

## Nine Ways to Enhance a Home's Curb Appeal

**Cosmetic fixes that can put a prettier face on a plain-Jane home will pay for themselves—and then some**

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BEFORE



PHOTO: ERIK LUBBOCK

**AFTER:** By adding a gabled entry, glass front doors, upscale light fixtures and new fiber cement siding, architect Lori Stephens helped a forgettable house make a stunning first impression.

Just as every mother believes her son is a handsome devil, we homeowners tend to see the best in our houses—or at least we become comfortably familiar with the way they look.

But let's face it, to the objective eye, not every man is George Clooney and not every house is a Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. There are a lot of drab, even downright gloomy facades out there—especially among homes built after World War II, when many builders abandoned traditional architectural styling to streamline costs and mass-produce housing.

Thankfully, the cosmetic surgery required to put a beautiful face on your home won't hurt a bit. It doesn't even require a big-ticket construction job. "Creating curb appeal isn't about trying to transform the house from, say, a plain-Jane ranch into a grand Victorian," says Charlotte, Vt. architect Ted Montgomery. "Just changing one or two little details is all it takes."

You can find your inspiration by looking at similar houses in the neighborhood—or by hiring an architect to offer suggestions (\$300 to \$500) and maybe sketch a plan (add \$300 to \$500). You'll boost your home pride, endear yourself to the neighbors and generate a lot more interest from buyers someday when your house goes on the market.

### **Subtract Flaws**

Assuming the house and yard are already well maintained, job one is to get rid of unsightly blemishes left by a penny-pinching builder or the misguided remodeling efforts of previous owners.

Replace the garage doors. The most prominent facial feature of many homes is a pair of big garage doors - which all too often are flat, lackluster slabs of steel or vinyl. Trade them for more visually appealing doors with moldings, windows or an old-fashioned carriage-house look (\$2,000 to \$5,000 a door, including labor). See [designerdoorm.com](http://designerdoorm.com) and [clopaydoor.com](http://clopaydoor.com) for examples.

Remove siding. Sometimes ugliness is only skin-deep. "Peek under dreary aluminum, vinyl or asbestos siding and you may find well-preserved wood clapboards hiding underneath," says Asheville, N.C. architect Jane Mathews. If so, remove the siding, repair the old wood and give the house an attractive paint job (\$10,000 to \$20,000). If not, you could paint the siding or replace it with fiber cement siding (see image), a no-maintenance product that looks like real wood (\$15,000 to \$25,000).

Lose the funky railings. Swap out bad porch or stoop railings—such as black iron bars and chunky pressure-treated decking components—for visually interesting banisters and spindles that are worthy of their prominent placement at the front of the house (\$1,000 to \$3,000).

### **Add Character**

Like a dimple or a cleft chin, the addition of an interesting architectural element can give your house some distinctiveness.

Install a salvaged door. The typical postwar front door is decidedly dull, but the entry should be the focal point of your house, says Corvallis, Ore. architect Lori Stephens. For interesting replacements, troll an architectural salvage yard (the directory at [buildingreuse.org](http://buildingreuse.org) can help you locate one). Consider a recycled mission-style oak door, a six-panel colonial with blown-glass windows, or arch-top French doors (\$200 to \$800; more if you're converting to an arch top).

Add moldings. Many newer homes lack exterior trim; the siding just butts up against the windows and doors. A contractor can give the house a more sophisticated, traditional look by cutting back that siding and slipping in wide, flat moldings around the openings and possibly at the corners of the house and between its stories (\$3,000 to \$4,000). Consider using a synthetic product like cellular PVC for your moldings, which looks like wood but will never rot.

Enhance the roof. A straight, un-adorned roofline makes a house look about as interesting as a shipping container. So consider adding one or more windowed dormers (gabled peaks) or extending the eaves (the roof overhang) a few feet beyond the front of the house with detailed moldings on the under-side (\$2,500 to \$6,000 per dormer or eave extension). This is major surgery though; do not attempt it without first getting an architect's input.

### **Multiply the Effect**

Invasive procedures aren't always necessary. Just adding the right accents can transform your home's outer look—not unlike a pair of stylish new specs or a good haircut.

Replace light fixtures and hardware. Lose generic shiny brass or black house numbers, mailbox and porch lights (especially bare-bulb fixtures) and substitute something unique and substantial, perhaps made of antiqued copper, bronze or brushed nickel (\$20 to \$75 each). For ideas, see [rejuvenation.com](http://rejuvenation.com) and [restorationhardware.com](http://restorationhardware.com).

Plan for a nonstop flower show. Most of the flowers in your yard probably bloom in the late spring, which makes for a beautiful May—or whenever the big show happens in your climate—but leaves you with a bland yard for the other 10 or 11 months of the year. A local nursery can help you choose and plant additional bulbs, shrubs and trees with different bloom times (as well as plants with colorful autumn foliage and winter berries), so there'll always be something performing in the yard (\$50 to \$250 a shrub, \$500 to \$1,500 a tree).

Add color. A paint job (\$2,000 to \$10,000) in pleasing hues can make any structure appealing. "But don't choose a bright, high-contrast color scheme—that only exaggerates a house's flaws," Montgomery warns.

For subtler suggestions, check out the book "House Colors" by Susan Hershman (\$23 at Amazon.com) or go for the colors of nature—muted greens, deep reds or pale yellows—and keep the body and trim close in color. That will give your home a friendly, peaceful look rather than making it say, "Hey, look at me." Sort of like an average-looking guy choosing a simple charcoal suit instead of a flashy powder blue one that only a Hollywood star could pull off. ■