

20 things that can alter the value of your home

By [Dana Dratch](#) • Bankrate.com

Here are 10 features that can add value to your home, and another 10 that could reduce the sales price:

1. An updated kitchen. "Kitchens are critical," says Robert Irwin, author of "Home Buyer's Checklist." "Today, people like a big kitchen with a lot of workspace." They look for solid surface counters and high-quality flooring, such as wood, laminate, tile or stone. And they want newer appliances in working order. Even if it's not huge, it should have "countertops that are serviceable that aren't going to have to be replaced soon and cabinetry in good condition," says Alan Hummel, past president of the Appraisal Institute. "It has to be well-appointed and large enough to fit your needs." And it doesn't hurt if it opens onto another room. "A lot of families are looking for that openness," says Hummel. It helps to have a window over the sink, says Don Strong, a remodeler with Brothers Strong Inc., a Houston remodeling firm. Be wary if renovations are out of character with the community, such as granite countertops in a subdivision where plastic laminate is the norm. "Will you sell faster? Yes," says Hummel, CEO of Iowa Residential Appraisal Co., in Des Moines. "Will it sell for more? Not if the appointments you've done are significantly higher quality than the rest of the neighborhood."

2. Modern bathrooms. Buyers are looking for "master baths that give a little room to roam," says Hummel. A big asset: spa or whirlpool tubs. "I'm always entertained by the people who have them in the master bath and don't use them," says Ron Phipps, principal broker with Phipps Realty & Relocation Services in Warwick, R.I. "But it's a big feature." Some other features buyers are seeking: separate showers with steam and/or multiple jets, double sink, separate room for the toilet. And make sure the plumbing and hot water heater can handle the job. The pipes have to be large enough to carry an adequate volume of water and the hot water heater has to be big enough to accommodate it. "You need a bare minimum of a 75-gallon hot water heater, and most of my customers have 100 to 150," says Chicago-based home inspector Kurt Mitenbuler. "You don't want to see that false economy of a \$30,000 bathroom but nobody spent a few thousand dollars to upgrade the pipes," he says.

3. A well-appointed master suite. "People are really excited about master suites," says Hummel. The wish list: a luxurious bathroom, lounging areas and walk-in closets.

4. Natural materials. "People like natural materials," says Phipps. "Ceramic tile, hardwood floors, granite. We've gone back to a real appreciation for historically true materials. And simulated works as well. The look is very popular." In floor coverings -- especially bathrooms or kitchens -- look for ceramic tile or wood rather than linoleum, which can tear, says Strong. In the rest of the house, wood or laminate products are a plus over wall-to-wall, says Gary Eldred, author of "The 106 Common Mistakes Homebuyers Make (and How to Avoid Them)". But if you have carpet, it should be a good product and well maintained so that "a person doesn't have to walk in and think, 'I'm going to have to spend five grand right off the bat,'" says Strong.

5. Curb appeal. "A good first appearance on a home can add as much as 5 percent to 10 percent to the value of the home," says John Aust, president of the National Association of Real Estate Appraisers. "Homes in a neighborhood tend to vary about 10 percent from house to house, assuming all other things are the same."

6. A light, airy spacious feel. "People buy space and light," says Myra Zollinger, owner/broker with Coldwell Banker Realty Center in Chapel Hill, N.C. "I have yet to have anybody walk into a really dark house and say, 'I love this.'" Richard "Dick" Gaylord, member of the executive committee for the National Association of Realtors, agrees. "That's a very big feature," he says. "I haven't sold many homes that aren't bright and airy."

7. Good windows. "People are looking at exposures and windows," says Phipps. "It's been a cold winter for most of the country and energy efficiency is very important." Insulated windows are always a plus, says Strong. "Typically, they pay for themselves in five years," he says. The cost: for an average 2,600-square-foot home, estimate about \$10,000 for new windows, he says. Well-placed skylights are also a good touch to add value, says Phipps.

