids' art, collectibles, toiletries and tell-tale signs of pets (toys, food, etc.) all need to go. You want someone to imagine themselves living there - without thinking about you.

Purge and declutter. Tackle one room at a time, breaking it into zones. Then, (ruthlessly) work each area with a trash bag. Do a second pass with a new bag, looking for anything donation-worthy. Give yourself a few weeks for a proper purge - clutter suggests a lack of storage.

Do a deep clean. A top-to-bottom cleaning is what's required. Focus on the kitchen and bathrooms first, taking a toothbrush to surfaces if you need to, and then move on to living and family rooms. Don't forget closets and cabinets (buyers have been known to peek).

Make small fixes. Ask your agent about fixes that have big impact. A new coat of paint goes a long way, as does cleaning the blinds, fixing leaky faucets, recoiling tubs and upgrading a lighting fixture or two.

Detail the landscaping. Focus on sprucing things up. In the winter, keep walkways clear of snow and ice. In the spring, trim back bushes, edge lawn and beds and touch up the mulch. Make fence or deck repairs, and clean the windows. Then add a seasonal planter as a final, welcoming touch.

Get the photos right. Use a point-and-shoot camera, and open curtains to bring in natural light. Remove counter clutter, tuck away cords, lower toilet lids, and shoot from the doorway to capture the most space. Take several shots and then take some more. Pick only the best ones. Listing photos matter - a lot.