

6 Worth-the-Price Fix-Ups

Simple and affordable do-it-yourself projects can greatly increase a home's resale value, according to HomeGain's annual home improvement and staging survey. The marketing company surveyed nearly 600 real estate professionals to discover which DIY home improvement projects give sellers the biggest return for their buck. Here are six projects under \$1000 (amounts are estimated) that made the list.

1. Cleaning and decluttering. Remove any personal items, unclutter countertops, organize closets and shelves and make the home closets and shelves and make the home sparkling clean.	\$290 Cost \$1990 Return
2. Brightening. Clean all windows inside and out, replace old curtains, update lighting fixtures and remove anything that blocks light from the windows.	\$375 Cost \$1550 Return
3. Smart Staging. Rearrange furniture, bring in new accessories and furnishings to enhance rooms, incorporate artwork, and play soft music in the background.	\$550 Cost \$2194 Return
4. Landscaping enhancements. Punch up the home's curb appeal in the front and back yards by adding bark mulch, bushes, and flowers and ensuring current plants and grass are well-cared for and manicured.	\$540 Cost \$1932 Return
5. Repairing electrical or plumbing. Fix leaks under the sinks, remove any mildew stains, and ensure all plumbing is in good working condition. Update the home's electrical with new wiring for modern appliances, fix any lights or outlets that don't work and replace old plus points with new safety fixtures.	\$535 Cost \$1505 Return
6. Replacing or shampooing dirty carpets Steam clean carpets, replace any worn carpets, and repair any floor creaks.	\$647 Cost \$1739 Return

We asked. You answered. What's your favorite staging accessory?

Area Rugs Rugs can really help you define a large space. We also use them to stage bedrooms: Plop a few pillows and a breakfast serving tray on top of a rug instead of racking up the cost of a full-sized bed and accessories. I learned this neat little trick from another local agent a few years back and have been using it ever since!
Stepanie Crawford, Zeitlin & Co., Nashville TN

Sheer Curtains My favorite staging accessory is a tension rod with a white sheer curtain on the windows. It dresses up the window but still allows the light in. And no tools are needed to hand the rod!
Giovanna Graves, Central Mass Real Estate Inc., Leominster, MA

Side Tables I love to use trunks or small suitcases in place of a side table. It adds interest because it's unexpected but appealing to all types of buyers. I've had buyers actually want to purchase them when buying the home.
Mary Habres, Encore Home Staging and Redesign, Jacksonville FL

Timers for Lights I work in a climate that tends toward gray days in the winter so having timers on lights really changes the first impression. During the holidays, I use battery-operated candles with timers. They come on at the same time every day, stay on for five hours, and then shut themselves of. It's fun, festive and safe. Dava Behrens, Colwell Banker Valley Brokers, Corvallis, OR

Fabulous Fabric I buy fabric to coordinate with the style of the home I am staging. I cover a large framed canvas with fabric for art and headboards. I also use fabric as a colorful throw at the end of a bed or to recover a chair seat. A little blanket edging and sewing glue finish the edges. I can make everything look coordinated with a custom appearance. Kristin Bramer, IdEvolution, Lafayette CO

Fresh Flowers, Mirrors and Candy! I like to use beautifully simple fresh flowers-sometimes even just one bud in a small vase in the bathroom. Near the entrance to the home, I like to use a mirror that is sized to scale with the space and goes with the interior décor. Finally, I used clear canisters in the kitchen filled with candy, such as Swedish Fish, M&Ms or peppermints. It adds some color and a splash of fun. Jessica Dolan, Room to Breathe Home Organizing & Staging, State College PA

Excerpted from HomeGain's 2011 Home Sale Maximizer Survey, www.homesalemaximizer.com