

# Home Preparation and Renovation Checklist for Selling Your Property

Preparing your home for sale is a multi-step process that applies to all residential property types (single-family homes, condos, and multi-unit buildings). Use this comprehensive checklist to ensure both interior and exterior areas are show-ready. Each section below highlights key tasks to address before listing your property, helping you impress buyers and avoid last-minute issues.

## Pre-Sale Improvements and Repairs

Before listing, take care of maintenance and repair issues so buyers see a well-kept, move-in ready home. Address both obvious problems and minor fixes:

- **Fix Functional Issues:** Repair anything broken or not working properly. This includes leaky faucets, running toilets, doors or windows that stick, and any electrical or HVAC issues. Ensure windows and doors open, close, and lock smoothly, and that all appliances and home systems are functioning correctly[1].
- **Complete Minor Repairs:** Tackle small fixes that could raise red flags. Touch up scuff marks or holes on walls, tighten loose cabinet handles, replace burned-out light bulbs, and stop any dripping pipes or faucet leaks[2]. Re-caulk around sinks, tubs, and showers to seal out moisture, and refresh any dingy grout in bathroom or kitchen tiles for a clean look[3].
- **Address Cosmetic Damage:** Repair or replace cracked window panes and torn window screens[4]. If there are water stains or minor drywall cracks, fix the underlying cause and patch/paint the area. Check for wood rot (on exteriors, decks, or fences) and have it repaired to prevent safety issues[5][6].
- **Service Major Systems:** Consider servicing your mechanical systems if due. For example, have the HVAC unit inspected or tuned up, and replace HVAC filters for better air flow[7]. Ensure the water heater, electrical panel, and any other critical systems are in good working order (buyers' inspections will cover these).
- **Consider Strategic Upgrades:** If parts of your home are very outdated, plan a few cost-effective upgrades to increase appeal. For instance, updating old light fixtures or ceiling fans, replacing worn-out carpeting, or upgrading kitchen/bath faucets and cabinet hardware can modernize the home without a full remodel[8]. Focus on improvements that enhance what buyers see (and touch) every day, while avoiding unnecessary high-cost projects.

*(Tip: If you're unsure about the home's condition, you might get a pre-listing home inspection to identify issues early. This can guide your repair efforts and prevent surprises later, though it's optional.)*

## Cleaning and Decluttering

A clean, clutter-free home allows buyers to focus on the property – not your personal belongings. Give your home a top-to-bottom deep clean and create an open, neutral environment:

- **Declutter All Rooms:** Remove excess items from every area of the house. Pack away personal collections, knick-knacks, and non-essential items in closets and on shelves. Clear off countertops, tables, and windowsills of unnecessary objects[9]. Storage spaces (closets, cabinets, pantry) should also be thinned out to appear more spacious – consider renting a storage unit or donating unneeded items.
- **Depersonalize the Space:** Take down family photos, kids’ artwork, diplomas, and any highly personal or unique decor[10]. The goal is to create a **blank canvas** so potential buyers can envision themselves living there[11]. Also remove any items that might not appeal to a broad audience (e.g. controversial posters or very bold design elements). A neutral style will attract the widest range of buyers.
- **Deep Clean Every Surface:** Thoroughly clean your home beyond the usual routine. Scrub bathrooms (tiles, grout, toilets, tubs) and kitchens (countertops, appliance interiors, sinks) until they sparkle[12]. Mop or vacuum all floors (shampoo carpets if necessary), dust all ledges, vents, and ceiling fans, and wipe down doors and light switch plates. Don’t forget less-seen areas like baseboards, window tracks, and inside closets – buyers *will* peek everywhere.
- **Clean Windows and Mirrors:** Wash all windows (inside and out) to ensure maximum light and a clear view[13]. Also clean mirrors and glass doors. Shiny, streak-free glass makes your home feel brighter and well-maintained. If window screens are dirty or damaged, clean or remove them (store removed screens in the garage) to improve curb appeal[14][15].
- **Eliminate Odors:** Do a “smell test” in your home. Pet, food, smoke, or mildew odors can turn off buyers immediately. Air out the house by opening windows, clean any source of smells (like carpets or garbage disposals), and consider an **unbiased nose** – ask a friend or your agent to confirm the home smells fresh[16]. Use subtle approaches to add a pleasant scent: lightly scented candles, plug-ins, or simmering a pot of cinnamon before showings can help, but avoid overpowering fragrances or anything that could bother those with allergies[17].
- **Finalize Cleaning Before Showings:** Plan a final **deep clean** right before photographing or showing the home. Every surface should be dust-free and gleaming – a spotless home signals to buyers that it’s been well cared for[18]. If needed, hire professional cleaners for a one-time deep cleaning of carpets, kitchens, baths, and hard-to-reach areas.

