

Top Home Updates.

15 home improvements tips to get the maximum return in your sales price



#1 Minor Bathroom Remodel

Average return at resale: 102 percent

- It costs about \$10,500 to replace the tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity and fixtures. You'll get back an average of \$10,700 at resale, a recoup rate of 102 percent.
- If you can pipe a child's name on a birthday cake, you can re-caulk a tub. Use a softener like CAULK-BE-GONE to get rid of the old caulk. Fill the tub with water after you're done to stretch caulk while it dries.
- If your old tub is too large to fit out the door, re-glaze it for a like-new finish. Cost: \$300 to \$400.
- Remove dated wall coverings and apply a fresh coat of paint. For damaged walls, spray on texture provides quick coverage.
- Old shower doors can ruin any bathroom. Removing or replacing them will add the illusion of space.

#2 Landscaping

Average return at resale: 100 percent

- The average homeowner spends about \$3,502 for landscaping and another \$1,465 on a designer, according to the American Nursery & Landscape Association.
- Not sure where to start? Local garden centers often offer free design services, or ask the neighbors what works for them.
- Sod costs about 30 to 35 cents a square foot, so a 5,000 sq. ft. yard would cost about \$1,500 to sod. Budget for a delivery fee if you buy less than 1,000 sq. ft. of sod.
- A splash of color at the front of the house is an eye-catching plus. For maximum impact, choose one color and vary the height of plants.
- If your doorway is overwhelmed by greenery, then get out the shears. Replace overgrown shrubbery with flowering foundation plants mixing heights and colors for dramatic effect.
- A charming focal point like a walkway and fountain adds major value to your property. Roll a sealant on flagstones for a permanent wet look that enhances the color.

#3 Minor Kitchen Remodel

Average return at resale: 98.5 percent

- A minor kitchen remodel averages \$14,913 and brings in \$14,691 at resale, a recoup rate of 98.5 percent. Go for the minor remodel when your kitchen needs a cosmetic update and not a drastically different floor plan.
- A \$15,000 kitchen update covers 30 feet of re-facing for cabinets and drawers, a new wall oven, cooktop, sink and fixtures, laminate countertops and resilient flooring.
- Put recessed lights 3' to 5' apart on center and 18" from cabinets to light the countertops. Running the lights between two joists is easier than running through the joists.
- If your home is worth more than \$500,000 go with stone or trendy glass countertops.
- Cover the old vinyl with floor leveler so the pattern doesn't bleed through. You can't put a second layer of vinyl on if the subfloor is below-grade concrete.
- Brighten up the kitchen by giving your old wood cabinets new character. Just sand and paint -- it's a whole lot less expensive than buying new ones. Get the steps for painting wood cabinets
- Don't forget window treatments. Changing drapes and window molding is an inexpensive way to add decorator detail.

#4 Exterior Improvements

Vinyl Siding, Paint, Updated Front Entry

Average return at resale: 95.5 percent

- The average national cost to replace 1,250 sq. ft. of vinyl siding: \$7,239. Average return: \$6,914, with a recoup rate of 95.5 percent.
- A gallon of paint covers 400 sq. ft. of house.
- Paint color cards take the guesswork out of choosing the right color combination for doors, trim and siding. Get more tips on exterior colors [here](#).
- If you think your house was painted before 1978, test for lead before sanding or scraping.
- Upscale, fiber-cement siding costs \$10,393 and returns \$10,771 at resale, an even better recoup rate of 103.6 percent.
- If your columns have to hold up that pergola, make sure you purchase the load-bearing type. Fiberglass composite columns are popular and durable. Check salvage yards for unique historic columns.
- For an updated look, remove old awnings from over windows and doors.
- Swap damaged wrought iron railings for real wood supports for a more inviting entry.
- Give a bare, charmless porch a dramatic makeover by adding a pergola and columns.

#5 Attic Bedroom Conversion

Average return at resale: 93.5 percent

- The average attic bedroom in a two- or three-bedroom house costs \$39,188 and returns \$36,649 at resale.
- The best recoup rate is in the West: 105 percent; worst is in the Midwest: 82 percent.
- That price includes a 15 x 15 ft. bedroom, a 5x7 bath with shower, a 15-ft. dormer, four windows and a closet.
- Add insulation in your attic to lower your utility bills. Just make sure the foil vapor barrier is installed down toward the ceiling to prevent moisture from seeping up. Check the US Department of Energy Web site to see the [right level of insulation](#) for your area.
- Can your existing HVAC system handle the load of another room? If not, factor in the cost of a second unit.
- A solar-powered attic fan is a super efficient way to save on cooling your house. The attic fan exhausts heat from above your home and is powered by a solar cell on the roof?so it doesn't add a cent to your utility bill.

