

HAVE A YARD SALE AND DO IT RIGHT!

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Yard sales won't make you rich. But, they're a great way to get rid of your excess stuff. They are usually necessary if you are planning to move. I have never met a single person who didn't need to dump some excess "baggage" before moving.

With some good merchandising and creativity, you can usually make a little money from your yard sale. Plus, you'll have less to pack for the move. Or at the very least make more room in your garage, attic, etc.

I have come up with the following ideas to help you have a great yard sale. If you feel a bit overwhelmed and need some help, we are available for consultations. We can do everything from help you decide what to keep and what to get rid of to how to price items so they will sell and even how to "merchandise" your yard sale setting. Contact me for more information.

- **PUT PRICES ON EVERYTHING** This is really important. I've been to yard sales where people don't price anything, and just want you to make an offer. People hate that, and will often walk away immediately. Personally, I don't want to offer too little, and be insulting, and I don't want to offer more than they would have taken for the item, either. I suggest you buy pre-printed price labels in neon colors that are easy to see. You should also keep a list of the big-ticket items along with their prices in case people remove the price. That way, you and the ones helping you can refer to it for the more important items. If you don't want to spend money on stickers, then use masking tape and permanent marker to price the items. Even with pricing there is a good chance they will fall off or be removed by someone. So, keeping general notes on prices is a real lifesaver. You can also keep general price points grouped together and in addition to pricing individual items, you can put up signs like "Everything on this table is under \$2.00" or something to that effect.
- **DON'T GET SENTIMENTAL WHEN PRICING.** This will lead to overpricing, which is bad. Plus, one man's trash is not always another man's treasure, but a sweet deal. A true bargain. Remember people going to yard sales want to spend the least amount of money possible and get the best quality items they can find. Be prepared to feel hurt and insulted when they make ridiculously low offers on

items that are clearly of a certain value, even in the yard sale world. This comes with the territory. That's why I always recommend you have an impartial friend who will step in and take over when you start feeling bad about selling your personal possessions for mere pennies.

- **PLAN, PREPARE AND PURGE** Once you make the decision to have a yard sale, take some real time to prepare for it. This is not something you think about Friday night and then open the garage door Saturday morning to "see what you can get for a few things." Garage, or yard, sales take a lot of planning and time to prepare. Depending upon your motivation, you can take several approaches to the preparation.

IN THIS ARTICLE I AM GOING TO ASSUME YOU ARE MOVING:

If you are moving and don't want to take things you know you don't need any more, then it is important that you be methodical and thorough. You need to go through every room and every cabinet, closet, drawer, basket, etc. in your entire house. It is a good idea to get some big sturdy boxes in advance. Start with three at a time and label them "Trash," "Donate" "Action" and "Sell."

The "Action" box is the one where you put things that have missing parts or belong to something else. Later on, you can reunite items that were missing pieces such as board games or tool kits or CDs with their proper cases, etc. You'll be surprised how quickly this box fills up. People tend to get lazy over time and don't always put things away properly. The "Trash" box is just that, pure trash. I am sure you'll find a lot of that. You may want to add another box labeled "Recycle." If I didn't add this to the list, my daughter would be very upset with me. You'll find papers of all kinds everywhere in the house. Rather than adding needlessly to your local landfill, at least put this out with the recycles over the next few weeks. Even a few boxes full at a time will help.

Now, "Donate" is the box where you put things that you know could be useful to someone but are not worth putting in your garage sale. This is typically socks, single towels that don't make up a set, a single dish, glass, etc. Old towels can be donated to animal shelters. They will really appreciate these. Other items can be donated to the Salvation Army or other charity where people might just find a need for that odd jelly jar without a lid! Then, there is the "Sell" box. Hopefully this will end up having a lot of great stuff in it.

I would recommend you have to "Sell" boxes. Use one for things you can price immediately and then set aside for merchandising later and

the other for things you aren't sure how much you want to sell them for. If you can price even a third of your things as you go along you will be that much more ahead of the game!

As I mentioned earlier, this process can be hard because you are going to start reminiscing as you purge. It is really good to have a friend to keep you on task during this process. Pick someone who is motivated and by nature a happy person. They will keep you going and not let you spend too much time looking back at your past. Remember there is a reason you are getting rid of these things. You just don't need them anymore. Plus, if you are in fact moving there will be new things you'll want to buy for your new home! You will need some room for those shiny new trinkets.

