



Planning a Garage Sale

A garage sale held prior to moving can help both lighten the load and bring in some extra cash.

Pre-plan

Pre-planning brings to mind details that otherwise might be overlooked in organizing a garage sale, highlighting the various steps necessary for its ultimate success. Allow at least three weeks for preparation.

- Check with local authorities for restrictions applying to garage sales. You might need a special permit or be required to pay a fee or collect sales taxes. Signs advertising the sale might be limited or prohibited.
- Consider a joint sale with one or more neighbors; share the work, fun and profits. The greater the assortment of items you have to offer, the more potential customers you'll attract and the more successful the sale will be.
- Decide where to hold the sale — the garage, patio, yard, basement or if other families are involved, a central or community location.
- Set a date and hours for the sale. Sales on weekends and warmer weather generally fare better. In some communities, there are "traditional" days for sales. Arrange for alternate dates in case of rain. It's best to avoid holidays.
- Let your insurance agent know you'll be holding a sale, and make certain your homeowner's policy will cover any liability for injuries.
- Start saving shopping bags and cardboard boxes for customers' convenience.

What to Sell

Go through your house with a record sheet or notebook, listing everything you want to sell. If you have fewer than a hundred items to offer, consider having a joint sale with one or more neighbors. Generally, proceeds are not taxable, provided the merchandise is sold for less than what you paid for it and you've held no more than a few garage sales in the past year.



Sorting It All Out

After identifying items you want to sell, the next step is gathering them all together and making sure they are tiptop shape.

- Gather all of the items in one place for convenience in pricing and making minor repairs. Sewing a gaping seam and adding glue or a nail can mean the difference between a sale and a “leftover.”
- Bundle various “go-togethers,” such as cake pans and a cake rack, all of which could be sold as a unit. Or, wrap a few unrelated items together as a “surprise” or “grab bag” specials.
- See that clothing and linens are clean, and that sizes are clearly marked. Preferably, iron them and put them on hangers or fold neatly. Pair shoes and mark sizes.
- If you’re having a sale with other people, be sure to mark each item with a code number and/or color so it can be identified easily when sold. This will eliminate questions about profits at the end of the sale.
- As you identify items to be sold, put price tags on them right away and take to the garage sale holding area. Don’t wait until just prior to the sale to start pricing. Price tags should be placed on the underside of dishes – never on top where the pattern could be damaged during the removal of the tag.

Pricing

Items should be priced according to their worth to consumers, not the seller. For items in good working order, charge about 20 - 30 percent of the original purchase price. Used clothing and books generally fetch lower prices.

- Keep prices in increments of \$.25 or whole dollars – for ease in figuring costs and change due. Remember, you can always go down on a price, but you can never go back up.
- When setting a price on each item or group of items, keep in mind that your merchandise is used and should be priced accordingly. Try to look at your items objectively. Look for a happy medium – not too high, not too low –



with enough leeway for a little bargaining. Make exceptions for the “collectibles” you think warrant a higher price.

- Mark “AS IS” on anything that doesn’t work or is in some way defective, and price accordingly.
- Place a price tag on each article, and list the prices on a record sheet. For convenience and to avoid lost tags, use the press-on tags available at stationary and office supply stores. Small pieces of masking tape will also work.

Advertising

They key to a profitable garage sale is to operate it like any successful retail business in a competitive market. One way to do this is to advertise cleverly and aggressively. Consider coming up with a slogan to use on large signs, as well as using balloons. Be sure to play up ad offbeat merchandise that mint intrigue and attract shoppers.

Let people know about your garage sales by:

- Running an ad in your neighborhood newspaper.
- Announcing the sale to members of clubs in your community.
- Putting signs in windows or on bulletin boards of neighborhood stores.
- Inserting a notice in your church newsletter or school newspaper.
- Distributing announcements throughout the neighborhood.

Put up signs in the area the day before your garage sale. Be sure to have a BIG sign at the sale site. Also remember to retrace your route and take down signs and announcements after your sale.

When making signs, BIG and BOLD lettering is a must. Include the date, times and address of the sale. Black lettering on white or yellow paper is very effective.

If you put up directional signs in your neighborhood, be consistent with their appearance so shoppers don’t get confused and attend another sale.

Don’t be surprised if you have shoppers arriving the night before the sale just to look around, or who arrive an hour before your posted start time. You must decide if you want anything sold before you are ready.



Displays

Before arranging your wares, remove from the sales area everything you don't want to sell. Cover with a sheet or drop cloth heavy items that can't be moved and attach a big "NOT FOR SALE" signs to them.

