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Tips for the Spring Selling Season

If you're staging your home for sale, don't neglect your garden.

By JUNE FLETCHER

The cherry blossoms are in full bloom in my hometown of Washington, D.C., marking the beginning of the spring home selling season.

If you, like me, are preparing to put your home on the market, that means that you not only have to stage your home's interior to impress potential buyers, but you have to spruce up your yard, too.

Although many sellers in my market hope that a drift of daffodils will clinch a deal, in truth, plants can hurt a home's curb appeal as much as they can help it. For instance, a drift of wild, weedy onions hidden in the grass can make a newly mowed lawn smell like a gas station restroom; trees planted too close to a house mask its best features and conjure alarming visions of weekends on a rickety ladder, cleaning gutters.

That's not the impression you want to make on buyers who fantasize about lounging on the patio, not messing with pole pruners. So here are some tips for staging your yard for sale:

- **Baby the lawn.** Find a high-quality weed killer with lots of micronutrients as well as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium with pre-emergent herbicides (organic ones use corn gluten) to kill growth before it starts. Send your soil to your county or state's extension service, an agricultural resource center that you can find through the [USDA's Web site](#), to have its pH levels tested; spread lime on your lawn if the pH level is below 6.0, or an acidifying agent like gardener's sulfur if it is above 7.0. And set your mower high (about three inches) to reduce the grasses' stress and cut down on the need for water.
- **Trim the overgrowth.** Prune any branches that touch the house, cover a window or block a path. To reduce mold growth, keep plant material at least a foot away from siding.
- **Splurge on mulch.** The new mulches that retain color throughout the season cost about a dollar a bag more than traditional mulch, but good first impressions are worth it. Although I normally use chipped mulches because they last longer, I plan to use a finely shredded texture this spring for its superior visual appeal.
- **Edge your flowerbeds.** There's no easier way to make your yard look neat and groomed. Don't bother with the plastic edging; simply tie a string between two sticks and follow the line with a sharp, flat-ended spade pushed about four-to-six inches into the soil.
- **Powerwash everything.** Cobwebs, mold and dirt accumulate on decks, patios, fences, trellises, eaves, windows and siding over the winter, but can be blasted away in an afternoon with a power washer. Just be sure not to get the water under the siding courses or in soffit vents, where the moisture can cause damage.
- **Plant annuals.** Perennials are wonderful if you're building a long-term garden, but they are expensive and tend to have short blooming seasons. For color and impact, place low-care annuals like impatiens, petunias and geraniums in beds.

Potted flowers and hanging baskets can brighten dull spots in your yard, draw attention to features you want to emphasize or flank an entrance—and you can take them with you when you move.

- **Plant a garden.** If you have a sunny corner, a small raised bed with decorative veggies such as rainbow-stemmed Swiss chard and bush beans, or fragrant herbs like sage and rosemary, can suggest your yard is useful as well as pretty. (And hey, the Obamas did it.) But stay away from plants, like corn, that suggest a barnyard, or are prickly and prone to spilling out of bounds, like summer squash and pumpkins. If you must have tomatoes, choose pretty, bush-style cherry tomatoes rather than the regular vining varieties which need to be caged and are prone to unattractive wilts and fungal attacks.
- **String a hammock.** Nothing suggests that the living is easy (and your yard is low-maintenance) as much as a hammock. If you don't have two trees close enough to string one between them, spring for a hammock stand.
- **Create conversation areas.** To draw attention to a birdhouse, sculpture or other attractive feature in your yard, arrange two colorful side chairs and an end table facing it. When you have an open house, place a book and a small glass of water with yellow food coloring on it to suggest lemonade (don't use the real thing, or you'll attract bees).

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