Having the ultimate garage sale is a great way to get rid of all of that "treasure" that fills your closets and garage. I recommend a good annual purge of anything clothing or item you haven't looked at in over a year or that you forgot you even have. Chances are that if you forgot you own it, you probably won't miss it.

WHAT TO GET RID OF AS I mentioned earlier, if you don't use it or don't know that you even own it, chances are pretty safe that you can get rid of it. We tend to be a culture of collecting "things" and with advances in just about everything; those items we had to have can become outdated in months. Our tastes and interests change and most of us simply don't have enough space to keep everything. Simplify your life and get rid of excess clutter. Chances are you won't miss it and having the extra cash could be a benefit.

Make sure you have enough sellable items to even hold a garage sale. People like big garage sales, and the more stuff you have to sell, the more people will stop by and shop. Think about getting together with some friends and having a combined garage sale. If they don't want to help out, offer to sell their junk for a 30% commission.

If you have children, get them in on this process. Have them go through their things, with your final oversight, of course. I have always let my daughter sell her own things and keep the money to buy something new that she has been wanting. I even let her have her own table and she often gets rid of more than she would normally be willing to part with. However, beware that your child may want to get rid of things you don't want to. So, you will need to be clear in setting some ground rules about their participation in the purging process.

You can also let them on the day of the sale by having them sell cans of soda or lemonade. You don't have to make much, if any, profit on this but it keeps the kids busy and teaches them how to handle money. Not to mention customers love not having to stop somewhere to get a drink on hot days. My daughter learned how to make change from a dollar at a very young age!

- **PLANNING THE SALE** Pick a date. If you live where it's cold or tends to rain, put the sale off until you are more likely to have good weather (If this is an option). People do not come out when it's cold and rainy. Once you select your date, check the weather and if it looks bad, seriously consider changing the date. Get everything you have together to sell. This could take several weeks to several months. I try and keep a stack for 'Goodwill' and a stack for 'Garage Sale' throughout the year. Make sure you have several big ticket, nice items. People come to garage sales early looking for furniture, electronics and other big ticket items.
- **CLEAN ITEMS UP AND MAKE SURE THEY ARE IN WORKING ORDER** If something doesn't work, label it as such and don't expect to make much money on it. Dust everything and clean with soap and water. Use the Mr. Clean sponges to remove gunk from items. People will spend more money on items that are clean and appear to have been well cared for.
- **HAVE SOME DECENT STUFF FOR SALE** I've been to one too many yard sales where all they're selling is a few ugly, cracked mugs and some clothing from 1982. This is not worth your time. If you don't have anything decent to sell, throw it away or give it to charity.
- **PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD** Furniture is always a hit at yard sales. So be sure your best looking and largest items are easily seen by "drive bys." People tend to check out the place before they stop. If something doesn't catch their eye right away, they may keep driving. You want to attract as many people as possible to your sale. So, put your best items in a prominent place with the prices easy to see from the street. If you have some big-ticket items still inside the house, be sure you have a huge sign telling shoppers about it with an arrow pointing to your front door. Note: If you will be allowing people to enter your home, you must have another person who will escort them and keep an eye on them the entire time they are inside. Even if you are allowing someone to use your bathroom, follow them and wait. Some people just can't be trusted.
- **SET UP YOUR YARD SALE IN ADVANCE** Yard-salers start shopping at the crack of dawn, and are usually finished shopping by noon, so

having it all set up in your garage the night before is really helpful. No matter what you put on the sign or in the papers, people are guaranteed to show up early!

- **ADVERTISE!** You can advertise in the newspaper, but I find Craig's List and a local yard sale Yahoo Group to be way more effective. Also, you may be able to advertise in your local free papers, if you're giving the leftovers away afterwards. You can also put up signs at the grocery store, library and community center, if you have one nearby. Put up your signs the day before the sale with the day, date and time clearly marked. You may want to add your "big ticket" items to the sign like, "Furniture, Playstation, Washer & Dryer." This lets people know you mean business and they will want to return for your sale. If you don't mind getting a bunch of calls, you can always put your phone number on there. But, be prepared for people to call you to try to buy things before the sale. You might get a little extra money this way though. I've done it before and sold some furniture for more than I had planned to by allowing all the obnoxious phone calls. So, for me it was worth it. But, this is not something for the faint at heart to do! Send emails too. Tell everyone you know that you are having a yard sale and ask them to forward your email along. You can even list some of your key items in this email. It is a great free way to advertise.
- **PUT UP LOTS OF CLEAR SIGNAGE.** Start at the closest main road and put a big sign there. Try a yellow sign with BIG BLOCK LETTERS. On the main road sign, don't put a lot of info. People driving by won't see it. Instead, write "HUGE YARD SALE" and an arrow pointing to the street they want to turn on to get to your house. Continue with the same color scheme at every turn until you get to your house.

