Pre-Sale Home Inspection Checklist

Find the surprises before your buyer does.

One of the best ways to make your home easier to sell — and reduce the odds of a buyer uncovering an unpleasant surprise during their inspection — is to inspect the home **before you put it on the market.**

The best option is to hire a qualified professional home inspector for a pre-sale inspection.

But if you aren't ready to pay for a professional inspection, this checklist can help you take a careful walk through your property and look for many of the same **visible warning signs** a buyer or inspector may notice.

The goal isn't to make your house perfect. It's to find the surprises before the buyer does.

Before You Start

Grab a flashlight, screwdriver, notepad and your phone. Walk through the property slowly and make notes or take pictures of anything that looks questionable.

Don't climb onto the roof, open electrical panels, enter unsafe crawl spaces or attempt anything you're not comfortable doing. If something looks suspicious, bring in the appropriate professional.

For each item below, mark:

☐ Looks Good
☐ Needs Attention
☐ Have a Professional Check It

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1. Roof, Gutters & Drainage

Stand on the ground and look carefully at the roof from several angles. **Pay special attention to:** anything that could suggest a current or previous roof leak.

☐ Missing, loose, curling or damaged shingles
☐ Areas of visibly excessive roof wear
☐ Sagging or uneven areas of the roof
☐ Damaged or missing flashing around chimneys, vents or roof penetrations
☐ Visible damage around skylights
☐ Chimney masonry that appears cracked, loose or deteriorated
☐ Gutters that are loose, leaking, clogged or pulling away from the house
☐ Downspouts securely attached
☐ Downspouts directing water away from the foundation
☐ Water pooling near the house after rain
☐ Tree limbs touching or hanging directly over the roof

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2. Exterior

Walk completely around the house.

☐ Cracked, damaged or missing siding
☐ Peeling or deteriorated exterior paint
☐ Damaged brick, stone or mortar
☐ Gaps or openings where water or pests could enter
☐ Rot or deterioration around windows and doors
☐ Loose fascia or soffit
☐ Cracked or deteriorated caulking
☐ Windows with cracked glass or visible damage
☐ Exterior doors that don't open, close or lock properly
☐ Deck boards that are loose, soft, damaged or rotted
☐ Deck and porch railings secure
☐ Exterior stairs and handrails secure
☐ Driveway or walkway conditions that could create a trip hazard
☐ Retaining walls showing significant leaning or movement
☐ Soil generally slopes away from the foundation rather than toward it

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3. Foundation, Basement & Crawl Space

Moisture and structural concerns tend to get buyers' attention quickly.

☐ Significant foundation cracks
☐ Cracks that appear to have recently widened or moved
☐ Bowing or leaning basement walls
☐ Standing water
☐ Damp areas or visible water intrusion
☐ Water stains on walls or floors
☐ White powdery deposits on masonry
☐ Musty odors
☐ Visible mold-like growth
☐ Damaged or rotting wood
☐ Signs of termites or other wood-destroying insects
☐ Floor joists or support posts that appear damaged or altered
☐ Sump pump operates properly, if present
☐ Crawl space appears dry and reasonably accessible

Don't automatically panic over every crack. Homes settle and minor cracks are common. But anything large, changing, displaced or accompanied by water intrusion deserves additional attention.

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4. Plumbing

Run water throughout the house rather than simply looking at the fixtures.

Faucets & Fixtures

☐ Turn on every faucet
☐ Check underneath every sink for leaking or moisture
☐ Check around faucets for leaks
☐ Hot and cold water operate normally
☐ Water pressure appears reasonable
☐ Water drains reasonably quickly from sinks, tubs and showers
☐ No unusual gurgling or sewer odors

Toilets

☐ Flush every toilet
☐ Toilets don't continually run
☐ Toilets are securely attached and don't rock
☐ No visible leaking around the base

Water Heater & Other Plumbing

☐ No visible leaking or corrosion around the water heater
☐ No unexplained water on the floor around plumbing equipment
☐ Exposed pipes don't show obvious leaking or severe corrosion
☐ Main water shutoff location is known and accessible
☐ Sump pump operates if one is present

If you have a **well or septic system**, consider having those systems evaluated separately before listing.

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5. Electrical

You are looking for obvious problems — **not performing an electrical inspection.**

☐ Test accessible light switches
☐ Test accessible outlets
☐ Replace missing or damaged outlet and switch covers
☐ Look for loose outlets or switches
☐ Look for scorch marks, discoloration or signs of overheating
☐ Look for exposed or damaged wiring
☐ Make sure extension cords aren't being used as permanent wiring
☐ GFCI outlets appear to function in appropriate wet-area locations
☐ Breakers aren't repeatedly tripping
☐ Electrical panel is accessible

Do not remove the electrical panel cover unless you are qualified to do so.

If you see evidence of overheating, exposed wiring, unusual electrical modifications or recurring breaker problems, call an electrician.

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6. Heating & Cooling

Buyers and inspectors will normally operate the systems when conditions permit.

☐ Furnace or heating system turns on and operates
☐ Air-conditioning system operates when weather permits
☐ Air appears to flow from supply registers
☐ Filters are reasonably clean
☐ HVAC equipment isn't making unusual noises
☐ No obvious leaking or excessive corrosion around the equipment
☐ Thermostat functions properly
☐ Accessible ductwork appears connected
☐ Outdoor AC unit is reasonably clear of vegetation and debris
☐ Service records are available if you've maintained the system regularly

If the HVAC system hasn't been serviced in several years, having it professionally serviced before listing may be worthwhile.

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7. Attic, Insulation & Ventilation

Only enter the attic if it is safely accessible.