*(Note: For condos or apartments, focus on your unit’s interior and any balcony/patio. Ensure the entryway to your unit is neat (a door wreath or clean doormat can add charm). In multi-unit properties, also tidy any common hallways or entry areas under your control so the overall property makes a good impression.)*

## Staging Recommendations

Staging is all about presentation. By thoughtfully arranging furniture and decor, you can make your home feel larger, brighter, and more inviting to buyers. You can hire a professional stager or do it yourself using these tips:

- **Furniture Placement:** Arrange furniture to maximize the sense of space and functionality in each room. Remove or reposition any oversized or extra pieces that crowd the space. Each room should have a clear purpose and easy traffic flow – for example, in a living room, position seating to highlight a fireplace or view, and in a bedroom ensure the bed isn't blocking windows or doors. Consider temporarily putting bulky furniture in storage to open up floor space.
- **Highlight Key Rooms:** Focus your staging efforts on the rooms that influence buyers the most: the living room, primary bedroom, and kitchen[19]. These areas should feel **comfortable, stylish, and spacious**. For instance, set the dining table with a simple centerpiece, arrange the living room with a cozy conversational layout, and clear off kitchen counters except for a few attractive essentials.
- **Use Neutral, Inviting Decor:** Stick to a neutral color palette for any added decor or linens, which appeals to a wide audience. Replace loud or dated décor with simple, modern touches. You might add **neutral-colored throw pillows or a clean, modern rug** in the living area to warm it up[20], fresh white towels in the bathroom, or crisp new bedding in the master bedroom. Mirrors are great accessories – they can make rooms look bigger and brighter by reflecting light. Houseplants or a vase of fresh flowers can also bring life to a room (just don't overdo it).
- **Lighting and Ambiance:** Bright rooms feel larger, so maximize light in every space. Open all curtains and blinds to let in daylight[13]. Add floor or table lamps in any dim corners, and make sure every light fixture has a working bulb of appropriate brightness. Use warm-toned bulbs for a cozy feel, but ensure all lighting in a room is the same color temperature for consistency[21][22]. For evening showings, turn on porch lights and interior lamps to create an inviting glow. Soft background music and gentle air freshener (or a faint natural scent) can further enhance ambiance during open houses.
- **Balance Lived-In and Showroom:** Staged homes shouldn't feel sterile – you want a **welcoming, aspirational look** that still feels somewhat homey[23]. Aim for a balance between a model home and a comfortable living space[24]. For example, a throw blanket on a chair and a cookbook on the kitchen counter are nice touches, but keep it minimal and avoid personal clutter.
- **Professional Staging Help:** If you're unsure how to best present your home, consider bringing in a professional home stager[25]. Stagers are experts in highlighting your home's best features and arranging furnishings to make rooms look bigger and more functional[26]. They can often use a mix of your items and their decor inventory to transform the space. Ask your real estate agent for stager recommendations if needed. Even a consultation for advice can be worthwhile.

*(Tip: Whether DIY or professional, staging often yields a great first impression. Little details like a new welcome mat at the front door, a bowl of fresh fruit on the kitchen counter, or neatly folded towels in the bathroom can subconsciously signal hospitality and care to buyers.)*

## Painting and Cosmetic Touch-Ups

Fresh paint and small cosmetic upgrades can give your home a “like new” feel without major renovations. This section covers easy improvements to surfaces, finishes, and fixtures:

