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Landscaping can add a new look to houses up for sale

By Christine Arpe Gang
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"It's better to be looked over than overlooked."

Mae West wasn't talking about curb appeal when she made that statement but the sentiment fits, said Cheryl Haas, a certified home stager.

Haas, owner of Defining Touch (definingtouch.com), specializes in getting houses spiffed up so they sell fast. But her advice also applies to those who just want to improve the looks of their property.

The most important factor in selling a house is how it looks from the curb, Haas said at the Mastering Spring Fever event put on last month by area master gardeners.

Great curb appeal is followed by an up-to-date kitchen and appealing master bedroom and bath as the attributes that influence buyers the most.

Sometimes a landscape needs only some taming.

One of her clients owned a house in Midtown that was totally hidden behind overgrown trees and shrubs. It hadn't sold after months on the market.

"If they can't see it, you can't sell it," Haas said. The house sold in a week after careful pruning improved the view of the house and a front-yard fountain.

In the favorable growing climate of the Mid-South, trees and shrubs can overwhelm a property in just a few years if they aren't regularly pruned.

"Landscaping is like a child," Haas said. "If you don't nip it back now and then, it grows out of control."

Haas presented a top 10 list of things to do to enhance curb appeal:

- Paint if the house needs it. Just adding color to the front door is an easy way to add life to the exterior if the



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Timi Ulrey looks over the marigolds at a previous Memphis Zoo plant sale.

rest of the paint is in good condition.

- Change or paint outdated light fixtures.
- Add landscaping with an eye toward color. A nice landscape is the first thing that makes a buyer stop and look.
- Replace worn-out garage doors, especially if the garage faces the front.
- Add outdoor lighting.
- Resurface the driveway.
- Add decorative details to the architecture, such as shutters or moldings. Conversely, Haas showed a photo of one home that looked better after shutters were removed.

"You need something to say my house is unique," she said.

- De-clutter the property by getting rid of excessive garden ornaments, furniture, toys and tools.
- Build or refurbish decks. "Most people consider the outside areas to be another room in the house," Haas said.

If you are planning to sell your house a few years from now, start working on the landscaping now. It's easier on your budget, and an established landscape always looks better than one that is brand-new.

Even if you aren't planning a move, looking at your house from a buyer's perspective can lead to some worthwhile improvements.

Buyer's market

The spring frenzy of plant buying has begun. You can indulge at three community plant sales this weekend: the annual wildflower sale at Dixon Gallery and Gardens; the native plant sale at Lichterman Nature Center and the Memphis Zoo's spring plant sale.

Details and hours are listed in the garden calendar, Page M5.

When you buy at these sales you not only help the horticultural efforts of the nonprofit institutions, you are assured of getting plants that are well acclimated to our climate.

Buying locally grown plants is highly recommended by Betty Llewellyn, a master gardener and member of the Collierville Garden Club, who presented a series of classes at the Collierville Public Library earlier this year.

These sales present the opportunity to buy from knowledgeable people, another of Llewellyn's recommendations for getting the best plants.

Some of her other tips include checking a plant's root system by gently lifting it out of its pot. Annuals that lift out too easily do not have well-developed roots. Perennials with tightly bound roots or roots that circle the pot have outgrown their container and are best left at the nursery.

Avoid containers with weeds and annuals with too many blooms. We all like to see what we're buying, so growers force annuals to flower earlier than they should. Choose flats with few flowers but lots of buds.

Avoid plants with yellow leaves and those with signs of disease or insect problems.

Lucky lecture

When Dr. Michael Dirr talks, gardeners listen.

The Mid-South Hydrangea Society sold all 400 tickets to his lecture on hydrangeas set for Monday at the Memphis Botanic Garden. Some people are traveling more than 100 miles to hear him.

Dirr, who retired as a professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia and still does research there, is the pre-eminent voice on trees and shrubs in America through his book, "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants."

Lately he's turned his attention to the world of hydrangeas in his new book, "Hydrangeas for American Gardens."

Unlike his colleague, Dr. Allan Armitage, Dirr doesn't give many lectures.

He's turned down several invitations to speak in Memphis.

So, my hat is off to the leadership of the hydrangea society, especially Linda Orton, for bringing him here.

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