

DOES YOUR HOME NEED A TUNE-UP?

Just like you take a car for regular tune-ups to ensure it continues to run smoothly, your home also needs some special attention. There's a lot more to keeping up a house than cutting the grass and clearing snow from the driveway. Ensuring your home "looks" good and is in proper working order, not only makes it more attractive and comfortable, but it can also increase the market value of the property.

Homeowners who plan to move within a few years are often reluctant to invest time and money on improvement projects that may not pay them back. But unless these improvements are very specialized, any project you choose - from fixing leaky faucets to installing new energy efficient windows - will start to pay you back in energy savings and comfort long before you sell.

The wisest improvements you can make to any home are those that keep it running smoothly and bring it up to the standards of other homes in the immediate area. And these don't need to break your budget.

Easy maintenance, repairs

Start with simple repairs that don't cost a lot and you can do yourself: securing loose tiles, adjusting a door, installing a lock, repairing a leaky faucet or pipe, and so on.

It's also a good idea to locate and read your gas, electricity and water meters on a weekly or monthly basis. This will help you gain an understanding of seasonal increases and decreases in consumption and enable you to take measures to become more energy and water efficient. The savings could be substantial.

You should have your furnace inspected and serviced annually to ensure there are no problems and change or clean the filter regularly. Also, inspect the smoke and carbon dioxide detectors around your home. You want to be certain that these will work in the event of a fire or other emergency.

Bigger upgrades

While replacing leaky faucets can drastically improve a bathroom's appearance and cut down on water usage, sometimes it takes a lot more than that to bring an old bathroom, for example, to an acceptable standard.

A bathroom tune up can pay big dividends. The first items to replace should be the fixtures -- the sink, faucets, vanity, bathtub, shower, and toilet. This is where you will add value and save money by opting for a water-efficient fixtures and energy-saving devices.

The floors, walls and accessories are not an essential part of a bathroom tune-up, but you can save time and money when you do the complete overhaul at once, rather than one piece at a time.

If the decor in your home is bothering you, don't decide right away to rip everything out. All it may take to make your home look more attractive and in better repair are small improvements such as: refacing cabinets and counter tops, changing the colour scheme, repainting, hanging new wall coverings and installing new lighting.

Other good major home improvements include replacing old carpets and flooring with new, more durable products; adding a garage or a carport if your home does not have one; installing central air conditioning; repairing or adding a fireplace; upgrading your basement space; replacing old

windows with new energy-efficient ones; adding terraces, wooden decks and fences that add privacy; and investing in landscaping that adds value and is easy to maintain.

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