#6 Major Bathroom Remodel

Average return at resale: 93.2 percent

- A major bathroom remodel involves expanding an existing 5-by-7-foot bathroom, relocating and replacing the tub and toilet and adding designer sinks and faucets, a linen closet, lighting, a ceramic tile floor and exhaust fan for a cost of \$26,052, which brings in \$24,286 at resale.
- Start at the bottom. Dated flooring can seriously drag down value. Replace old floors with fresh tile in ceramic or stone for a solid payoff. Buy extra tiles in case you break a few during installation. Set some tiles aside at the end of the job in case you need to make repairs in the future.
- Give an old vanity a facelift with a new countertop for a clean fresh look buyers will love.
- Use eye-fooling tricks to make a small bath look larger. A new pedestal sink is a smart replacement for an old cabinet. The smaller footprint gives the illusion of space.

#7 Major Kitchen Remodel

Average return at resale: 91 percent

- A complete kitchen remodel in a midrange home averages \$43,862 and returns \$39,920 at resale. That price buys 30 ft. of cabinets, an island, laminate countertops, stainless sink, wall oven, cook top, vinyl flooring and appliances.
- If your home's value rises and your kitchen's finishes don't, do a major remodel rather than small fix-ups. Budget 10 to 15 percent of your home's value remodeling the kitchen.
- Kitchens feel bigger when there are fewer obstacles. Removing cabinets over a counter gives a wide open feel. Make those countertops truly useful by creating an eating bar.
- An eat-in kitchen is a big plus. Try adding a deluxe touch with a built-in banquet, bench and designer pillows.
- Local granite dealers that sell (or even give away) remnants then charge for cuts and installation can be a bargain option if you need 8 feet or less of countertop.
- Planning to sell? Stick with neutral colors for walls and window treatments. Remodeling to please yourself? Choose colors you love.
- Tin ceiling tiles make an affordable, custom backsplash.
- Put your home in the best light. Perk up a dark kitchen with French doors that'll let the sun shine in.

#8 Deck, Patio or Porch Addition

Average return at resale: 90.3 percent

- Adding a 16x20 ft. pressure-treated wood deck with a simple pattern costs about \$11,000. At resale, you'll get about \$10,000 of that back, a recoup rate of 90 percent.
- One simple but effective trick -- add eye-appeal with decorative planters on the front porch, patio and decks.
- Give a courtyard an impressive entry with an inviting gate, lighting and mature plantings. These small improvements will have a big impact at closing.
- Use bold plantings to emphasize features, or to distract the eye from flaws.
- Run-down stairs lower your profit margin, so make sure porch railings are safe and attractive.
- And here's an easy tip -- camouflage unattractive air conditioning units with a wooden trellis.
- In the West, the recoup rate reaches nearly 100 percent, but it falls to 83 percent in the South.

#9 Basement Remodel

Average return at resale: 90.1 percent

- The average basement remodel costs just over \$51,051 and returns \$46,010, so you'll recoup about 90 percent of the cost.
- What do you get for \$51,051? A 20 x 30 entertaining area with wet bar, a 5x8 bath, recessed lighting and a laminate floor.
- Remember when finishing walls, you should keep your drywall panels a half-inch away from concrete floors, so they don't absorb moisture.
- Always fix flooding problems first. Add French drains, bigger gutters or re-slope the yard to keep water out. Test to make sure the fixes work before investing time or materials in a basement.
- Want just the wet bar? Buy 10 linear feet of cabinets, a laminate countertop, a stainless steel drop-in bar sink and an under-counter refrigerator for about \$2,500.
- Cover concrete floors with an easy-to-install modular subfloor so floors won't be cold. Add carpet squares with a traction backing for an amazing transformation.
- In the West, basement remodels return 108 percent of cost, in the Midwest, 73 percent.

#10 Replacement Windows

Average return at resale: 89.6 percent

- Replacing ten 3x5 ft. windows runs about \$9,700. On average nationally, you'll get back \$8,700 when you sell, a recoup rate of nearly 90 percent.
- Big city window replacements pay off. The average homeowner recoups more than she spends on replacement windows in San Francisco, Seattle, Orlando, Miami, Chicago, NYC and Boston.
- For hot climates, there's low-e glass that reflects heat. And for maximum efficiency, add argon gas inside the pane to prevent heat and cold transference within the window.
- Replacing windows doesn't pay in all hot climates. You'll recoup only 62 percent of your cost in the Las Vegas desert.

