

Deck Out Your Landscaping Before You Sell

With homeowners' priorities shifting to their outdoor living spaces, it's more important than ever that your landscaping and backyard areas look their best when it comes time to sell.

Members of The Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association say the growth of the outdoor living phenomena is the result of North America's interest in 'cocooning,' the trend toward a more casual lifestyle, an aging population and the popularity of porches, decks, and patios in homes.

And with more outdoor living spaces come more elaborate and beautiful landscapes.

Studies have shown that attractive landscaping can increase the value of a home.

Two studies, one by Mark S. Henry of the Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics at Clemson University and another by Robert L. Degner of the Florida Agricultural Market Research Center, University of Florida, found that landscaping contributes to higher resale values in single-family residences, according to the Associated Landscape Contractors of America.

Henry's study, "The Contribution of Landscaping to the Price of Single Family Houses: A Study of Home Sales in Greenville, South Carolina," pointed out not only did homes with excellent landscaping sell 4 to 5 percentage points higher, but homes with poor landscaping in neighborhoods with excellent landscaping sold for 8 to 10 percent less.

"The right landscape design can make all the difference to a prospective buyer, especially when it's beautifully and carefully executed," said



Wendy K. Jones, a Dallas area Realtor.

First impressions are not only important for buyers, but for appraisers and real estate agents, too, Minnesota appraiser Eric Flom said in a May 24 Star Tribune article.

Flom said appraisers take landscaping into account as they compare a house to similar ones. The Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers says a mature tree can have an appraised value of \$1,000 to \$10,000. So how much time, effort and money should you put into sprucing up your landscape if you're selling?

Robert Irwin, author of *Improve the Value of Your Home Up to \$100,000*:

50 Surefire Techniques and Strategies (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), says that when it comes to your back yard, putting in a little effort can go a long way.

"If you put in a minimal amount of money, time, and effort into your back yard, you will help sell your home and probably get enough boost in price to warrant the work," he said. "However, if you do extensive landscaping, just consider it money spent to please yourself. Although it will help sell your home faster, it won't impress buyers enough to pay much more for it."

Irwin suggests the following:

* If your back yard is nothing but weeds, rent a weed eater and cut them.

* If you want to take it a step further, rototill the soil, flatten it with a roller and buy \$50 worth of seed. "Spread it out, cover with a thin layer of soil, and water the heck out of it," he says. In two weeks you'll have the early stages of a lawn; it will fill in a few months. "For little more than a hundred dollars, you've probably added a thousand or more to the value of your home (or at least kept it from being knocked down by that much)."

* Plant low flowers and shrubs around your lot.

* Put in a deck or patio. "A deck can add value to a home," Irwin said. "However, don't expect a buyer to pay you for what it will cost you to add that deck." Paving stone or bricks are a cost-effective way for a fairly easy patio.

* Make sure your back yard looks neat, clean and livable.

* Plant trees that won't grow too large. A good choice for many back yards is fruit trees. "Used sparingly, they provide an excellent way to inexpensively go tall in your back yard."

* Remove unsightly trees -- those that are too tall or inappropriate. Be sure you check with your city or county government regarding tree removal laws.