- **Repaint Walls in Neutral Colors:** One of the most impactful updates is painting any bold, dark, or scuffed walls in a neutral tone. Whites, light grays, beiges, or greige colors create a blank canvas that most buyers prefer<sup>[27]</sup>. Neutral walls also make spaces look larger and brighter. If you have rooms with very personalized paint (children’s murals, bright accent walls, etc.), painting them over in a soft neutral is highly recommended. Don’t forget ceilings if they are stained or dingy – a coat of flat white ceiling paint can do wonders.
- **Touch Up Trim and Doors:** Inspect your baseboards, crown moldings, interior doors, and window frames. Clean off any dust and grime, then **paint touch-up** any chipped or peeling areas. Freshly painted trim in white or a coordinating neutral will frame your rooms nicely. Also repair or replace any damaged trim pieces. Tighten loose doorknobs and consider updating old-fashioned brass hardware with more contemporary styles (brushed nickel, matte black, etc.), especially on the front door or master bedroom door for a good impression.
- **Refresh Cabinets and Fixtures:** Take a look at your kitchen and bathroom cabinets, as well as fixtures like faucets and lighting. If cabinets are in good shape but just dated, you might simply replace the hardware (handles/knobs) with a modern style<sup>[8]</sup>. For very worn cabinet fronts, a fresh coat of paint or refinishing can make them look new. Ensure all cabinet doors and drawers open smoothly (fix any misaligned hinges or tracks). Update leaky or old faucets with new ones, and consider swapping out any very outdated light fixtures or vanity lights for a reasonably priced modern fixture. These cosmetic updates can greatly improve the perceived value of the home.
- **Fix Floors and Flooring Appearance:** Make sure your flooring looks its best. Replace any cracked tiles, and re-grout or re-caulk where needed (especially around tubs, showers, and counters)<sup>[3]</sup>. If you have hardwood, consider refinishing high-traffic areas or at least polish and apply wood conditioner to minimize scratches. Deep clean carpets or consider replacing them if they are extremely worn or have odors/stains that won’t come out. Ensure transitional areas (like thresholds) are secure and even. Repair any squeaky floorboards if possible (a few screws or nails in the subfloor can often silence a squeak).
- **Exterior Touch-Ups:** Don’t forget the outside surfaces. If paint is peeling on exterior siding, trim, or shutters, scrape and repaint those areas to protect the wood and

look tidy. Often, simply painting the front door can give the entry a fresh look – a bold, welcoming color or even just a new coat of the existing color makes a great first impression[28]. Also paint or replace an old mailbox, and ensure house numbers are legible and firmly attached (new house number plaques are inexpensive and add curb appeal[29]).

*(Note: Always use proper prep for paint jobs – clean surfaces, patch holes, use primer if needed – to ensure a quality finish. Also, keep receipts of any improvements; buyers love to see that updates were done professionally.)*

## Landscaping and Curb Appeal

Your home's exterior sets the buyer's expectations before they even walk in the door. Improving curb appeal can significantly boost interest. Tackle the front yard, entryway, and overall outside appearance with these steps:

- **Yard Cleanup and Lawn Care:** Make sure your lawn and landscaping look neat and cared for. Mow the lawn and trim the edges; if it's spring or summer, keep the grass watered so it's green and healthy. Rake up leaves and pick up any debris or sticks[30][31]. Trim overgrown shrubs and trees, especially any branches touching or hanging over the house[32]. There should be no vegetation blocking windows or paths. If you have dead or dying plants, remove or replace them. For bare spots in the lawn, consider planting sod or grass seed. A well-maintained yard gives buyers a great first impression.
- **Add Fresh Mulch and Plants:** Refresh your garden beds with a new layer of mulch or stone for a clean look. **Plant colorful flowers** (annuals or perennials) in the front yard or in planters by the front door for a pop of color, if the season permits[33]. Even a couple of planters with bright flowers can make a front entrance more inviting. In fall/winter, you might use hardy plants or evergreens for greenery. Window boxes with flowers (or seasonal decor) can also add charm[33]. The goal is a cheerful, cared-for landscape that enhances your home's appearance.
- **Exterior Cleaning:** Give all exterior surfaces a good cleaning. Power-wash siding, porch floors, and walkways to remove dirt, stains, and mildew[14]. Clean out gutters and downspouts so they're not overflowing with leaves[34] (buyers often notice gutter condition). Wash exterior windows for crystal-clear glass that sparkles in the sun[13]. If your driveway or sidewalk has tough stains or algae, pressure wash those as well – or use a hose and scrub brush for smaller areas. A clean exterior signals that the property is well maintained[14].
- **Entryway and Front Facade:** Make the front entry as welcoming as possible. If the front door paint is faded or peeling, **repaint the door** or replace it for a quick facelift (a bold but tasteful color can draw the eye)[28]. Polish or update the front door hardware – a new handle set or door knocker can look great[33]. Ensure the doorbell works (consider installing a smart video doorbell if appropriate)[35]. Put out a new, clean doormat. Check that house numbers are clearly visible from the

street – replace them if they’re broken or tarnished[29]. If there’s a front porch, stage it with a couple of chairs or a bench and potted plants to create an inviting outdoor living space (even a small condo balcony can be adorned with a chair and plants).

