



Inexpensive Ways To Boost A Home's Curb Appeal

Curb appeal can go a long way toward making a home more attractive to its inhabitants as well as prospective buyers once the house is put on the market. Improving curb appeal is a goal for many homeowners, and while many projects aimed at making homes more aesthetically appealing can be costly, there are ways for cost-conscious homeowners to improve their properties without breaking the bank.

- Put your green thumb to use. A well-maintained landscape can dramatically improve a home's curb appeal. Pay attention to the plants, shrubs and trees throughout your property, watering them during periods of little rainfall and trimming them when necessary so your lawn does not look like an overgrown, neglected suburban jungle. Professional landscaping services can help you maintain your property, but even if your budget does not allow for such an expense, you can still make sure your landscape adds to your home's appeal by keeping a watchful eye on the property and addressing any issues that arise. Maintain your lawn through the colder months of the year as well, making sure no one walks on the grass when frost has settled, as doing so can produce dead spots throughout the lawn.



Maintaining plant life on a property won't cost homeowners a lot of money, but such an effort can add substantial curb appeal to a home.

- Redo your front door. While their eyes may initially be drawn to a well-manicured lawn, prospective buyers will eventually find their way to the front door. If your door is especially old, consider replacing it. If your budget does not allow for such an expense, you can still give your home's front entrance an entirely new look by installing some inexpensive molding around the door before giving the door a fresh coat of paint. Molding around the front door can make an entrance more impressive, while a new coat of paint can make a home feel warmer and more vibrant.

- Plant flowers. Another inexpensive way to make a home more appealing is to plant some colorful flowers around the property. Line walkways with flowers native to your region, as such plants will last longer than exotic alternatives that may not be capable of adapting to the local climate. In addition to lining walkways, hang window boxes filled with colorful flow-

ers or plants outside naked windows. Doing so can make windows seem larger and add some color to your home's exterior.

Another creative way to make use of colorful flowers is to place a few planters at the foot of your driveway and painting the numbers of your address on the planters. This can be both effortless and inexpensive, but it can instantly make a home more inviting to prospective buyers.

- Spotlight certain parts of your property. Many homeowners focus on improving the curb appeal of their property during the daytime hours, but you can take steps to make a home more appealing at night as well. Solar spotlights placed around trees and other attractive features in your yard can shed light on those areas of your property you're most proud of, even after the sun has gone down. Solar spotlights won't add to your energy bill, as they are powered by the sun, and they can make certain accents on your property stand out at night.

Improving curb appeal may sound like a significant undertaking, but there are many ways budget-conscious homeowners can make their home's exterior more appealing without going broke.

Guide To Replacing Home Siding

Few home improvements can transform a home more than the installation of new siding. Replacing siding can be a costly venture, but the right siding will maintain its appeal for years to come.

Updated siding can improve home's energy value by enabling owners to save on heating and cooling costs. A new design and color also can improve a home's property value and set it apart from neighboring properties. According to the Professional Builder's Home Exteriors Survey, exterior design and materials used are a top priority for new home buyers.

Project costs depend on the size of the home as well as which siding material homeowners choose. Considering new siding is a major renovation, it pays to get the job done right.

Choose a qualified contractor

It is important for consumers to do their research when it comes to siding materials and contractors. A contractor who takes shortcuts or improperly installs the siding may void a manufacturer's warranty. Always ask family members and friends for recommendations before choosing a contractor, and check out each prospective contractor's work for yourself. Interview more than one contractor and compare both their costs and what they offer. Ask plenty of questions of the contractors, and avoid those who try hard-sell methods. Questionable contractors may try strategies like a promise of a considerable discount if you 'act now' or scare

tactics that your home is unsafe in its present condition.

Be sure the contractor carries general liability insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance for their subcontractors. Ask for a license number as well and verify its accuracy. Select a durable material

Siding comes in all types of materials from wood to plastic to fiber cement, but vinyl is among the most popular due to cost and availability. Research how well particular brands of siding stand up to conditions and which are the least likely to crack, warp or discolor. Find this information from online reviews or through consumer advocacy groups. Also remember, vinyl and other synthetic materials have improved and can now mimic the look of many other materials for a fraction of the cost.

Calculate how much you need

Before you price out siding with con-

tractors, estimate how much you will need for your house. Consumer Reports suggests multiplying the height times the width of each rectangular section of your house in feet, going by what you can measure from the ground, to determine their areas. Multiply the approximate height and width of gables and other triangular surfaces and divide each total by two. Then add all the totals. To allow for waste, don't subtract for doors, windows or other areas that won't be covered. Finally, divide the total square footage by 100 to estimate how many squares of siding you will need. A square represents 100 square feet. Knowing how much you need can save you money. Vinyl siding can completely transform the look of a home and make it more energy efficient. Consumers who do their homework will get the best value for their investments.

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