



JOAN MARSH BUNKER / STAGED WITH CLASS

A staged pergola by Joan Marsh Bunker of Staged With Class, a home-staging company serving Burlington and Camden counties. The indoor-outdoor carpet is from Target for under \$75. Bunker suggests reading manufacturer's guidelines before using the carpet with a firepit.

You don't need to spend a fortune on landscaping to make your outdoor living spaces shine.

By **DONNA ADINOLFE**
CORRESPONDENT

Selling a home in today's economy is no walk in the park; however, some quick and inexpensive fixes can create a parklike setting right in your backyard to attract potential buyers.

The backyard is an especially strong selling point if your home is on the market in the warmer months, according to New Jersey realty sales agent Michelle DeVito.

Young couples are envisioning space for outdoor get-togethers, while families are considering their children's needs and safety. Empty nesters might be looking for a serene place to relax without a great deal of maintenance.

"With warm weather, people are wanting to be outside more, so, not only should the house be clean and crisp looking, so should the yard and patio," DeVito said. "If there is no patio, make it look like there is one."

Today's buyers not only are looking for a place to live, but also for a lifestyle, according to Joan Marsh Bunker of Staged With Class, a home-staging company serving Burlington and Camden counties in New Jersey.

"By purchasing a few up-to-date accessories, clearing out excess furniture and neutralizing colors, an outdated space can transform into one that will give the 'wow' factor," Bunker said.

The least expensive way to improve your patio for sale is to clean it, according to Ruth Wheeler of Garden Girls, a company based in Yardley, whose staff designs and maintains gardens and livens up decks and patios.

"Take everything off the patio. Scrub down or power wash your whole patio, windows, rails, patio floor and siding," Wheeler said. "Then wash everything you took off —

tables, chairs, etc. A good cleaning makes a big difference and it doesn't cost anything."

Bunker agreed, adding, "When the decision has been made to sell a house, it is not the time to make major patio renovations. What is needed is cleaning, clearing, and fixing of any cracks or defects that may catch a buyer's eye. A small table and chairs is often all that is needed to set the stage. A nice indoor/outdoor rug, some potted plants (a few large, rather than many small) can work wonders."

Then hit the yard sales.

Yard sales and curbside castoffs are the stuff dreams are made of, according to Wheeler, who recently transformed her own patio for about \$200.

"I start a yard sale in early spring. I look for patio and garden accessories for Garden Girl jobs to keep the cost down for my clients," she said, adding that "people just want to get rid of stuff so they will sell it cheap. Among the items she suggests you look for are plant containers and racks, benches, little tables, an old chair that can be refinished, and garden sayings.

Wheeler said she started her business after receiving compliments from neighbors about her own garden. She tries to keep her costs down for her clients who may be older and either can't or don't want to work in a garden, but still enjoy having one. Plus she said she enjoys the exercise.

"In the spring, I can't wait to get my hands in the dirt," she said. "The end product is very rewarding."

Bunker added, "In today's competitive, and often frustrating, real estate market, a seller needs to have his property stand out from the rest by addressing each and every area, whether it is inside or out. Each can be a valuable asset by adding to the overall ambience and saleability of the property."