If you don't get traffic near your street, signs are going to be the best way to get people to your sale. With the right sign, you can get the soccer mom to stop on the way to the game or the dog walker out for their morning stroll. My last garage sale got more comments on how great my signs were than anything else. I laugh when I see a flimsy sign written in ball point pen taped to a pole, and wonder if the sign was left from a sale three weeks before. Go to any office supply store and for less than \$10 buy a package of at least 10 pieces of neon colored poster board. White will do nothing for you. Also make sure to invest in a BIG permanent marker. They have some that are two inches or so across. Get a couple...you'll dry them out. Make sure you have clear packing tape or a staple gun for wooden signs and then some thin wooden sticks. I used

some dowels that we had in the garage but you could also use paint sticks or anything light and firm. You'll use these to tape to the back of your signs to keep them steady in the wind. Print a map of your neighborhood and mark out the high traffic corners within about ½ to 1 mile of your house. Plan where you'll be putting the signs so you can put arrows on your signs directing customers closer and closer to your sale. An address is nice, but people won't be able to find them without the signs if they are unfamiliar with the area. Make sure to draw arrows pointing customers in the right direction. Make your signs simple so that they can be read from the furthest distance away. "Moving Sale", "Garage Sale", "HUGE Multi-Family Sale", "Empty Nest Sale" or even "Kicking my Husband Out Sale" with an arrow is really all you need. In smaller letters, you can add your address, the date and the time, but if your signs are good and you only keep them up until your sale is over, you don't need too much information to clutter up your sign. The bottom line is that you want people to come and clear out your junk on YOUR terms and your time line.

- **MAKE YOUR YARD SALE A GOOD SHOPPING EXPERIENCE.** Set things up like displays in stores. Put like items together, and try to put as much on tables as possible. Use a broom handle to hold clothing on hangers. Tie towel and sheet sets with pretty ribbons. Fold clothing neatly and place in piles by style and size. Line up books by size. Put all kitchen accessories in the same place and all the tools and yard accessories together in another section. Think of your garage sale as a big department store. Keep your items in categories. Things will sell faster and people will find more of what they want quicker.
- **GET CREATIVE** hang broom handles from the ceiling and use them to hang as much of the clothing as possible. If you have some really good clothing items you may want to consider constructing a "makeshift" dressing room with mirror. This is especially helpful if you are trying to sell designer clothing and dresses. The women will appreciate this and will be more prepared to buy something a bit pricey if they know it will fit them. You can hang sheets from the ceiling in a square formation against one wall and put a coat rack in there with a stool and a full-length mirror leaning against the wall. Again, watch these people. Keep track of what they are trying on!
- **BORROW** You can never have too many tables at a garage sale. Try not to put too much on the ground. In advance, ask friends and family members to borrow their folding tables. You can even cover some of them with old sheets and put sturdy boxes of different sizes

underneath that will allow you to raise up certain items allowing for easier viewing and a more pleasing shopping experience. Be sure to label everything you borrow so you can promptly return it when you are finished. People are very protective of their spare tables!

