

7 Home Remodeling Projects That Pay Off

Subtitle: *Spend your money wisely and choose your projects carefully, and you can substantially increase the value of your home - in more ways than one.*

Whether you expect to be living in your home for many more years or you're itching to sell, spending money on remodeling can offer a big-time payoff. The right remodeling projects can increase your home's curb appeal and value, and can help make the selling process faster and easier. And if you're not planning on selling soon, you'll get a double-dip of value: increased enjoyment of your home, with the increased value of your home banked against a possible future sale.

But when it comes to value returned vs. dollars spent, not all remodeling projects are equal. Some will truly enhance the value of your home and offer a nice return on your investment. Other projects - not so much. If increasing the value and sales-appeal of your home is a primary concern, it's important to spend your remodeling dollars discriminately.

Remodeling Magazine recently released the results of a survey that determined which home remodeling projects offered the best return of value for dollars spent. Here are the top 10, ordered in percentage of costs returned:

#1 - Sack the Old Siding

Replacing the elderly, weatherworn siding on your home isn't exactly a glamour project, but it offers a better return for dollar spent than any other home remodeling job. That's because it increases the curb appeal of your home. And as seasoned realtors know, the inner appearance of your home matters little if the outer appearance turns prospects away.

The percentage of your investment that will be returned can vary somewhat depending upon the materials used. Spending money on foam-backed vinyl siding, for example, might not return quite the investment value as would a more economical siding material - at least in terms of home valuation. The increased energy efficiency, though, may really pay off long-term if you remain in the home.

#2 - Window Dressing

Replacing your drafty old windows with new energy-efficient, stylish windows will also give your home a big curb appeal boost. And if your home needs new windows, it certainly isn't alone. According to the Remodeling report, "More than half of the nation's 76 million owner-occupied homes were built prior to 1970."

That means there are lots of homes out there with drab, dreary and drafty windows. So refitting your home with a set of shiny new windows is a great way to stand out from the crowd.

#3 - Roof Replacement

Perhaps nothing makes prospective buyers as jittery as a home with a patchwork, worn roof and a 'for sale' sign in the yard. And conversely, few features are as effective at generating a warm and fuzzy feeling for prospective buyers as a new roof.

But if your house needs a roofing upgrade, be careful how you spend your money. There are lots of great new roofing systems available, but they are far from equal in terms of return on investment. The old tried-and-true fiberglass shingles, for example, offer a better return for dollars invested than a new standing-seam metal roof.

#4 - Countertop Conversion

While you might yearn for a complete kitchen remodel, that's a big job that requires big bucks. But just replacing your kitchen countertops can work wonders at upgrading the eye-appeal of your kitchen for just a fraction of the price of a total remodel. And if you haven't been in the market lately for new kitchen accoutrements, you might be amazed at the choices now available to you.

"You only had one or two choices in countertops 20 years ago. Now you have 500 choices," says Steve Melman of the National Association of Home Builders. "Granite is still the most popular. But there are new kinds of engineered concrete, soapstone, quartz, and other materials that can add value to your home."

#5 - Kitchen Cabinets: Don't Replace - Reface

Are your kitchen cabinets old, plain, and well... just yucky? You could have them all ripped out and replaced with brand-new custom-built cabinetry. But that's a potentially bank-breaking option.

A great alternative is to just reface your existing cabinets. By replacing cabinet and drawer doors, and applying new veneers to existing frames and ends, you can have the *look* of brand-new cabinets for a fraction of the cost. And you'll be better off in terms of investment value than with a total rebuild of your cabinets.

#6 - Bathroom Basics

If your bathroom is way past its prime, it might be time for a remodel. And while it won't be cheap, on average, remodeling a bathroom isn't nearly as expensive as remodeling a kitchen. The typical bathroom offers less surface area, less cabinetry, and fewer appliances than the typical kitchen. Those differences make a complete bathroom remodel much more affordable than a kitchen remodel.

Current popular bathroom upgrades include big walk-in showers replacing tubs, stone countertops, wood or stone floors, floor-to-ceiling steam showers, and all-wood cabinets.

#7 - Deck The House

A great way to add both dollar value *and* aesthetic value to your home is by installing a deck.

Stained wooden decks are the old standby. But composite decks are rapidly pushing wooden decks out of favor. "Ninety-nine percent of the decks I design and build are with composite," says Tom Reinhofer of Georgetown Decks and Construction. "These things are stain and fade-resistant."

No Point in Applying Lipstick to a Pig...

Though these remodeling projects can pay dividends by increasing the value and appeal of your home, be sure to take care of the basics first. Prospective buyers want to know that your house is sound. For most buyers, that takes precedence over remodeling prettifications.

"Buyers want to take the basic systems for granted," Remodeling's editorial director Sal Alfano said. "They assume that the roof doesn't leak and the air conditioning and plumbing work. Maintenance can chew up a lot of cash quickly, and people are afraid of that."

But - assuming that your house is basically sound - spending money on the right remodeling projects can offer a great return on investment. The value of your home can be increased, offering a pay off when the time comes to sell. And in the meantime you can enjoy living in a more beautiful, more luxurious home.

Kind of like having your cake and eating it too.