

H **YOUR** HOME



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Dressing Down for the Holidays

Christmas lights, birthday streamers, July Fourth balloons and Easter eggs are great ways to celebrate the holidays, but when you're trying to sell your home, less is more. While a wreath or candles can be tasteful and attractive, sellers might consider staying away from large Christmas trees (they make a room look smaller or darker) or collages of holiday cards and pictures (they cover the refrigerator). Not only can decorations take up space, but also they often distract buyers from seeing the house itself. And you definitely don't want decorations to show up on virtual house tours or online photos, because they will look dated very quickly.

If you do want to put up holiday decorations, do so on an abridged schedule. Rather than stretching the December holidays out to a full month, for example, you might want to put up your tree a week before Christmas and take it down on New Year's Day, and keep Hanukkah or Kwanzaa decorations up only for the actual days of the special occasions.

Of course, there is always an exception to the rule. In some cases, says **Mary K. Martin, CRS**, of Semonin REALTORS® in Louisville, Ky., decorations help with the sale of a house. "In my neighborhood we have a holiday house tour," Martin says, "so when a house goes on the market later, people sometimes remember it from the holiday tour and its decorations. In our case, it's an attraction rather than a problem."



De-Junk It **BEFORE** You Sell It

Don't look now, but junk is lurking in your house. Old tools, books, tiles, broken furniture, mattresses, lumber, ancient appliances, fencing and boxes. If you're preparing to sell your home, one of the first steps in making sure it's show-ready is disposing of your old and neglected stuff. But sometimes, hauling all these items to the local dump is easier said than done — especially when you're busy remedying carpet stains and chipped paint. And it seems that charities are becoming pickier about what they'll accept these days — and even more so what they will pick up from your home.

Fortunately, a fast-growing Cana-

dian-based business has come to the rescue. 1-800-GOT-JUNK? is a removal company with franchises across North America. Since its founding in 1989, the company has hauled more than 75,000 truckloads of junk to the dump or to recycling centers. About 60 percent is recycled, according to www.1800gotjunk.com, the company's Web site. Prices for labor and hauling vary, depending on location. In Washington, D.C., for example, one eighth of a truck full of junk will cost you \$129 to haul it away; the whole truck, \$478.

If you're worried that your junk is too strange for a mainstream junk-removal company, fear not. 1-800-GOT-JUNK? once picked up 18,000 expired cans of sardines from a customer.

Location, Location Bathroom

So what exactly increases the price of a home? The answer is a mystery no more, thanks to the *Value of Housing Characteristics Study*, financed by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®.

Two professors, G. Stacy Sirmans, a real estate professor, and David A. Macpherson, an economist, from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Fla., completed the report, which proves that everything from skylights to ceiling height can affect the value of a home. The study shows each additional bedroom increases the value of a home about 4 percent, while air-conditioning raises it 12 percent. But the real value, the findings show, is in the bathroom. Each full bath adds about 24 percent to the selling price of a house.

Other factors that apparently greatly affect the selling price are square footage, lot size, presence of a den, a fireplace and 9-foot ceilings. The study is based on about 28,000 transactions in the 21-county Philadelphia area during eight years.



3...2...1... Open House!

You have finished the heavy cleaning, wrapped up the yard work and picked up clutter again and again. Now, it's time for the big show. The goal is to present a home that is as clean, bright and appealing as possible. Make yourself a checklist, so you remember the little last-minute, preshowing chores, like wiping down the kitchen and bathroom counters, opening every window dressing and turning on the lights. The Web site www.ourfamilyplace.com suggests giving every family member a job in advance so everyone's prepared when it's time to spring into action. "Everyone must know their duties and carry them out, so that you don't end up banging into one another trying to get everything done quickly," the site suggests. And last, but not least, the site stresses, make yourself invisible when it comes time for the showing.



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Do you know someone who is thinking about buying or selling a home? Please mention my name.

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