

# Suncoasteam's Homeowner News™

Courtesy of Jim Mulligan & Andy Leonard ☞ [www.suncoasteam.com](http://www.suncoasteam.com)

May 2006

## Make 'em Fall in Love at First Sight

We are always disappointed when we see a sloppy-looking house for sale. It makes us wonder: how could the seller not know the immense importance of first impressions? If buyers don't like what they see as soon as they pull up to the curb, they won't even bother to get out of the car and take a look inside. How can the seller then hope for a quick sale and a good price? This happens more often when the market is hot, when some sellers think they can afford to be lazy with the look since buyers are plentiful and homes sell quickly. But curb appeal is equally important in hot and slow markets. In a slow market it means a faster sale; in a hot market it means more buyers bidding on the house which often increases its selling price. The good news is that creating great curb appeal is neither difficult nor expensive. Here's how it's done:



Starting with the yard, your goal is to create a "cared for" look. It goes without saying that the lawn should be neatly mowed and clear of fallen leaves, twigs, toys and gardening implements. The detail that is sometimes forgotten (but contributes greatly to the overall look) is the edge of all things concrete. You don't want your walkways, driveway and sidewalk to have raggedy edges (courtesy of unruly grass and weeds) so whip out your power trimmer and create nice, clean lines. Shrubbery should be neatly trimmed and should not obscure any windows or the front door. Now, some folks really feel bad significantly reducing the size of a really large plant, but overgrown bushes only hide the main attraction (your house!)

from view. Not only that, but buyers may wonder if the plants are there for a reason – like to hide a defect! So let the house show and let the plants complement (not obstruct) the look.

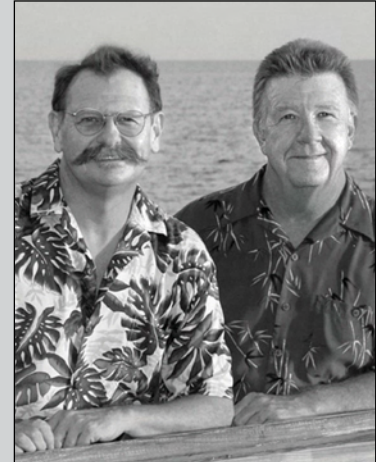
Speaking of complementing the look, how about planting some flowers? Spring is here, so now is a great time to add a splash of color to your yard. If you have planting beds around your home make sure they are full of colorful flora. If not, placing a couple of large pots overflowing with flowers by your front door will do the trick.

Now on to the house itself...

As you can imagine, buyers are not particularly impressed by peeling paint or stained walls. These problems should be remedied, but not before you discover and address their underlying cause (usually moisture coming from somewhere). Otherwise, your work will be in vain; the stains will reappear and any new paint you apply will bubble up and peel again.

Painting the entire house is usually a great investment, but it's not always in the seller's budget (and not always necessary). For less severe blemishes (where there's no peeling paint) pressure washing is a good alternative. It can really rejuvenate the house. Hiring someone to do it is not that expensive; purchasing (or renting) a pressure washer and doing it yourself costs even less. (By the way, pressure washing is also great for your walkways and driveway.) For that extra shine, paint the "accents" such as trim, window shutters and the front door. If the

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Friends don't let friends buy or sell a home alone. They refer them to a good REALTOR®. And a good REALTOR provides guidance, local knowledge and a caring attitude to make sure that your friend's real estate transaction goes as smoothly as possible. Do you know of someone planning to buy or sell a home soon? Refer them to the one real estate team that you know will handle the transaction with care, expertise and utmost professionalism. It's what friends do!

### Jim Mulligan & Andy Leonard

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## Making the Relocation Easier for Kids

Moving across country can be tough on adults, let alone on kids. Changing schools, losing old friends and leaving familiar surroundings can be disorienting and even heartbreaking for youngsters. Here's how to help them cope.

Inform your children as early as possible about the upcoming move so that they will have ample time to prepare adequately and say goodbye to the friends and family members they will be leaving behind. Help them organize phone numbers and e-mail addresses so they can stay in touch.

