LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT: Curb appeal can make or break the deal. Relatively inexpensive touches—cleaned-up flower beds, trimmed hedges, a cleared driveway and walkway—make a difference. "You want to make sure you're getting people to walk through the front door," says landscaper Chris Cipriano, whose projects are shown here.

FIRST
Impressions

Consider it exterior staging: curb appeal, the one chance you have to show your home in its best light before the potential buyer even walks inside. "To sell your house, you have to first get people in the door," explains landscape designer Chris Cipriano, whose full-service statewide landscaping business offers staging expertise. To that end, he continues, "you have to look at the property as a whole, including your front and backyard." Just as with the interior, you first need to step back and look for any glaring problems. Is there a lot of clutter? Are sidewalks chipped, or the driveway cracked? Does the siding look dingy, the trim peeling and frayed? "Return on investment is your main goal," says Cipriano. "Fixing it up doesn't have to be that expensive." He suggests this checklist:

CLEAN UP CLUTTER Get rid of all those plastic kids' toys, straighten up woodpiles, throw out broken patio furniture.

FACE-LIFT THE FACADE Power wash the siding, paint the trim, replace torn screens or cracked windows.

LIGHT THE WAY Exterior lighting is very important, says Cipriano. "Appealing night lighting will attract those people just driving by at night," he says.

REPLACE HARDWARE Make sure house numbers, door handles and locksets, even the mailbox, aren't grimy and rusty.

SPRUCE UP GARDENS Prune overgrown shrubs, pull weeds. Then, plant colorful perennials and layer with annuals. Dollar for dollar, "it's an inexpensive way to make the house attractive," says Cipriano.

MAKE IT HOMEY Pots or urns on the front stoop add a nice touch; patio or lawn furniture looks cozy. Many firms, including Cipriano's, rent out furniture and flower pots. "Simple touches can make it inviting," he says.