- **Outdoor Lighting and Safety:** Good lighting enhances curb appeal and provides safety. Clean all exterior light fixtures (remove bugs and dirt) and replace any burnt-out bulbs. Consider installing landscape lighting along walkways or solar lights by the driveway to illuminate the path at night[21][22]. Ensure the porch light is bright enough (choose a warm, inviting glow). For added ambiance, you can hang string lights on a porch or in a backyard patio area. Also check that fences and gates are in good condition – repair any loose fence boards or sagging gates, as these are visible signs of upkeep.
- **General Exterior Once-Over:** Stand across the street and evaluate your curb appeal objectively. Look at the roof (are any shingles missing or curling that should be fixed?)[36]. Look at the siding (any visible damage or in need of paint?). Walk the perimeter of the house and note anything that catches the eye as unsightly or needing repair (for example, an AC unit covered in weeds, peeling paint on a windowsill, or garden hoses strewn about). **Neatly coil hoses**, put away lawn tools and children’s toys, and garbage/recycling bins should be clean and tucked to the side or in a garage. By making the exterior as tidy as the interior, you ensure buyers’ first impressions are positive[37].

*(Tip: Curb appeal isn’t just about landscaping – it’s the overall impression. Even for condos, make your front door area shine; for multi-unit properties, ensure the building entrance and any yard space are clean and attractive. A little effort outside goes a long way in attracting buyers.)*

## Safety and Compliance Checks

As a seller, you’re responsible for delivering a home that meets basic safety standards and any local compliance requirements. Before listing (and certainly before closing), verify these important items:

- **Smoke and CO Detectors:** Test all smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in the home. Replace batteries in each unit and **install new detectors if any are missing or outdated**[38]. Many buyers (and lenders) will require functioning detectors on each level of the home and in key areas (check your local fire code for placement). In some regions, sellers must obtain a smoke/CO detector compliance certificate from the fire department before closing[39]. Ensure you meet any such requirements early to avoid delays – for example, Massachusetts law requires a passed smoke detector inspection by the local fire department for sellers[39].
- **Electrical & Fire Safety:** Do a quick audit of potential electrical hazards. Cover any exposed wiring or junction boxes, and fix any light switches or outlets that don’t work. Check that GFCI outlets (the ones with reset buttons) are installed within 6



feet of water sources in kitchens, bathrooms, and garages – these are often required by code[40]. If you're missing GFCIs in those areas, consider having an electrician install them to pass an inspection. Ensure no circuit breakers are tripped and label your electrical panel clearly. Also, have a fire extinguisher accessible in the kitchen for safety (not mandatory for sale, but a nice touch).

- **Home Security and Hazards:** Ensure that all doors and windows have proper locks for security. Fix any broken locks or latches. Check for trip hazards around the home – loose steps, uneven flooring, or loose rugs – and address them (repair, reattach, or remove the hazard). If you have a staircase, make sure the handrail is secure and not wobbly. For homes with a fireplace or wood stove, have the chimney cleaned if it hasn't been in a while, and consider a chimney inspection; a clean chimney is a safety plus in buyers' eyes. For homes with a pool, ensure you have appropriate safety measures (fences or covers) in compliance with local laws.
- **Pest and Environmental Checks:** It's a good idea to ensure your home is free of infestations or environmental hazards. Arrange for an exterminator to eliminate any active pest issues like insects or rodents before showing the home[41] – seeing a roach or mouse dropping can sour a buyer's impression fast. If you live in a termite-prone area, you might get a termite inspection done and address any treatment needs (many buyers will do this, but handling it proactively can be a selling point). Likewise, if you are aware of any mold or asbestos issues, have those professionally remediated or at least evaluated. Disclose and provide documentation of remediation for buyer confidence.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Research if your city or state requires any inspections or certificates prior to sale. Common examples include: sewer lateral inspections, energy efficiency audits, or local point-of-sale inspections for code compliance. If you're in a homeowner's association (HOA) or condo association, check that your property doesn't have any outstanding violations (unapproved exterior modifications, etc.) and that you have any required HOA resale documents ready. Being on top of these **compliance items** will make the closing process much smoother.