- Organize clothing by size and set up a rack on which to hang apparel. A clothesline stretched across the garage or a ladder suspended horizontally from the ceiling will serve this purpose.
- Boards set across sawhorses will serve as temporary display counter. Leave aisles wide enough for customers' convenience.
- Group similar items together. Use corrugated cartons to hold smaller article, compact discs, records, and books. Stand compact discs, records, and books on end for easy flipping.
- If possible, provide a convenient electrical outlet or extension cord for testing appliances.
- Have a tape measure on hand so shoppers can measure furniture to see if it will fit in a particular spot in their home.
- If you have a lot of clothes for sale, consider providing a mirror and makeshift dressing room. Make sure you have someone in charge of checking shoppers into and out of the room. In order to prevent shoplifting, it is wise to use cards with numbers that correspond to the articles of clothing shoppers want to try on.
- Consider making a sign for each area of your sale, such as Books, Magazines, and Music; House wares and Kitchen Gadgets; Odds and Ends; Everything on This Table 3 for \$1; and Surprise Grab Bags \$.25.

Security

There is always the possibility that your sale might be visited by people hoping to pick up something for literally nothing. To guard against this:



- Try to always have at least two people present so the sales area is never left unattended. A person alone in the selling area might be subject to physical intimidation by the unscrupulous. Shoplifters often work in pairs, so one can distract the seller's attention while the other takes wanted items. Be alert to these tactics.
- Instead of keeping your cash in a small box, wear a money belt to make change, and keep large bills in your pocket.
- Group similar items together. Use corrugated cartons to hold smaller articles, compact discs, records, and books. Stand compact discs, records, and books on end for easy flipping.
- Allow customers in the sales area only. Strangers might visit your sale solely for learning whether you have anything worth burglarizing later.
- If anyone brings a shopping bag or other container, ask that it be left with you until the decision of what merchandise to buy has been made.
- Keep an eye on people who loiter for no apparent reason, particularly those who seem to be watching you.
- Display small, easily concealed items in an area that will be easy for you to watch – perhaps near the checkout counter.
- Keep the doors of your residence locked while you are conducting the sale at your home. If you have a cordless telephone, take it with you, but keep it away from shoppers.

The most effective way of frustrating suspected pilferers is to follow them around and ask what they are interested in and whether you can help. Such close supervision will soon cause them to leave.

Ready, Set, Go!

Have everything ready the day before the sale so you will be ready to go at your advertised starting time. You'll need:



- Plenty of change, including dollar bills. Pick up coin rolls at the bank before the sale. Be sure you know how much change you have on hand to start with.
- An old fishing tackle box or plastic container that has divided sections to use for change.
- Paper and pencil for computing costs. (A small calculator is helpful but crucial if you have to charge sales tax.)
- A record sheet. Mark off without delay the items sold and price changes made.
- A trash container, which you should keep close by as items are sold so your sales area remains neat.
- Wrapping supplies – newspaper, shopping bags, cardboard cartons, twine, a stapler, and scissors or a sharp knife.

Have a firm CASH ONLY policy, with big sign to that effect. Accept checks only if you know the writer well.

Ask for a deposit if a customer wants an item “held.” It also is wise to set a time limit for holding items.

It’s a good idea to keep pets confined during the sale. Some pets can become agitated by crowds and unfamiliar people, or drive shoppers away. Paws can be stepped on by overzealous shoppers.

Bargaining

- Bargaining is expected. List price changes on your record sheet.
- Discounts, especially on major items, often will close the sale. Ten percent is a good beginning discount offer.
- Some shoppers might want to bargain with you at the beginning of your sale. Tell them you will discount everything after lunch if they come back.



- Reduce prices near the end of the sale. A cash profit, however small, is better than winding up with many leftovers.

After the Sale

- Divide up the profits if the sale was a cooperative effort, remembering to deduct the amount with which you began.
- Many banks charge a fee to count and roll loose coins, so you might want to let your children have fun doing that job.
- Keep the money in a safe place until it can be deposited in the bank.
- Remove all sale signs you put up.
- Consider donating any leftover items to charitable organizations such as Goodwill, the Salvation Army and children's homes. They generally give a receipt for donation so the value can be deducted on a donor's income tax return. Or, contribute leftovers to church rummage sales, resale shops, schools or community centers.

Congratulations

You've made a profit by disposing of all those things you didn't want to take to your new home...and wasn't it fun, too?