☐ No obvious roof leaks or water staining
☐ No visibly wet insulation
☐ No obvious mold-like growth
☐ No evidence of animals or pests
☐ Bathroom exhaust fans don't appear to terminate improperly inside the attic
☐ Attic ventilation openings aren't obviously blocked
☐ Insulation appears generally consistent and undisturbed

Water stains deserve particular attention. Determine whether you're looking at an old repaired problem or evidence of an active leak.

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8. All The Important Surfaces

Walk every room instead of focusing only on the major mechanical systems.

Windows and Doors

☐ Open and close a representative number of windows
☐ Windows aren't cracked or obviously damaged
☐ Exterior doors open and close properly
☐ Interior doors generally operate normally
☐ Locks and latches function
☐ No major rot or water damage around frames

Walls & Ceilings

☐ Look for water stains
☐ Look for unusual cracking
☐ Look for bulging or sagging drywall
☐ Check areas underneath bathrooms for evidence of previous leaks
☐ Look around windows for signs of water intrusion

Floors

☐ Look for soft or damaged flooring
☐ Watch for significant slopes or uneven areas
☐ Look for water damage around toilets, tubs, showers, sinks and appliances

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9. Kitchen & Appliances

If an appliance is staying with the home, assume a buyer or inspector may try to operate it.

☐ Range/cooktop operates
☐ Oven operates
☐ Dishwasher operates without obvious leaking
☐ Garbage disposal operates
☐ Built-in microwave operates
☐ Refrigerator operates if included with the sale
☐ No leaks beneath the kitchen sink
☐ Cabinets and countertops are reasonably secure
☐ Exhaust fan operates where present

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10. Bathrooms

Bathrooms combine plumbing, electrical and moisture — which makes them an important inspection area.

☐ Faucets operate normally
☐ Sink drains properly
☐ Tub and shower drain properly
☐ Toilets flush and don't rock or leak
☐ No soft flooring around the toilet or tub
☐ Caulking and grout aren't badly deteriorated
☐ No obvious water damage
☐ Exhaust fan operates
☐ GFCI protection appears to function where applicable

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11. Garage

☐ Garage door opens and closes properly
☐ Automatic opener operates
☐ Door between the garage and house closes and latches properly
☐ No obvious damaged or exposed wiring
☐ No significant water intrusion
☐ Walls and ceilings don't show obvious structural damage
☐ Garage floor doesn't have major trip hazards

Never intentionally defeat or bypass garage-door safety equipment just to make the door operate.

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12. Basic Safety Items

These are inexpensive items that can create unnecessary concern when they're missing or obviously defective.

☐ Smoke alarms installed and functioning
☐ Carbon-monoxide alarms installed where appropriate
☐ Stair railings secure
☐ Deck and porch railings secure
☐ Loose steps repaired
☐ Obvious trip hazards addressed
☐ Missing outlet and switch covers replaced
☐ Broken windows repaired
☐ Exterior doors lock properly

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13. Specialty Systems

A home inspection may not evaluate every specialty system–these deserve separate attention:

☐ Septic system
☐ Well
☐ Radon
☐ Chimney/fireplace
☐ Swimming pool or spa
☐ Termites or other wood-destroying insects
☐ Sewer line
☐ Private drainage systems
☐ Solar system
☐ Generator
☐ Outbuildings

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14. The Seller Paperwork Check

Some inspection problems are actually **information problems.** Gather whatever you have for:

☐ Roof age or replacement documentation
☐ Furnace and AC age
☐ Water-heater age
☐ HVAC service records
☐ Roof warranty
☐ Appliance manuals or warranties
☐ Basement waterproofing documentation
☐ Foundation repairs
☐ Electrical work
☐ Plumbing work
☐ Septic or well service records
☐ Permits for major renovations or additions
☐ Receipts and warranties for significant repairs

Documentation can give buyers confidence that work was done properly and can answer questions before they turn into concerns.

What Should You Fix?

You don't necessarily need to repair everything you discover. Instead, put each problem into one of four buckets:

1. Fix it now: Small repairs, inexpensive safety issues and obvious defects that could unnecessarily alarm buyers.

2. Have a professional evaluate it: Anything involving structure, significant moisture, roofing, electrical, plumbing, HVAC or another issue you aren't qualified to diagnose.

3. Price for it: Sometimes the smartest decision is to sell the property with the problem rather than invest additional money before selling.

4. Disclose it: If you know about a material defect, don't try to make it disappear cosmetically. Handle your disclosure obligations honestly and appropriately.

Pay Extra Attention to These Red Flags

Before putting the home on the market, consider professional evaluation if you discover:

- Active water intrusion
- A leaking roof
- Significant foundation movement
- Standing water in a basement or crawl space
- Visible structural deterioration
- Major electrical problems
- Persistent plumbing leaks
- Sewer or septic problems
- HVAC equipment that isn't operating
- Significant mold-like growth
- Termite or wood-destroying insect activity
- Strong gas or sewer odors

These are the types of issues that can become much more difficult to deal with after you're already under contract.

One Final Walkthrough

When you've finished, ask yourself:

If I were buying this house and seeing it for the first time, what would concern me?

That's the point of the exercise.

Finding a problem before listing gives you options. You can investigate it, repair it, disclose it, price around it or get professional advice.

Finding the same problem **after you're under contract** means you're dealing with it while a buyer is waiting, deadlines are running and your sale may be at risk.

Want Even More Certainty?

Consider hiring a qualified professional home inspector to perform a **pre-sale home inspection** before your property goes on the market.

A professional inspection can uncover problems that aren't obvious during a homeowner walkthrough and gives you the opportunity to address those issues **before a buyer uses them to renegotiate your deal.**

Important Note

This checklist is intended as a general homeowner screening tool and is not a professional home inspection, engineering evaluation or legal advice. It does not replace inspections performed by qualified professionals or any property-disclosure requirements that apply to your sale.