Selling Soon? The Plumbing Checks That Matter Most Before Listing

Plumbing can make or break a home inspection

When you put a house on the market, buyers and their home inspectors will look closely at the plumbing. Old or poorly maintained systems raise red flags and can stall a sale or lower an offer. The good news is that many common issues are easy to spot and fix before the inspector arrives. A focused pre-listing plumbing check helps you address problems on your own timeline, not under the pressure of a pending offer.

Below is a practical list of what to examine, why each item matters, and what a reasonable fix looks like. The goal is to present a home that feels solid and well-cared-for, not one that hints at expensive surprises behind the walls.

Shut-off valves: the first thing an inspector checks

Every main water shut-off valve in the home should move freely and close completely. If a valve is stuck open or won't turn, a plumber cannot stop water quickly in an emergency. Home inspectors will test these valves. A seized valve is a minor part that can cost little to replace, but a failed one during a showing could cause real damage. Check the main house valve, the valve at the water heater, and any shut-offs for outdoor spigots. If any valve feels stiff or leaks when turned, have a plumber service or replace it before the listing goes live.

Do not force a stuck valve yourself. Old brass or galvanised valves can snap, and that means turning off the water at the street and calling a professional. A simple visual check for rust or corrosion around the stem is enough to know you need help.

Supply lines: look for corrosion and leaks

The supply lines that carry water to fixtures and appliances are often hidden under sinks, behind toilets, and inside cabinets. Inspectors will pull out drawers and open cabinet doors to see them. Look for small drips, discolouration, or white crust at connection points. Those minerals are a sign of a slow leak that has been drying and leaving deposits. Modern braided stainless steel supply lines are inexpensive and easy to swap, and they look much better than old rubber or chrome lines. Replacing them with **updated plumbing materials** is a low-cost upgrade that signals care. A single new supply line costs a few dollars and takes a plumber minutes to install.

If you see corrosion on copper pipes, that is a different matter. Green or white patches on copper usually mean pinhole leaks are developing. A plumber can evaluate and repair the

affected section. Do not try to patch a corroded pipe yourself; the fix needs proper soldering or a compression fitting, and a botched job will leak later.

Drain pipes: slow drains and bad slopes

Drains that empty slowly are a common finding on home inspections. The cause is often a partial clog, a pipe that slopes the wrong way, or old cast iron that has rusted internally. Before you list, run every sink, tub, and shower for at least a minute and watch how the water drains. If you see standing water or hear gurgling, the drain needs attention. A slow drain can usually be cleared by a plumber with a snake or hydro-jet. If the pipe itself has settled and lost its slope, that requires cutting and re-routing a section. That is more work but still worth doing before the inspector flags it.

Old drain pipes made of cast iron or galvanised steel can develop internal rust that narrows the passage. They also tend to fail at joints. A home inspector will note visible rust and scaling on exposed drain pipes in the basement or crawl space. Replacing a section with modern PVC or ABS drain pipe is a straightforward job for a plumber. The cost is modest, and the improvement in appearance is significant.

Fixture connections: the details that show care

The connections where a fixture meets the wall or floor are easy to overlook but inspectors look at them closely. Loose toilet flanges, gaps around shower valve trim, and missing escutcheons (the decorative rings around pipes) all suggest sloppy maintenance. Tighten any loose toilet bolts, but do not overtighten them or you may crack the porcelain. Replace missing or damaged escutcheon plates. A bead of caulk around the base of a toilet or the edge of a sink that has dried or cracked should be removed and reapplied. Fresh, clean caulk costs almost nothing and makes a fixture look new.

Pay attention to the water heater. Inspectors will check the temperature and pressure relief valve. That valve should not be dripping, and the discharge pipe should be directed to a drain or outside. If the valve is leaking, it may need replacement, which is a job for a plumber. A water heater that is more than ten years old is worth noting; even if it works, an inspector will mention its age. If you are already replacing supply lines or valves, consider whether the water heater itself should be updated. That is a larger decision, but it can remove a major inspection concern.

For sellers who want to understand how strategic plumbing updates affect the sale process, the resource How Smart Plumbing Renovations Increase Home Value and Speed Up Sales - Bigboxratio explains the broader picture. It shows why a few focused upgrades can shift a buyer's perception from worry to confidence.

Utility spaces: the areas buyers rarely see but inspectors love

The mechanical room, basement, or crawl space where the water heater and main pipes live is a goldmine of information for inspectors. These areas often accumulate clutter, dust, and cobwebs that hide small leaks or corroded fittings. Clear everything away so the pipes and valves are visible. A clean space lets an inspector see that maintenance has been regular. Look for signs of past leaks: water stains on the floor or walls, mould, or damp insulation. If you find them, fix the source of the leak and repair the stained materials. A dry, clean utility space with **updated plumbing materials** sends a strong signal that the home has been cared for.

Check the pipe insulation. Foam insulation sleeves that are missing, torn, or waterlogged should be replaced. Proper insulation on hot water pipes reduces heat loss and prevents pipes from freezing in cold climates. It is a cheap, visible improvement that counts toward overall condition. Also confirm that any gas pipes (if present) have no rust or visible damage. A gas leak is a serious safety issue. If you smell gas or see damage, shut off the gas supply if safe to do so, open windows, leave the house, and call the gas company or a qualified technician. Do not try to fix gas piping yourself.

What problems to fix yourself and what to leave to a pro

Simple checks that need no tools are fine for any homeowner. Running water, listening for drips, looking for stains, and tightening a loose handle are all safe. Anything that requires disassembling a fixture, cutting or soldering pipe, working on a gas line, or touching live electrical wires should be left to a licensed plumber or electrician. A home inspector will see a DIY repair that is not up to code, and that can create a bigger problem than the original defect. When in doubt, pay for a professional opinion before listing. A pre-listing plumbing inspection by a plumber costs a few hundred dollars and can uncover issues you would never find on your own.

The best approach is to walk through your home with a flashlight and a notepad. Write down every dripping faucet, every slow drain, every rusted valve, and every missing escutcheon. Then decide which items you will handle yourself and which need a pro. Tackle the easy ones first: replace supply lines, tighten loose connections, replace old caulk. For the bigger items, get a plumber's quote early so you have time to schedule the work before the listing goes live.

A home that passes a plumbing inspection with few or no issues gives buyers one less reason to negotiate. The small investment in **updated plumbing materials** and repairs pays off in a smoother sale and a higher net price. For a deeper look at how plumbing renovations affect the sale timeline and final offer, the full analysis at **How Smart Plumbing Renovations Increase Home Value and Speed Up Sales - Bigboxratio** is worth reading.