

According to the National Association of Realtors, 98 percent of all home buyers start their home search on the internet. That's why it is important to properly prepare your home for professional photography. You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

When potential home buyers are viewing your property online, they want to envision themselves in that home. A clean and decluttered home gives the appearance that the home is well maintained and cared for. The more a buyer believes they need to do to make it their own, the less they may be willing to offer on the house. Don't leave money on the table when a few hours of cleaning, arranging and decluttering can help your sellers receive beautiful, appealing photographs for an attractive real estate listing and a faster sale!

Having your home photographed is usually the last step in the listing process before it goes on the market, so following the guidelines below will also put your listing in ideal showing condition.

General tips when preparing your listing:

Clean the whole house (vacuum carpet, mop hard floors, clean countertops, clean windows).

Declutter as much as possible. Less is more.

Remove personal photographs (or replace with general landscape/object photographs) when possible.

Remove small floor rugs to reveal actual flooring and get a cleaner look.

Put all clothes in closets.

Laundry rooms/closets are often photographed and should be as tidy as possible. Clothes should be removed from any glass-front dryers.

Consider removing some furniture to make the house appear more spacious.

If you plan to include aerial photography or video, please try to schedule your photographer on non-trash collection days.

Photographers are not allowed to move trash cans and recycling bins from neighboring properties.

Garages and closets are not typically photographed, so it's a great place to temporarily stow items from view.

Photographers generally follow a standard "shoot list" for each property. If you or the homeowner want to highlight specific areas of the house you should let your photographer know in advance.

Checklist -- Area By Area

Exterior, Front Yard & Backyard

Close all garage doors.

Remove cars from driveways and the front of the house so they are not visible in the photographs.

Attend to landscaping (mow the lawn, remove leaves, shovel snow from the driveway/walkway, etc. depending on the season).

Remove dead foliage and empty planters.

Remove trash cans.

Remove or roll up visible water hoses, ladders and other tools.

Remove toys and playground supplies.

Clean and arrange outdoor tables, chairs, etc. and fluff cushions.

Interior

Turn on all lights and replace any bulbs that are dim or burned-out.

Open window curtains and sheers.

Open slats on vertical window blinds. Blinds may be raised or lowered, as long as they are uniform throughout the house.

Turn off televisions and computer screens.

Hide remote controls.

Entryway

Remove coats and backpacks from entryway hooks and put them in a closet.

Remove shoes.

Remove clutter (keys, wallets, papers, etc.) from an entryway table.

Kitchen/Dining Area

Clear countertops -- less is more. Items like soap dispensers, paper towel rolls, dish towels and sponges should all be stowed.

Leave a couple of stylish items on the counter (a coffee maker or a bowl of fruit).

Hide all dishes; place dirty dishes in the dishwasher.

Remove any items from the kitchen sink.
Hide garbage cans and recycling bins.
Clear the front of the refrigerator of magnets, postcards, photos, etc.
Clear dining table. Consider having a vase of fresh flowers on the table.
Straighten all chairs and space them evenly.
Remove children's chairs or high seats.

Living Room

Remove magazines, papers, mail and random clutter.
Arrange books and art in bookshelves so it looks tidy.
Remove toys.
Remove clutter and clean interior of the fireplace.
If the fireplace has a glass front, clean it.
Arrange furniture pillows.
Hide and/or arrange cables from TV, stereo and other electrical devices where possible.

Bedrooms

Make the beds, including decorative pillows/shams if available.
When visible, edges of bedding and sheets should either be tucked in neatly or hung straight.
Pillows should be wrinkle-free, fluffed, matching and arranged neatly.
Remove personal belongings like pictures, clothing, electronics and clutter.
Remove trash cans.
Clean under the bed and remove items that may show in the photos.

Home Office

Clear desk.
Hide and/or arrange all the cables.
Hide papers.
Arrange items neatly on a bookshelf.
Remove personalized items.

Bathrooms

Clear and clean countertops and sinks. A decorative soap dispenser can remain.
Toothbrushes, hairbrushes, makeup, etc. should all be removed.
Remove waste baskets, hampers, toilet brushes and plungers.
Put toilet seats down.
Remove shampoo, soap, etc. from showers and tubs.
Remove all old and/or unmatched bathroom towels. Matching, nicely folded towels may remain.
Remove floor mats.

Pets

As much as we love pets, there should be no evidence of them in your home.
Remove food and water bowls.
Place pet beds, litter boxes, cat towers and toys out of view.
Clean pet hair from furniture.
All pets should be removed from the home while the photographer is working. Cats have a way of showing up in photographs unbeknownst to the photographer (under a bed, on top of a cabinet, etc.).

A good photographer will always tour the house before they begin shooting to make sure that everything is in its place and "photo-ready". A well-prepared property will ensure that your photographer can produce the best results, stay on schedule and deliver your photos in a timely manner.