When you start your home search, it's important to keep your kids "in the loop." If it's not possible for them to tag along during house hunting, then share with them snapshots of the homes you are considering. This should help reduce the fear of the unknown, and make them feel included in family decisions. One you've selected the home, take your children to see it, as well as the neighborhood and possibly their new school. If this is not practical, then bring them pictures of their soon-to-be-new neighborhood, including the snapshots of the local park, school, or other things that would be of interest to them.

During your move, your attitude will be contagious. If you are stressed out, your kids will be too, perhaps even more so. But if you are calm and upbeat, your little ones will feel more at ease. Make the move sound like an adventure, not a hassle.

Make sure that they get to participate in the move. Little ones can label their boxes with crayons and stickers. You may also consider giving them a special task, like helping with your garage sale, or (if they are old enough) being in charge of the family pets. This will keep them occupied, and they will have less time to spend on worrying.

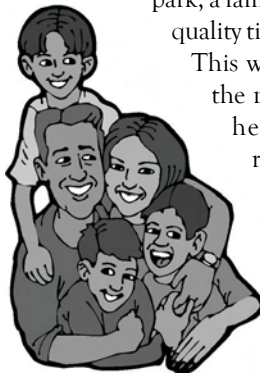
Good communication during this period is really the key. Give your children opportunities to convey their

feelings and anxieties about the move, and they will feel better just knowing that you will take time to listen to them. Feel free to (gently) share some of your own concerns about the move, for instance an anxiety about your new job. This will let them know that they aren't the only ones who are worried.

Once you've arrived in your new town, don't rush to unpack everything right away. Yes, unpack the essentials, but then take the time to explore the new neighborhood together. Locate a local park, a family restaurant, and spend some quality time together at your new home.

This will help ease the transition to the new surroundings. What also helps a lot is maintaining a regular schedule that your kids are used to, such as the schedule of meals, homework and bedtime. Your children will be reassured that their family life hasn't changed all that much.

And let's not forget how important (but sometimes difficult) it is to make new friends. Help your children find activities that they enjoy (such as sports, dance or church activities) where they can meet other kids. Encourage them to bring new friends home, share some pizza and perhaps watch a movie. As they start to rebuild their social circle, your children will feel more at home in your new city.



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door hardware is worn, replace it, or at least polish or paint it. The same goes for your mailbox and the house number (small details, I know, but small details add up).

Finally, don't forget about the evening view. Busy house hunters often drive around checking out homes after work then call their Realtors in the morning with the list of homes they wish to see. Well-placed exterior lighting can make your home look more inviting and ensure that your home is on that list.

### Free Consultation Available!

We've all been guilty of it at some point – we've noticed a crooked this or a broken that on our home and decided to fix it later. But the later never came, and we got used to these imperfections to the point of not even noticing them any more. But someone (a buyer!) looking at your home for the first time will notice them. That's why, before you list your home for sale, it's helpful to have someone impartial look at it with a critical eye and suggest repairs that will increase its appeal to buyers. And who better to do this than someone who looks at homes all day long, every day? As your friendly local real estate experts, we offer this pre-sale consultation for free, with absolutely no cost or obligation. Just give us a call or drop us an e-mail and we'll be glad to help!

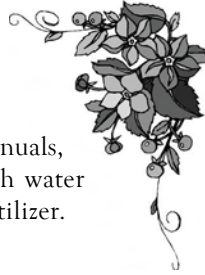
### Free Special Report Available

**The Seven Expensive Mistakes Sellers Frequently Make** is a four-page special report that no seller should be without. If you are thinking of selling a home soon, arm yourself with the knowledge that can help you avoid expensive mistakes too many people have made. Request this report today – there is no cost or obligation.

