



By **PAUL OWERS**

McClatchy-Tribune News Service  
FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. —

Sellers should take broom and brush in hand.

Homes that attract interest are priced right and show well. The grass is cut and the shrubs are manicured, rooms are free of clutter and ratty carpeting has been replaced with a neutral-color berber.

We talked to five housing experts — appraiser Joel Greenberg, real estate agent Janice Leis and home stagers Akanake Cadden, Heather Johnson and Margo Aguirre — for ideas on renovations that homeowners can make that will help their properties stand out.

Fair warning: most of these are budget-friendly, but some changes do require a little extra cash.

“When the market was hot, buyers were willing to overlook things,” Greenberg said. “Not anymore.”

#### 1. Curb appeal

This is arguably the most important part of preparing your home for sale because it’s the buyer’s first impression. Your home doesn’t necessarily have to be repainted, but it should look fresh, with no cracked paint. Consider pressure-cleaning sidewalks, resealing the driveway and replacing the mailbox. Get rid of any debris, weeds and toys in the yard. Sprinkle mulch around the trees and trim the hedges so that they’re not hiding windows. Plant colorful flowers no more than 6 inches high.

“Red, purple, orange,” Cadden said. “Those colors create excitement in a buyer.”

#### 2. Kitchens and bathrooms

Kitchens are the No. 1 seller of homes, with bathrooms a close second. Consider replacing the kitchen counter tops if they’re old and bland. Everybody loves granite, but laminate, black Formica or four-inch tiles with grout aren’t bad alternatives and cost less. Granite 12-by-12 tiles with thin grout is another possibility, but you may have to do a lot of cutting, depending on the depth of the counter top.

Here’s a good rule of thumb: If the house is listed at \$500,000 or above, you probably need to spring for granite. To spruce up the bathrooms, replace the fixtures

# Renovations homeowners can make to help their properties stand out

and the sliding shower door. Hang some fluffy white towels. Above all, the bathrooms must be spotless.

#### 3. Doors

The front door, if possible, should have glass side panels to allow light to shine through. Replacing the hardware with, say, antique bronze is a cost-effective way to make the door look new. Don’t forget to make sure the doorbell works. Doors inside the house should be painted and the hardware should be the same on each one. Fix any annoying squeaks. Older homes have sliding-glass doors, but there’s not much you can do with those except replace them. French doors will add value, but they’re expensive.

#### 4. Flooring

Wood is good, but make sure it’s sanded and restained. Laminate flooring also is fine, but it should be a neutral color. Shampoo the carpet so it’s free of stains and pet smells. You don’t need to buy new carpeting because the homebuyer will want to select it. But if the rug is really bad, get berber from one of the home improvement stores and install it yourself.

#### 5. Lighting

Upgrading the lighting is an inexpensive way to improve the look and mood of a house. Replace the fixtures, install dimmers and use soft-wattage light bulbs. Buy a chandelier, but nothing too ornate. Also, keep the outside lights on at night because prospective home buyers often drive through neighborhoods after dark.

#### 6. Living room and closets

A cluttered house quickly turns off buyers, so lose the knick-knacks. Make the house appear open and inviting. Pack up one-third of a closet’s contents and store the junk somewhere off site. A crowded closet tells buyers the house doesn’t have adequate storage.

#### 7. Garage

Garage organization is big business these days and the before/after photos offer dramatic contrasts. Local companies will come in and get rid of the junk, using bins, cabinets, lockers, hooks and hangers to more neatly store what’s left. The cost of organizing your garage can range from a few hundred dollars to more than \$15,000. You could do much of the work yourself. For instance, if the garage floor is stained, paint it gray.

#### 8. Patio

Again, less is more. Make sure the junk is gone and that the furniture looks new. Set up the grill. Create a scene that allows potential buyers to see themselves

relaxing outside and enjoying the backyard.

#### 9. Ceilings

Adding crown molding and removing popcorn ceilings are nice touches but not necessary. If you do try it, hire a professional. In most cases, however, your money would probably be better spent elsewhere.

#### 10. Pool/spa/sprinkler system

The pool and spa should have enough water. If there are leaks, or if the equipment is broken, get busy. Don’t forget about the sprinkler system. Granted, sellers don’t want to invest hundreds or thousands of dollars in fixing these items, but it will greatly improve their chances with buyers.

## AUCTION

Two Separate Sales

### REAL ESTATE

Sat • May 10 • 10:30 am

**449 Acres**

Johnson County

**Prop A: 274.47 Ac Divided,** 17 Tracts

- 115 Acres Cultivation • 3-Acre Pond • Creek
- 100 Acres Mixed Hardwood/Pine
- Paved Road Frontage

**Prop B: 175.21 Ac Divided,** 4 Tracts

- 75.9 Acres Cultivation • 30 Acres Cut Over • Pond • Creek
- 70 Acres Mixed Hardwood/Pine • 1/4 Mile of Paved Roads

Sat • May 10 • 3:00 pm

**704 Acres**

Toombs County

**Prop C: 257.8 Ac Divided,** 10 Tracts

- 115 Acres 16-Year-Old Pine
- 36 Acres 12-Year-Old Pine
- 50 Acres 7-Year-Old Pine
- 46 Acres Hardwood Bottoms
- 3/4 Miles of County Road Frontage
- 1.5 Mile of Frontage on Rocky Creek
- 1,500' Paved Road Frontage

**Prop D: 447 Ac Divided,** 3 Tracts

- 80 Acres Crop Land • 50 Acres Bottom Land
- 65 Acres 18-Year-Old Pine
- 70 Acres 15-Year-Old Pine
- 23 Acres Roads/ Food Plots
- 1 Mile of Cobb's Creek AND
- Free Creek Frontage

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