*(Tip: Consider keeping a folder of maintenance records (recent HVAC service, roof repairs, etc.) and any permits or inspection sign-offs for major work done. This can reassure buyers that the home is safe, up to code, and well-maintained[42].)*

## Final Walkthrough Readiness

In the whirlwind between accepting an offer and closing day, don't forget to prepare for the buyer's final walkthrough. The final walkthrough is typically done a day or two before closing so the buyers can verify the home's condition and that any agreed-upon repairs were completed. Use this checklist to ensure **nothing is overlooked**:

- **Move Out Completely:** All personal property should be removed from the home by the time of the walkthrough (except items you've agreed in the contract to leave,

like appliances or fixtures). Check every room, closet, cabinet, and storage area (attic, basement, garage, shed) to ensure you haven't left anything behind[43]. Don't forget outdoor storage or items in the yard – the property should be delivered empty and clean. Properly dispose of any hazardous materials (old paint cans, propane tanks, etc.) instead of leaving them for the buyer[44]. An empty house lets buyers inspect freely and avoids any misunderstandings about items that were meant to be included or removed.

- **Repair Commitments:** Complete **all repairs or improvements** you agreed to during negotiations *before* the walkthrough. If the buyer's home inspection led to a repair addendum (for example, fixing a leaky roof or replacing a water heater), ensure that work is done and keep copies of receipts or invoices as proof[45]. It's wise to leave those receipts on the kitchen counter or provide them to the buyer's agent ahead of the walkthrough. This shows good faith and lets the buyers verify the repairs were handled by a professional (if applicable).
- **Deep Clean and Final Touches:** Perform a final cleaning after all your belongings are out. At minimum, the contract likely stipulates "broom-swept" condition – meaning floors swept/vacuumed, surfaces wiped down, and no debris left[46]. Ideally, you should **leave the home as clean as you'd hope to find it** if you were the buyer. This means vacuuming or mopping floors, wiping out cabinets and drawers, cleaning kitchen appliances, and sanitizing bathrooms one last time. Pay special attention to the refrigerator (which should be emptied and cleaned) and oven, as buyers will check these. Remove all trash from the property. A thoroughly clean home at walkthrough not only satisfies contractual obligations but also creates goodwill.
- **Utility and Home Function Check:** Just before the walkthrough, go through the house and test all lights, faucets, toilets, and appliances one more time[47]. Replace any burnt-out light bulbs (so the buyer isn't greeted by a dark light fixture). Flush toilets and run faucets to make sure no new leaks have appeared. Run the HVAC system (heating and cooling) to ensure it's operational[48]. If any appliances are included in the sale, quickly test those as well (run the dishwasher, turn on the stove burners, etc.). These checks help catch any last-minute issues – if a problem is discovered during the buyer's walkthrough, it could delay closing, so it's best *you* find it first and address it.
- **Walk the Exterior:** Do one more walk-around outside. Confirm that no storm or accident has caused new damage since the buyer's inspection. Look at the roof, siding, and foundation for anything notable[49]. Verify that the yard is in the same condition as when the buyer made the offer – grass not overgrown, no new dead patches or fallen branches, and any trash or yard waste is removed. If you promised to remove an outdoor item (like an old shed or above-ground pool), make sure it's gone[50]. Also check that all exterior lights, doorbells, and garage door openers are functional, since the buyer may test them.
- **Finalize Home Handover Items:** Gather all sets of house keys, garage door openers, gate keys/fobs, mailbox keys, and any other access devices. Leave these



in a kitchen drawer or another agreed spot for the buyer (or give them to your agent/buyer's agent as instructed). It's also helpful to leave appliance manuals, warranty info, and a list of service companies (e.g. pool service, lawn care, alarm company) for the buyer's reference. Leaving these in a labeled folder on the counter is a courteous touch.

- **Keep Utilities On:** Do **not** shut off electricity, water, or gas until after the closing is officially completed (you can usually schedule them to transfer the day after closing). The buyers will need the utilities operational during their final walkthrough to test everything[\[51\]](#). Turning them off too early can not only impede the walkthrough, but also lead to contract complications. Instead, arrange with your utility providers for a transfer or final reading the day after closing.
- **Pro Tip – Pre-Walkthrough:** If possible, finish moving out a day or two before the buyer's walkthrough. Use that time to do your own **pre-walkthrough inspection** of the empty house[\[52\]](#). This way, you can catch any issues (like a missed drip under a sink or a light you forgot to fix) and address them proactively. It also gives you time to clean without rushing. If you cannot personally attend the buyer's walkthrough, ask your real estate agent or a representative to be available in case any last-minute issues arise[\[53\]](#). Being prepared will help ensure a smooth closing with no surprises.