

# Add value to your property

First impressions count, says landscape designer Sandra Batley. Make your property stand out.



IF TWO SIMILAR neighbouring houses were for sale and one had a well-designed garden, that one would sell faster. In fact, it is often literally the first thing that attracts potential buyers. It wasn't that long ago that the garden was usually left until last or completely overlooked when renovating the inside of the home for ways to add value. Well, these days things are a little different.

## Talk to the professionals

Your home might be your biggest asset, but it doesn't necessarily follow that the more money you invest in it, the more money you'll get in return. Before you embark on any project, you'll need to check out a few things. Talk to the professionals. Depending on what you want to do, you might need advice from a landscape designer or architect (if it's a structural undertaking). Adding value is the new thing to do, but how best to spend your hard-earned cash is the big question.

## Garden improvements pay off

When it comes to your garden, a couple of deck chairs, a lemon tree and a bit of lawn just won't cut it these days. More Kiwis want a comfortable outdoor living space, a retreat to entertain and relax in, and are prepared to pay for it. My clients frequently ask whether renovating their back yards will add value to their property. In my experience, many of the gardens I have created have been major contributing factors in the marketing and selling of the houses for the owners.

Getting a house valuation before and after the work is done will give you a good indication of the value added. In a recent television series, landscaping was placed fourth out of 10 for top value-adding projects. With land and house prices at a premium, it's wise to maximize the outdoor area and create exterior living spaces with street appeal, functionality and saleability that appeals to a wide audience.

## Spend wisely

The sky isn't the limit, so it's worth finding out what your property is worth and its maximum value. Talk to your local real estate agent. The trick is not to overspend and pay over the odds on changes that won't be reflected in the eventual market price. Keep the scale and costs of any work in proportion to the overall value. This goes for all value-adding projects for your home, both inside and out.

## Do your homework

- Have a plan on paper, or at least in your head. It's easy to get carried away and tear down every tree and structure on the property.
- Think the project through carefully. Employ the services of a landscape designer to get you started if you are stuck for ideas or need some inspiration.
- Talk to real estate agents and your local council to get a rundown on what is possible or impossible for your property and relevant to the area you live in.

## Simple tricks to revitalise your house and garden

- Re-plant existing garden beds with colourful plants to freshen up a tired part of the garden. Do work with the environment you have and use native plants, as they are less expensive to maintain.
- Plant trees for screening or privacy. This is a cost-effective way to create a living fence or screen.
- Make sure letterboxes, fences, pathways and entranceways are spic and span. A lick of paint revitalizes the duller features. Water-blast mossy decks, fences, dirty paths and driveways. Remember, no one likes to see grubbiness inside or outside the home.
- Create a stylish, welcoming entrance using superb pots with great-looking plant combinations.
- Remove any plants that are past their use-by date.
- Screen off parts of the garden that will distract you from the good stuff, i.e. clotheslines, sheds and bad views.
- Dress up existing courtyard spaces with stylish outdoor furniture, feature pots and plants.
- If you have a rental property, keep things very simple. You will need to strike a balance between creating an inviting, enjoyable space for your tenants to enjoy living in and not giving them or yourself too much work to do to maintain it.

## Add structural value

Functional hard landscaping features such as pergolas, decks, fencing and a carport/garage are some of the best ways to maximize the use of the garden and add value. Decks create extensions of your living areas and outdoors, fencing provides privacy and security, while a garage provides security and storage for your car.

These are, however, usually high-ticket items so get a few quotes first and see if it still fits within your budget. Getting a garage or carport built is likely to be a big job, so make sure you have the money and time to see it through. You could save on labour costs if you build it yourself. But remember, a botched job will end up devaluing rather than adding value. Consents and building permits will also be required for much of this work. Check with your local council for all regulations.

You can lift the exterior of your home even if you are on a tight budget. A little bit of money can go a long way if you prioritise and opt for features that are functional rather than purely aesthetic.

## Create extra space

- Clear some space. Prune or remove trees that have got too big for their space or are blocking out valuable light. Take trees out that may be taking up space for other more valuable things such as a new outdoor living area or an extended lawn.
- Patio or courtyards are best covered to provide shade and protection from the rain. This will maximize the benefits of living outdoors year round.
- Add extra 'parking space; if you have suitable space this is also a very effective way to add value.
- Open up or enlarge existing areas to create an entertainment area. Outdoor living areas that flow easily from the indoors is a highly effective way to add value.



## Before you start check out these suggestions

- Don't do anything you don't have the time or money to maintain.
- Swimming pools and spas won't add value; people see them as a lot of work.
- Don't focus on the backyard before the front. Create street appeal first. If the front of the house doesn't look good but the back is incredible, prospective buyers might never get to the back.
- Don't over-plant. Plants cost money. And don't under-estimate lawn space. With diminishing house and garden sizes, families see much benefit and value in having a nice lawn to enjoy.
- Appeal to a wider audience. Do not add features that are luxury items only e.g. fireplaces, outdoor kitchens and elaborate water features.

Quality landscape design and installation, whether you DIY or get in the professionals, will add value to your property and help it sell faster. In my experience, it has been a successful and rewarding process to go through. ■



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