8. Landscaping. Mature trees "are worth \$1,000," says Strong. And having outdoor spaces with touches such as pergolas and Victorian garden swings "can be very helpful," says Phipps. Appraiser John Bredemeyer remembers one \$250,000 home in Omaha that had no landscaping at all. "It was stark," says Bredemeyer, national chair of government relations for the Appraisal Institute, a professional group for real estate appraisers. "It just stood out as unappealing." Conversely, you don't have to spend a fortune on plants, either. Just keep it "typical with the neighborhood," he says.

9. Lots of storage. Nothing beats an oversized garage, some attic space and plenty of closets. "If you have a two-car garage, do you have extra space for those things we all have -- bicycles, lawn mower, snow blower?" says Hummel. "Space is important." A nice plus in the master suite? "His and hers walk-in closets," says Irwin.

10. Basement. "If it's dry, it's a plus," says Kenneth Austin, co-author of "The Home Buyer's Inspection Guide." "But it's a negative if it has water problems." A finished basement adds even more value. "Ten years ago, nobody cared," says Mittenbuler. "Now everybody wants them."

Liabilities

On the flip side, here are 10 things that could harm your home's value:

1. A pool. Forget what you might have heard. An in-ground pool in most parts of the country doesn't automatically raise the value of your home. "I would stay away from pools if you can at all avoid it," says Irwin. Having a swimming pool will automatically limit your market when it comes time to sell, he says. "It's constant upkeep, they get cracks, the equipment goes down and it's expensive to replace, and the liability is high." Others consider it a mixed blessing. "For the people who want the pool, they're willing to pay for it," says Austin. "But there are an awful lot of people who don't want a pool." Consider your home value and location. In a million-dollar house, not having a pool is a detraction, says Irwin. "But they won't give you much more" if you do have one.

2. No garage or small garage. Unless you're living in a condo, retirement community or historical or in-town neighborhood, most buyers will look for at least a two-car garage. "If you don't have a garage, it's a real negative," says Austin. "If you have a one-car garage, that's a problem, too."

3. Garbled floor plan. Small rooms and bathrooms, an inconvenient floor plan or a layout that requires you to access bedrooms or bathrooms through other rooms will detract value from your home.

4. Outmoded appliances or systems. Who wants an electrical system or plumbing system incapable of handling modern conveniences? Would you buy a home if the appliances were worn or broken? Phipps remembers walking into one house with clients who casually opened the oven door -- and it fell off.

5. Stale or overly personal decor. Sure, red is the hot wall color right now, "but for how long?" says Hummel. "We've gone into houses where they've had purple walls or electric green," says Austin. "It's a turn-off to many people."

6. A bad roof. Roofs are expensive to replace and a good roof is considered standard equipment in a house. If your roof has problems, expect to take a hit in the price.

7. Bad location. Phipps remembers one neighborhood with a significant difference in value between the even- and odd-numbered houses. The reason? The odd numbered ones backed on an interstate highway, as well as some ugly utility lines. As a result, "the even-numbered houses were worth about 10 percent more than the odd-numbered homes," he says.

8. Poor maintenance. "If you've got an old roof and outdated paint, I don't care if you've updated the kitchen, you won't even get the buyer out of the car," says Bredemeyer. "If you know you've got to have something fixed, fix it," says Zollinger. Otherwise, people "will subtract the cost or not make an offer on the house. And if people think the house hasn't been taken care of, they will wonder what else they're not seeing."

9. Environmental hazards. Besides being a danger to human health, lead, mold or asbestos can kill home value.

10. A laundry list of needed improvements. "It detracts if you have to do work," says Gaylord. "A house that you can move in today -- and it's livable -- is fine." But a list of must-dos just to conduct everyday life will scare off a lot of potential home buyers. "Especially with first-time buyers," he says. "Most of them are [already] scraping just to get in."

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