



## Tips for the Best Yard Sale Ever

### How to Profitably Give Unwanted Stuff a New Life

by Sarah Tarver-Wahlquist

**E**ach American discards an average of 4.4 pounds of personal garbage a day according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Half of what we toss can be recycled. A yard sale can both clear out the clutter and keep reusable items in circulation.

#### Assemble Merchandise

In assembling merchandise from all around the house, make it a family affair, with everyone contributing things to consider together. Before putting any item in the “keep” pile, ask: How long have I lived with this? How often did I

need it? How often will I use it now and in the future?

Check with neighbors and friends to see if they want to join in a multi-family sale likely to draw more potential buyers.

#### Advertise

Getting the word out is essential. Place a yard sale listing in a local newspaper, either for free or a small fee. Free online posting is available at *Craigslist.org* and *GarageSaleHunter.com*. Also, post flyers (on recycled paper) seven to 10 days before the sale along busy streets in the community.

On the event day, make sure that large, bright signs in the neighborhood lead buyers to the sale. Reuse cardboard from old boxes to save money and recycle signs and flyers afterwards. Cindy Skrzynecki, of Minneapolis, who has monitored the phenomenon, notes, “Shoppers tend to equate the size of a sign with the size of a sale, so a few large, well-placed signs may draw more people to you than several smaller signs.”

Skrzynecki says that holiday weekends or weekends that coincide with popular local events are excellent because, “You’ll provide a fun activity for people that stay in town.”

#### Set Up

How items are displayed is important.

Here's how to make old stuff as attractive as possible to buyers.

**The cleaner the better.** Make sure all items are presentable.

**Make items visible.** Arrange a display that's catchy and organized. Use tabletops and bookcases; even improvised surfaces can work, such as plywood atop buckets.

**Show clothing effectively.** Hangers are better than folded piles that get messy.

**Does this thing work?** Have an extension cord handy so people can test electrical devices, and provide a measuring tape for furniture and other large items. Have batteries on hand for testing items like flashlights or electronic games. Label things that don't work and price accordingly for those that know how to fix things or strip parts.

**Ensure the price is right.** All items should be clearly priced via a small sticker; buyers quickly tire of asking and sellers may not recall earlier answers. For multiple sellers, use a different colored sticker for each, remove the stickers as items sell, and use the totals from the stickers to divide profits at day's end.

**Use creative labeling.** Provide buyers with uses for odd items. Sunny Wicka, author of *Garage Sale Shopper*, says, "Sales can be made solely by suggesting a novel use." Also spark the shopper's imagination by combining art supplies—like old magazines, papers, markers, paints and knickknacks—on a table labeled "Great for Art!" or group household items, crates and blankets labeled "Going Away to College?"

**Prepare for early birds.** Yard sale pros arrive early to scour sales for the best deals. Be prepared to bargain or else make it clear that prices are fixed via a few friendly signs.

After the initial rush, consider accepting bargain offers. During the final hour, consider cutting prices in half.

## Ready, Set, Sell

Summer and early fall are good times for yard sales. Make it exceptional, a place where people will have fun and want to hang around (more browsing time often means more purchases).

## WHERE TO UNLOAD THE UNSOLD

**Electronics Industries Alliance Environment Consumer Education Initiative:** Many organizations will refurbish and donate used electronics to charities and nonprofits that can use them. Those that recycle ancient or broken equipment can be found at [ECyclingCentral.com](http://ECyclingCentral.com)

**ExcessAccess.org:** This service matches business and household item donations with the wish lists of nonprofits that provide pick-ups.

**Goodwill Industries:** Check the yellow pages or [Goodwill.org](http://Goodwill.org) to find a nearby donation site and store; 85 percent of profits support employment services.

**The Salvation Army:** Check [SalvationArmyUSA.org](http://SalvationArmyUSA.org) or the yellow pages to find the organization's nearest donation site (by zip code) or schedule a pickup (click Ways You Can Help); 100 percent of profits from sales fund its service programs.

**Vietnam Veterans of America:** Pick-ups usually can be scheduled the same week; accepts a full range of household items for use by veterans' families. [PickUpPlease.org](http://PickUpPlease.org)

Play upbeat music, set up a children's play area and maybe a kids' lemonade stand as cool drinks help keep shoppers refreshed and cheerful.

Consider sharing the fruits of family hobbies such as homemade items, plant cuttings or herbs in hand-painted clay pots and cut flowers. Shoppers appreciate such personal touches.

## Arrange for the Aftermath

Arrange a charity donation pick-up beforehand to truck away leftover items. The Salvation Army and Vietnam

Veterans of America regularly move still useful items into welcoming homes.

For those that enjoy throwing yard sales, consider organizing charity yard sales in the community. Engage a local place of worship, neighborhood association or school to help people recycle their old stuff while also raising funds for worthy causes.

*Sarah Tarver-Wahlquist is a frequent contributor to Green American magazine ([GreenAmerica.org](http://GreenAmerica.org)), from which this was adapted. For more tips, visit [YardSaleQueen.com/yardsale.htm](http://YardSaleQueen.com/yardsale.htm).*