

Selling your Home? Don't Neglect the Garage

Your yard is in perfect order, the front door is freshly painted, the interior is sparkling, and soft music plays lightly in the background. Your house is ready for potential buyers. Or is it?

If you're like other whose home is on the market, you've gone through the steps of making your house show well. But how much time have you spent making your garage look its best?

The garage is an important amenity for many homeowners. Among new-home buyers, about one-fourth want garages that can hold not two, but at least three vehicles, regardless of the additional cost, according to the National Association of Home Builders' report, "The Next Decade for Housing." Most buyers like the extra space for storage. So, just as you've beautified the rest of your house, making it open and clutter-free, you'll want the same attention given to your garage. You can achieve that by following these steps:

- ◆ Get rid of all that extra stuff. What's in all of those boxes lining the shelves of your garage? Gather all the items you don't use anymore (this would also be a good time to gather those final items from the rest of your house as well) and have a garage sale. Once you've sold everything you can, take everything that's left over to a local charity.
- ◆ Dust the walls and corners. Get rid of spider webs.
- ◆ Hang up heavy-duty hooks for larger items that are taking up room. This will help the garage look more orderly.
- ◆ If you have cabinets, shelves, or ready-made storage systems, organize the contents; get rid of anything you don't need.
- ◆ Try to get everything off the floor and into cabinets or shelves.
- ◆ Make sure all flammable items, tools, and chemicals are stored away and out of reach of children. You don't want potential buyers to wonder what else you may have handled irresponsibly.
- ◆ If you don't already have one, install a smoke detector in your garage.
- ◆ Make sure your garage door opener is working. Are all the extra functions operating properly - the automatic light function, the automatic reverse (this is a safety feature that reverses direction when something is obstructing the door), small opening feature for pets, emergency release, and the wall control panel.

And finally, clean those floors:

- ◆ Wipe up any excess oil with a towel or cloth. Pour some paint thinner on the oil spot, making sure it is fully saturated. Pour an absorbent material over the saturated spot. You can use cat litter, sand, baking soda, corn meal, sawdust, or any other absorbent material you may have on hand. Leave the mixture to set overnight. Sweep up your mixture. If possible, try to use a heavy push broom with sturdy bristles. Pour a little laundry bleach, dry dishwasher detergent or a concrete cleaning solution on the oil-marked concrete. Let it sit for about an hour. Rinse the area off with hot water and scrub the area with a broom.
- ◆ If your garage has a workbench, extra storage space, or any unique features, be sure you let your real estate agent know so those features can be pointed out to potential buyers.

And don't forget the garage door, part of the total "curb appeal" package. Make sure it's clean, and if it's worn or marked up, a coat of fresh paint is an easy step that will make a big difference to the house hunters who pull up alongside the curb and will likely see the garage right away.

While a garage usually won't make or break a sale, it could be a tiebreaker and adds to the overall first impression.