

Want to boost your home's value?

These simple do-it-yourself projects that can make a big difference, without taking too much out of your wallet.

Amy Fontinelle

Investopedia.com Published on Monday, Nov. 23, 2009 12:20PM EST Last updated on Friday, Dec. 04, 2009 7:29AM EST

Think spending \$50,000 on a total kitchen remodel or \$10,000 overhauling the bathroom is the only way to add value to a home? If large, expensive projects are beyond your grasp, you're in luck: Increasing the value of your home doesn't have to involve large outlays of cash, especially when you're willing to put in a little sweat equity. Why spend big money when there are so many low-cost, do-it-yourself (DIY) projects? Whether you're planning on selling or just want a nicer place to live, read on to find out what you can do to add value to your home for as little as a few dollars. (To read more about home improvements, see [Fix It And Flip It: The Value of Remodeling](#).)

House-Wide Updates

The following are some changes that can be undertaken for surprisingly little money.

Freshen Up the Walls

If your walls have scratches and dirty paint, an outdated color or tacky wallpaper, a few cans of paint can make a dramatic difference. If you're trying to maximize the value of your home, it's best to choose a neutral color scheme that unifies the entire house, makes the space look bigger and will appeal to a wide variety of potential buyers.

Install Crown Molding

This task is surprisingly simple but adds a lot of character. You simply buy the molding, which is nothing more than decorative strips of wood from a home improvement store, cut it to the size that fits your room (or have the store cut it for you), and attach it to the top of the wall with a nail gun. It may even come already painted. This involves a bit of woodworking skill as well as the right tools, but is very inexpensive if you can do it yourself.

Update Fixtures

Switch plates, outlet covers, curtain rods, light fixtures and doorknobs are often boring or overlooked, but a few bucks can add major pizzazz. Attractive metal switch plates and outlet covers can cost as little as \$5 apiece but look much more expensive. Light fixtures and decorative curtain rods can be a little pricier, but sometimes you can make an inexpensive piece look elegant with the right can of spray paint. Again, make sure to choose items in colors and finishes that will appeal to a wide audience.

Install Ceiling Fans

Everyone likes to save money on electricity bills, making ceiling fans an appealing addition to any home. Using ceiling fans can definitely cut down on air conditioning costs, and in fact, they can also reduce heating costs by circulating warm air away from the ceiling. A basic fan costs about \$50, and a nice one can be had for no more than a couple hundred dollars. If you don't already have overhead lighting in the room or rooms you want to install fans in, the electrical work needed to install them can significantly escalate the cost of

this project as well as take it out of the DIY realm.

Improve Window Treatments

The cheap vertical plastic blinds, paper shades, or horizontal aluminum blinds that may have come with your house definitely don't add any value to your home. Consider replacing them with plantation shutters, wooden blinds or nice drapes. By the way, it doesn't matter whether the drapes will come with the house if you are in the market as a seller. The important thing is that they make it look nice while it's on the market and help you get top dollar for your home.

Reveal and Restore Hardwood Floors

Older homes in particular are likely to have hardwood floors lurking beneath carpet. If your floor squeaks, that's a decent sign that you may have wood floors. If you're not sure, pull up your carpet in an unnoticeable corner and investigate. If you do have wood floors, there's a good chance you'll have to refinish them to restore them to their original splendor, but that will be much less expensive than installing new flooring from scratch.

Bathroom

Redo the Bathroom Floor

Many people can learn how to do this task themselves with a simple class (your local home improvement store may offer one). Because installation makes up a major part of the cost of most home improvements, saving all that money on labor may allow you to pick nicer flooring than you could otherwise afford. Opting for a neutral-colored tile will add the most value.

Update Fixtures

If you have generic, cheap and/or outdated fixtures, replacing them with newer, more customized versions can make your bathroom sparkle. For about \$40-\$100, you can replace a shabby bathroom vanity or ceiling light fixture with something elegant. A similar cash outlay will get you a new sink faucet. A spa-style chrome shower head adds a touch of luxury for about \$80. Towel bars are the easiest and cheapest fix at about \$20-30. Sometimes the upgrade can even be more energy efficient, increasing not only the aesthetics of your home but "greening" it up as well. (For more on saving energy, read [Ten Ways To Save Energy And Money](#).)

