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If You Want to Sell Your House, Figure Out What to Renovate First Replacing a garage door is probably worth it, but adding a bathroom might not be

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You want to sell your home, but the kids have scuffed up the floors and chipped the paint. The kitchen could use a face-lift and the lawn has seen better days.

Every seller has to decide whether to sink money into their house before listing it, and how much. Lately, the stakes have grown as the cost of construction and materials has skyrocketed. Borrowing to pay for those repairs has gotten more expensive, too.

The consensus among the dozen real-estate agents interviewed by The Wall Street Journal: Don't go overboard.

Shelling out small sums to punch up highly-visible parts of the property, particularly outside, increases the curb appeal. Spending large amounts to turn the place into your dream home doesn't make it someone else's dream home. (Below is a bang-for-your buck guide.)

"Sellers should avoid trying to become a general contractor," said Scott Harris, a real-estate agent at Brown Harris Stevens in New York.

What to fix

Replacing a garage door cost \$4,513 on average in 2024, but added \$8,751 to the resale value, recouping 194% of the cost, according to Zonda, a residential construction-focused research company. That project provided the most value in the firm's annual cost-value comparison.

Replacing an entry door cost \$2,355 on average and added \$4,430 to resale value, recouping 188% of the cost.

"They will recoup all of that with very low risk, and it's a low outlay," says Todd Tomalak, principal at Zonda, about exterior doors.

Minor exterior work is some of the most likely to pay off. It makes the house look nicer in listing photos and brings potential buyers through the door, real-estate agents say.

What has been your experience with renovating a home before putting it on the market? Join the conversation below.

A National Association of Realtors survey from 2023 found that sellers would recoup 217% of the cost of lawn care, 104% of the cost of landscape maintenance, and 100% of the cost of overall landscape upgrades.

Small-ticket items inside the house are worthwhile, too. Refinishing hardwood floors on a roughly 2,500 square foot home costs an estimated \$3,400, but adds roughly \$5,000 to the value of the house, according to a 2022 NAR survey.

What to skip

There is a high bar for doing costly work, like remodeling a kitchen or adding a new bathroom. Your tastes aren't guaranteed to appeal to potential buyers, meaning they won't necessarily be willing to pay lots more.

"Unless you have objectively excellent taste or can remove your personal preferences from the process and focus only on timeless, enduring style, I do not advise sellers to invest in a major renovation," said Kate Wollman-Mahan, a real-estate agent at Coldwell Banker Warburg in New York.

Adding an upscale primary suite to a house costs \$339,513 on average, but only adds \$81,042 to the resale value, recouping 24% of the cost, according to Zonda. Remodeling an upscale kitchen costs \$158,530 on average, but adds \$60,176 to the resale value, recovering 38% of the cost. *

Instead, think smaller. Refresh an old room with new cabinet pulls or more modern light fixtures. Reglaze a bathtub. Replace old toilet seats and shower rods.

Jennifer Roberts, a real-estate broker at Coldwell Banker Warburg in New York, said she once had trouble selling an apartment with red kitchen cabinets. After she had the seller paint them white, the home went quickly.

It is also tough to make the math work on major exterior projects. A metal roof replacement costs \$49,928 on average, but adds \$24,034 to the resale value, recovering 48% of the cost, according to Zonda.

Low-cost, big payoff

Painting the walls and pulling up old carpets can freshen the house, even if the finishes are dated. Decluttering the spaces, washing windows and treating lingering smells all help the house to show better.

"I watched a home priced under a million languish on the market with another agent," said Benjamin Dixon, a real-estate broker at [Douglas Elliman](#) in New York. "We came in and decluttered, painted, cleaned and staged, investing a total of under \$20,000 and had multiple offers and sold the home for \$1,050,000 in just a few weeks."

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