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# Basic Annual Manual



With the spring in full swing, there is still time to beautify your garden with some colorful annual plants. Here are the basics:

## Location

Just like in real estate, the location is crucial for plants. Most annuals love sun, although there are a few shade-loving exceptions. For the sun-lovers, make sure to pick a spot that gets at least four hours of direct sunlight per day. The soil is another important factor to consider. Properly prepared soil is loose and loamy, with plenty of nutrients for your plants. Tilling the top 6 inches of soil is a good idea, as is adding about 3 inches of quality compost.

## Planting

If you've purchased your plants from a nursery that kept them out in the open, you can plant them right away. However, if your young annuals were grown in a greenhouse, you may first want to allow them about a week to gradually adapt to their new surroundings. Keep them in a shaded area at first, and each day bring them out in the sun for a little longer so they feel "comfortable" in it.

Annuals like warm soil and steady weather. It's a good idea to plant late in the afternoon or on a cloudy day to avoid "upsetting" the flowers too much. When removing the plants from their containers, don't pull on their stems as this will likely damage them. Instead, carefully slip them out by turning the container upside-down, and try to disturb the roots as little as possible. Your annuals should be planted at the same depth (or just slightly deeper than) they were at the nursery. After you are finished

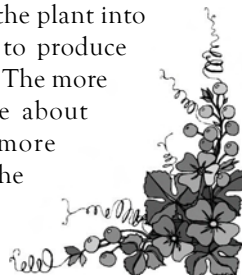
planting your new annuals, rejuvenate them with water and some starter fertilizer.

## Care

To grow happily, your annuals need about one inch of water per week. Deep, infrequent watering is preferred over frequent "sprinkling" since it encourages development of deeper roots. When you water, try not to water leaves as this can trigger foliage diseases. If you are using an automatic sprinkler, water early so the leaves will have a chance to dry off quickly.

As far as fertilizing goes, most annuals don't need much, provided that you've prepared the soil well. Once or twice per growing season should be plenty; if you used plenty of quality compost in the beginning you might not need fertilizer at all. Mulch is another smart feature to consider. In addition to improving the look of your garden, properly applied mulch helps the soil retain moisture and hinders weeds - both very nice bonuses for your plants.

And finally, if you want your annuals to produce a multitude of colorful flowers, don't forget about "deadheading." This is the process where you remove any faded flowers from your plants to encourage new growth. Remember, annuals live to produce seeds for the new generation of the plant; if you remove the dying blooms containing new seeds, you will "trick" the plant into thinking it has to produce another flower. The more vigilant you are about this task, the more you will extend the colorful life of your flower garden.



**Q: What are the rules for avoiding capital gains taxes when selling a home?**

*A: When selling a home, individuals don't have to pay capital gains taxes on the first \$250,000 of their profits (or up to \$500,000 for married couples) provided that two conditions are met. First, you must have owned and lived in the home for at least two of the past five years. In those two years the home must have been your primary residence. Second, in the two years prior to the sale you must have not sold another house and taken advantage of the same tax exclusion. If both of these conditions are met, your first \$250,000 of profit (or \$500,000 if you are married) is tax-free.*

*The IRS does allow for some leeway in these rules. For example, if you lived in the home for less than two years, but are forced to move because of your job, health, or certain other unforeseen circumstances, you may be able to claim a partial exclusion. Check with your tax advisor for details.*

**Have a tough real estate question? We are only a phone call or an e-mail away:**

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Unique home on fresh water canal, \$285,000, documented "mother-in-law" or income producing apartment on a huge, double lot. This home features 2 private lanais overlooking the canal, beautifully landscaped grounds, all on a quiet street, yet very close to shopping, restaurants, golf, the harbor, doctors and more! Two full kitchens, 2-1/2 baths, spacious master suite and great room with vaulted ceilings. A huge master kitchen marble counter top and plant shelves are just some of the warm features. Great for investment or snowbirds.

Condominiums in adult complex starting below \$100,000. Golfcourse condos or waterfront condos with dockage starting in the \$200's. More in all price ranges.

Buildable lots starting in the \$30K's with deed restricted lots in the \$50k's...

Waterfront lots with gulf access in the \$100k's, sailboat access in the \$200k's.

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