Kitchen

Paint or Stain Kitchen Cabinets

You could buy all new cabinets and save money by purchasing prefabricated (rather than custom) cabinets and installing them yourself, but that's more work and money than painting or staining your existing cabinets. White cabinets will brighten the room, don't usually go out of style and are easy for future owners to repaint if they want something different. You'll need to remove all the hardware from your cabinets, including removing the doors. You'll also need to clean the cabinets first so that residue like grease won't ruin your work. This renovation can be used to spruce up your bathroom cabinets as well.

Upgrade Cabinet Knobs and Drawer Handles

It's surprising how a seemingly innocuous element like a cabinet door knob can make your kitchen look cheap or dated. Updating this hardware can give your kitchen a face lift whether you redo your cabinets or not.

Living Room

Clean Fireplace Brick

If you have a brick fireplace and it's ever been used, chances are some of the brick is stained with soot and creosote. Because a nice fireplace can be a major selling point in a home, you'll want to make yours look as nice as possible. Just use a damp rag to wipe away some of the soot, then follow up with a fireplace cleaner designed to remove creosote. It will take some scrubbing with a stiff brush and possibly several applications, but you'll have that brick looking spiffy when you're finished.

Don't Forget the Exterior

It may be easy for you to ignore your home's exterior when you spend most of your time inside, but it's the first and sometimes only impression that others get of your house. Here are a few simple ways to make it look its best.

Install a New Front Door

A very basic steel front door costs about \$100, but for just another \$100-\$200, you can get a door with a lot more character that will improve your home's curb appeal. If you can't afford a new door, a fresh coat of paint in an inviting color may be all you need.

Replace the Front Door Mat

When you've had the same doormat for years, it can be easy to overlook how worn out or dirty it's become, but it's one of the first impressions people get of your home. This is one area where \$20 can make a big difference.

Gutters

This is more an issue of maintaining your home's value than increasing it, but it's extremely important. Without properly functioning gutters, which are designed to carry water away from your home, rain may seep into your home or pool around it, causing problems like mold and mildew and eventually compromising the house's structural integrity, leading to very expensive repair bills.

Power wash the Exterior of Your Home

For less time and money, a good washing can make your home's exterior look almost as good as a fresh coat of paint.

Repaint the Exterior

If washing the exterior of your home didn't brighten it up as much as you'd hoped, consider a new paint job. With the ladders and heights involved, this may not be a DIY task for everyone, but even if you have to hire others to do this job, it's still pretty inexpensive as far as home improvements go and can make your house look almost new from the outside.

Power wash the Driveway, Walkways and Patio

As long as you're renting the power washer, you might as well clean your driveway, your patio, and any walkways. You may be surprised by how new they'll look afterward.

Upgrade Landscaping or Clean Up Existing Landscaping

Flowers and other plants are a great way to brighten your home's exterior. Use greenery in front of your house and/or along walkways to draw attention to your house. To get the most for your buck, choose perennial plants, or ones that will come back year after year, rather than annuals, which will die in a year or less and not return. Patch any bald spots in the yard with fresh sod and trim existing trees and bushes to complete the yard's new look.

Put on Your Tool belt

Upgrading your home doesn't have to be expensive or difficult and it doesn't have to involve contractors. There are a variety of projects for all price ranges and all levels of skill and enthusiasm that can improve your home's value, whether to future buyers or, perhaps more importantly, to you. Putting a few of these home-improvement ideas into action will help you get the most value out of one of your biggest assets whether you're staying in it or selling.

For insight on real estate flipping, read [Flipping Houses: Is It Better Than Buy and Hold?](#)

Amy Fontinelle is a freelance writer and editor with clients located across the United States and in Canada. She has written over 300 published articles and blog posts for a variety of national and local publications and websites on topics including travel, restaurants, food and drink, fitness, budgeting, credit management,

real estate, investing and historic preservation. Her articles have been featured on the homepage of Yahoo! and on Yahoo! Finance, Yahoo! HotJobs, several local news websites and Forbes.com.