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Preparing Your Home for Sale, One Step at a Time by Kirsten Sharpe

You've made the big decision to sell your home—but now you're feeling overwhelmed at the thought of getting it ready for showings. Maybe the idea of buyers seeing your home makes you nervous, especially when you think about how much stuff you've accumulated over the years. Don't worry—you're not alone. Many sellers feel unsure about where to start. The key is to break the process into manageable steps. Even better, make it a team effort. Enlist your spouse, kids, or best friend, then celebrate your progress with a shared meal (just resist the urge to shop for more things afterward!). Here are some essential areas to focus on:

Boosting Curb Appeal (Exterior)

First impressions happen fast—often before the buyer even steps inside. Here's how to make sure your home's exterior shines:

- Check your front door area. Sweep away cobwebs and leaves, and add a fresh new doormat.
- Power wash your siding if possible—or at least give it a thorough wipe-down.
- Replace tired or dying plants in containers with something vibrant or seasonal.
- Make sure exterior light bulbs are working—and while you're at it, check the ones inside, too.
- Wash your windows and inspect screens for rips or tears.
- If you have a deck or patio, power wash it. Repair loose boards and check that railings are sturdy.
- Straighten the bird feeder—yes, even the small things matter.

Prepping the Inside (Interior)

Buyers will be looking closely—so this is where the real magic happens:

- Declutter all horizontal surfaces. That means floors, kitchen counters, bathroom vanities, dressers, shelves, the dining room table, and even the fireplace mantle. If it's flat, clear it!
- Clean out the fridge. Buyers will open it. Make sure it's clean and smells fresh.
- Organize closets. Buyers are curious, and they will open anything with a doorknob. If things are overflowing or messy, it sends the message that there isn't enough storage space.
- Dust ceiling fans (yes, people look up!) and wipe down baseboards—especially if you have pets.
- Remove excess family photos. Buyers need to imagine their life in the home—not feel like they're walking through someone else's.
- Repaint dark-colored rooms. A light, neutral palette appeals to the widest range of buyers. Before painting, patch nail holes and any dings in the drywall. Be cautious with too many small "touch-ups," as they can stand out in listing photos and make the walls look polka-dotted.

See Your Home With Fresh Eyes

Here's a tip: Next time you come home, walk through the front door, just like a buyer would. Look around with a fresh perspective. Does it feel warm, inviting, and well-kept? Or does it need some attention? If your honest answer is "I wouldn't buy this house," don't stress—just prioritize decluttering and making reasonable improvements. You don't have to renovate—just present the home in its best possible light. Because remember: you only get one chance to make a first impression.