#11 Family Room Addition

Average return at resale: 83 percent

- The average family room addition costs \$54,464 and adds \$45,458 at resale, a recoup rate of 83 percent.
- The highest recoup rates occur in high-cost Western markets.
- A sunroom counts in the home's square footage only when the room is heated and cooled for year-round use.
- A sunroom adds value only in upscale neighborhoods. It won't bring in higher bids in lower-end neighborhoods.
- An addition shouldn't be obvious. Make sure it has an open transition. A wider interior doorway and more substantial steps visually connect the addition to the rest of the house.
- Shop local window manufacturers to find offer good deals.

#12 Bonus Room Updates

Average return at resale: 72.8 percent

- Converting a 12x12 bonus room into a home office costs on average \$13,143 and brings in \$9,569 at closing.
- Use a roller to paint the paneling and a brush to smooth of the paint that puddles in paneling grooves.
- Paint panels different colors for a groovy modern effect.
- If you're selling, know your target market and decorate to please them. Families use bonus rooms differently than empty-nesters and singles.
- Add electric outlets for your computer and recessed lights. Kitchen cabinets or bookshelves organize the space above your desk. Put a rolling file cabinet underneath.
- Glass doors add a finished look to any bookshelf.
- Check local zoning before you build a studio to rent.
- Budget \$2,500 for the mini-kitchen.
- Adding a full bath costs an average of \$22,977 nationally. You'll average \$19,850 back if you sell, a recoup rate of 86.4%. Return rates go above 100% in big cities like NY, San Francisco, Orlando, Seattle and Washington, D.C

#13 Living Room Updates -- Decor

Average return at resale: 66 percent

- Spending about \$1,350 on staging and updating living room decor will get you new light switches, outlet covers, floor registers, crown molding, chair rails and drapes, plus fresh flowers, live flowers and accessories.
- Details add dollars. Crown molding gives a room a crisp, clean finish that buyers love. Make sure you choose molding that complements window trim and floor boards. Prices start at around \$1.40 per linear foot.
- Add square footage with a simple trick. Shift furniture away from the walls to make living rooms feel larger and more contemporary. Create a seating area around a feature you want buyers to notice -- like a dramatic fireplace.
- If you're staging your home to sell, don't move excess furniture and clutter into the garage. Rent a storage unit for about \$1 per square foot per month.
- New window treatments are a cost-conscious way to add a punch of designer color. For low ceilings, suggest the illusion of height by positioning drapes and valances higher on the wall.

#14 Bedroom Updates

Average return at resale: 52 percent

- Cost for new lighting will vary from \$100 - \$500.
- For a romantic design touch, swap the old light fixture for a small chandelier. The formula for sizing a chandelier: Room width + Room length in feet = chandelier diameter in inches.
- When doing dry wall repair, less really is more. Using as little joint compound as possible makes it easier to even out the surface when sanding later.
- Scale your window treatments to your room size. Cost to rent wallpaper steamer: \$20; new bedding and window treatments: \$300.
- Hardwood floors are hotter than ever. Pull up worn carpeting and refinish old floors to let the wood shine. Sanding hardwoods is physically demanding and if you do it wrong, you ruin the floor. Hire a pro to do the sanding and then do your own staining and sealing to save money. Cost \$1 to \$1.50 a foot. Fill carpet tack holes with Color Putty.

#15 Living Room Updates -- Walls and Floors

Average return at resale: 40 percent

- For only \$25, freshen the living room walls with a coat of paint in a light, neutral color. And don't overlook the trim?brighten it with a high-gloss white paint and caulk any open seams between the molding and ceiling and baseboard and wall.
- On average, quality hardwood flooring ranges from \$3-\$8 per square foot. For a 200 square foot area, expect to spend about \$1,200 if you install it yourself. Tack on another \$3 per square foot if you have it professionally installed.
- Sanding hardwoods is physically demanding. Make a mistake and you ruin the floor. Hire a pro to sand and then do your own staining and sealing to save money. Cost is \$1 to \$1.50 a foot. Fill carpet tack holes with Color Putty?.
- If you have carpet in the living room, either have it professionally cleaned (\$100-\$150) or replaced if it's torn, stained or has an unrelenting odor (on average \$10-\$30 per square foot).
- Always test popcorn ceilings for asbestos before you start (find an accredited lab at [The National Institute of Standards and Technology](#)). Asbestos was used in textured paints manufactured before 1977.
- Buy a new wood or stone mantel for as little as \$500.