

Summer SPRUCE UP

Louise Richardson lists her top 10 tips for giving your rental a lift before the hot weather hits.

AS EXPERIENCED PROPERTY

INVESTORS know, it doesn't need to cost the earth to maintain and profit from a property, in terms of rental yield and resale value.

But it is important to remember to factor maintenance costs into your annual budget.

Here are 10 key areas where you can protect and enhance your investment – practical jobs which should be done each year, and clever ways of adding extra panache.

1. Keep it clean

Paintwork will always look better and last longer when it's well looked after, so having a house or unit washed at the start of the sunny season is a wise move. While you're at it, it's good to attend to driveways, decks and other surfaces, especially if a winter build-up of mould and moss has rendered them unsafe. This needs to be eliminated – not just cleaned – so Resene Moss and Mould Killer is a good choice.

It's interesting to note that the range of targeted cleaning and protecting products becomes more extensive every year. Resene Paint Prep and House Wash is very effective (if moss and mould aren't present). For driveways, spray on Resene Deep Clean and leave it to work with the weather, Resene marketing manager Karen Warman says.

2. Paint to perfection

If it's time for a complete repaint or even just some vital touch-ups, good preparation is always important. Clean the surface thoroughly, scrape off flaking paint and repair any rough patches. Where you've sanded back to wood be sure to prime before painting. It can be tempting to take shortcuts such as failing to do repairs where necessary but this will generally come back to bite you when the newly painted surface performs poorly – bubbling or cracking.

3. Keep on top of the roof

Highly experienced investor and general manager of Maintain To Profit, Mark Trafford is big on roofs – something he says investors often overlook. Look for leaks, rust and general decay every year and if something's wrong, fix it quickly. If you're replacing a roof, especially a corrugated iron one, it can generally be done quite quickly with minimal disruption for your tenants although ideally it's the sort of job that is best done in between tenancies.



Easy-care planting is a great way of giving a property a 'lift'.

4. Let's go gardening

With more emphasis on gardening these days, especially on growing your own food, there's potentially significant value in landscaping. Unless, however, you have very green-fingered tenants, easy-care is generally best overall, with trees, shrubs, and grasses.

Sandra Batley from Flourish Garden Design finds that landlords tend to like New Zealand natives, which are generally hardy.

"It very much depends on the type of property though," Batley says. "If it's an ordinary little suburban house they're often not very interested in doing more than is strictly necessary, but a high-end corporate rental is another thing again because those tenants expect lovely surroundings."

A raised garden and a few packets of seeds can really impress renters and if they fail to tend to it, it's easily dismantled – or planted out with shrubs.

Try to keep up to date with weeding, trimming, chopping back and mowing, as keeping your property neat and tidy – at all times – is an important aspect of a winning maintenance plan.

5. Parking spaces

This is something that's easy to overlook, yet tenants can often regard it as crucial. A property with a garage will generally command a higher rent than one without so if moving a prefabricated model onto the site is feasible, then give this some serious thought. It may be possible to build a simple carport – even if you set up a shade sail to act as the roof. If none of these suggestions work for you, paving an area for tenants' cars to park on, to avoid getting stuck in mud and cutting up your lawns, is well worth doing. Mark Trafford also suggests adding a garden shed for tenants' bikes, toys or even firewood.



Decking needs regular re-staining to maintain the timber.

6. Hit the deck

Kiwi homes without a deck or at least an outdoor seating area are becoming as rare as hens' teeth and tenants will definitely pay a premium for that all-important indoor/outdoor flow. Decks below 1.5 metres tall no longer require a permit (although it's advisable to check with your local council) so they're an easy way to add value. At this time of year the big hardware chains have regular weekend deck-building classes where you can learn to do it yourself – or check out on-line tutorials. Choose a Resene Cool Colour for your paint or stain as these help avoid heat build-up.

7. Great outdoors

Even if there isn't space for a full-on deck, there are other ways of providing outdoor recreation areas for tenants. One possibility is the creation of a patio area, either paving the surface or even using such materials as pebbles or old bricks – laid carefully so that the surface is level.

Again, shade sails can help provide atmosphere, while protecting the space from the elements – the staff at a hardware store will be able to show you more potentially useful products such as trellis which comes in all kinds of guises these days including bamboo, aluminium, brushwood and of course, timber. Look online at sites such as Pinterest.com for more inspiration.

ADD A DECK IF YOU POSSIBLY CAN, GIVE TENANTS AS MUCH PRIVACY AS POSSIBLE USING SCREENS OR TRELIS AND ATTEND TO ANY OTHER ISSUES IN A TIMELY MANNER – GAINING THEIR TRUST. THAT WAY YOU WILL HOLD ONTO THE GOOD ONES
- DARRYL GOODE

8. Safety first

We've talked about removing mould and moss from decks and steps where it could be dangerous, causing people to trip or slip, but there are other issues around which you have an obligation to look out for tenants' interests. If you have presented a property as 'fully-fenced' and the tenant has small children, for example. Use this early-season overhaul to check that the fence is intact with locks and latches in working order. This is even more important if the property has a pool. Check with your local council to be certain that it conforms with all relevant rules and regulations.

Make sure that all outdoor areas are well lit at night with step lights and security lights and repair cracked or broken surfaces on paths and driveways as these can cause serious accidents.

9. Educate yourself

If you're new, or relatively new to the world of property investing, take the time to educate yourself about what works and what doesn't. Talk to a property manager or rental specialist, for example. Darryl Goode, of Auckland's Goode Rentals, has been in the business for many years and has a fair idea about what works and what doesn't.

"Add a deck if you possibly can, give tenants as much privacy as possible using screens or trellis and attend to any other issues in a timely manner – gaining their trust. That way you will hold onto the good ones."

10. Finishing touches

Simple things, such as repainting a front or garage door, adding a nice potted plant at the entranceway are easy, fun, ways of enhancing a property's appeal after the hard graft's been done.

Use a bold colour with a gloss finish for the door to really stand out, Warman suggests.

"The front door is one of the first impressions potential tenants and visitors will have," Warman says. "If it looks fresh and new, that suggests that the rest of the home is well looked after, too. A colourful front door also makes it easy to spot the entrance, so people know where to go!" ■

Loose or missing screws in roofing is a common reason for flapping iron or worse -leaks. But if you aren't a capable DIYer leave this one to a registered roofer.



Kiwis love outdoor entertaining and using outdoor areas; paving and easy-care gardens are a great way of improving your property.