- **WATCH YOUR SHOPPERS.** I hate to say it, but people will steal anything, it's ridiculous. I've even caught people trying to switch price tags on stuff. Same goes for your money box, watch it carefully. The best solution for this issue is to create a barrier for shopping. If you have a good size driveway or yard, line up tables around the edges and make a space for people to "enter and exit" that you can keep an eye on. Even better, is to have a "cash-wrap" table. This is the place you send everyone to pay for their items. Designate someone to stay at this table the whole time. They will see everyone coming and going and you can also keep all the money in one place. Have plenty of bags and boxes on hand and extra newspaper to wrap fragile items. Keep some scotch tape for sealing the newspaper and also keep your master price list there as well. You can also offer shoppers baskets to carry their purchases in while they shop. You can also offer your shopping bags that you normally use for groceries as well. This will help the buyer and encourage more buying if they aren't holding piles of things. Keep a sticky note pad and sharpie tucked in your "fanny pack" to mark their name if you see them carrying a lot of things. You can offer to put them on the "cash wrap" table with their name on it so they can go back and buy more of your stuff knowing their goodies won't be snatched by some other shopper!
- **HAVE PLENTY OF CHANGE** You don't want to miss out on selling your old baseball glove for 2 bucks, because you don't have change for a \$20, do you? Make sure you get lots of quarters, too. I don't know why but a lot of people show up to yard sales with big bills. It seems rather odd, but they do it. I, on the other hand, like to go with a lot of small bills. I find it easier to bargain with a wad of ones than a twenty. But, to each his own. You can never have enough change so get twice as much as you planned to.
- **TOWARD THE END OF THE DAY, START SLASHING PRICES** You need to get rid of this stuff, not make a fortune on it. You can even put a sign that everything will be half price after a certain time. Some people will come back to see what's left. Don't worry that you will lose out because if you have priced things right, the good stuff will sell during regular hours. However, you may get rid of some of the junkier items late in the day by discounting. Remember, you are

getting rid of these items anyway. Which brings me to my next point...

- DO NOT BRING THE STUFF BACK INTO THE HOUSE IF IT DOESN'T SELL. You wanted to get rid of it, remember? Put it down by the curb with a sign that says "FREE" or load it right in to the back of your vehicle to take to the donation center or landfill. Just make sure you don't bring it back in!

THE DAY OF THE SALE

Here are some tips for getting the most money for the items you are selling. Some of this may be repetitive but it is worth repeating.

- BE PREPARED FOR EARLY BIRDS There WILL be people waiting when you open the garage door and some are even so bold as to knock on the door. If you don't want early birds, post a clear sign on the front of your garage that indicates exactly what time you will 'open shop' and stick to it. You will get some good traffic and good sales from the people who want first shot at a good deal.
- KNOW WHAT THINGS ARE WORTH You don't want to get rid of a rare collectible for \$1 if it's worth \$50 just because you were ignorant. If you have antiques or collectibles, you might want to get them appraised first. Or, you can browse eBay and Craig's List to see what similar items are selling for online.
- PUT A PRICE TAG ON EVERYTHING, AND LEAVE SOME ROOM FOR NEGOTIATION People will always haggle, but that's what the point of a garage sale is. You want to make the most money and the customers want to pay as little possible. You need to find a way to meet in the middle.
- PUT THINGS ON FOLDING TABLES OR SHELVES IF YOU CAN Hang clothing and put shoes in pairs. You may want to tie the shoes together. Customers are more likely to stay and browse if they don't have to work to see what you have. If it is higher off the ground like in an actual store, they'll see your things a lot easier.
- HAVE A \$1 TABLE OR A 25 CENT BOX This will encourage further buying and browsing and will keep people shopping. Just be sure your designated "cash-wrap" person knows what items are one dollar and what items are a quarter. And, give that person a break when it comes to bargaining. Whatever they tell the person their total is, that person will try to pay less. Have a large, easy to use and read calculator at the ready for your "cashier" too.

- **KEEP YOUR POSSESSIONS IN SIGHT** If you don't, someone will walk away with it. Also if you have any expensive items, make sure they are within sight of you at all times.
- **GET HELP** If you are expecting a lot of people then you need to realize that you can't do it alone.
- **HAVE A SNACK STAND** If you have kids or some extra volunteers, think about having a soda or coffee stand and possibly some donuts for sale. Garage sale shopping is hard work, and having snacks on hand is a great way to make a few extra bucks.
- **TALK TO YOUR CUSTOMERS. STAND UP AND STAY BUSY** Customers don't want to walk up to a messy garage sale where someone is sitting in a lawn chair with their arms crossed looking completely miserable. Keep organizing, folding, straightening and consolidating items to make your sale look great all day.

AFTER THE SALE

TAKE DOWN YOUR SIGNS There is nothing more irritating than signs from garage sales three weeks ago. Your neighbors, and the city, won't appreciate it. So make sure that you go out and take down your signs as soon as you close up shop. This will also stop the flow of traffic to your front door. Bag up anything of value that you didn't sell and make a nice donation to Goodwill, the Red Cross or any number of great charities who will happily take your items. Some will even come any pick them up and you might even get a nice tax deduction.

RELAX Sit back and count your money, have something to eat and drink and then take a hot bubble bath and go to sleep. You've earned some rest!



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