

Top Tips and Tricks for a Successful Yard Sale

Hosting a successful (and profitable!) yard sale will be a breeze with these 15 tried and true tips.



By: Ellen Ford

If you'd asked me five years ago if I ever thought I'd have a yard sale, I would have laughed in your face and said no with gusto. It seems like everyone I know grew up in one of two camps: those who yard sale, and those who did NOT. I was in the NOT category. As an adult, it wasn't until I started trying to find vintage furniture to remake that I (very apprehensively) hopped on the yard sale circuit. I'll admit that I still get overwhelmed, haggling still makes me a little nauseous, and that sometimes, a yard sale that looks promising can be a dud. BUT – I'm a convert.

Going to yard sales vs. having a yard sale? Two totally different beasts. We had a HUGE yard sale last weekend and I'm still recovering. I did some research on tips and tricks, put on my marketing hat to promote the sale, planned out the layout and prepped the heck out of everything we were selling.

In the end, it was COMPLETELY WORTH IT. We made more money than I ever expected, we got rid of a ton of (nice) stuff that was just taking up space, and we learned some valuable tips along the way. And I'm going to share them with you today so your yard sale can be successful beyond all expectation. Are you ready? Here we go:

TIP #1 – Location, location, location:

If you don't live on a well-traveled street, or live in a spot with no parking, maybe it's time to make a deal with a friend or family member in a better spot. Location is the difference between a home run and a dud, when it comes to yard sale success, so do your best to aim for the best location possible. It's worth it to check to see if you need a permit from your city for a yard sale, too. Nothing rains on a good sale like getting shut down. Bonus tip: if a friend/family member gives you the go ahead, make it a multi-family yard sale – people tend to go out of their way for two-in-one sales, estate sales, and moving sales.



TIP #2 – Pick the right date:

Some experts tell you Sunday sales are the most successful, as most of the population either makes plans for Saturday or reserves the day for family time or errands. Sunday worked great for us, but we also planned our sale for a three day weekend, so Sunday was sandwiched in the middle. A less common yard sale day of the week? Friday. If you think about it, you could actually make out really well with collectors and retirees by holding a sale on a Friday, and if you have the endurance, hold a Friday/Saturday sale to get as many customers as possible. In terms of the summer season, aim to have your sale before it gets blisteringly hot where you live. Once you set a date, keep an eye on the weather and come up with a contingency plan in case of inclement weather.

TIP #3 – Timing:

We heard over and over, “Start early so you don’t miss the early bird buyers.” So, we planned to start at 8am, thinking we were in great shape. Until 7:15am rolled around and we had a line of cars parked with several people asking to start shopping early. And once passersby see one person shopping, it’s all over. (Lesson learned – do not be the nice girl who lets that one lady who has to go to work at 8am “just take a peek.”) All of a sudden, we had shoppers ready to haggle, bargain and buy – 45 minutes before we were supposed to start the sale. We scrambled and managed it, but time your sale so that you can catch as many shoppers as possible, without having to scramble. With our unexpectedly early start, our sale went from 7:15am to 2pm.... but we also had straggler shoppers until after 3pm.

TIP #4 – Signage:

Most of your customers will learn about your sale from your signs, so make them as clear as possible, listing the location, the date and time of the sale, and the hot ticket items to be sold. Make sure you strategize where you’ll post your signs (respecting all city restrictions, of course) so that as many people as possible will see them. Have the signs ready to put out the day or night before helps, too – you’ll get the evening AND early birds making note of where their first stop should be in the morning.



I bought these waterproof corrugated signs from Staples, along with a few Sharpie markers, to make signs we could put out the day before that wouldn’t succumb to rain overnight.

TIP #5 – Advertise:

Getting the word out is critical. We posted an ad on Craigslist and had several people mention it specifically as the reason they came to our sale. See if there's a spot in your local paper where you can post an ad for free. And of course, let ALL of your friends and family know by posting the details of your sale via social media or email.

TIP #6 – PREP:

I would say 90% of the success of our sale can be attributed to the thorough, laborious prep work we did. Over the course of two or three weeks, we pulled items to be sold whenever we had a couple free hours, creating a landing spot for all items destined for the sale in a garage bay. A week before the sale, I started organizing, sorting, and pricing. The day before the sale, we grouped everything so that we could move everything out into the driveway/lawn in an organized manner, not a chaotic mess. We created a plan for what was going to go where, how it would be laid out, how many tables, shelves, clothing racks, etc. we needed and gathered them up. Essentially, we prepped for THREE TO FOUR WEEKS. Yes. That's right. Save yourself the stress and headache – don't try to throw a yard sale together overnight. You won't make money and it won't be worth it.



TIP #7 – Pricing:

Speaking of making it worth it, price everything so that it's a deal, and make sure you put a price tag on everything, to avoid on the spot brain freeze or haggling. The general rule is 50-30-10 – new, unused items get priced at 50% of their retail cost, slightly used items = 30% of retail, and used items = 10% of retail. Also, if you're selling books, CDs, or other small items, try a "Buy 1, Get 1!" or similar package deal. For customers, this feels like a great deal (so they buy more) AND all of that stuff you don't want any more goes away. By the end of our sale, I was ready to start giving books away to people just so I wouldn't have to box them up or move them again, but because we did a package deal, almost all of them sold.



TIP #8 – Enlist Help:

Putting on a yard sale is a labor intensive undertaking. If you have friends or family who can help you set up, work the crowd, man the cash “register”, or run other errands, I would highly recommend it. The extra sets of hands will be well worth splurging on pizza, donuts, beer, what have you, to say thank you.

TIP #9 – Stage the Show:

We ran out of tables to put small items on, so I got a little creative and pulled out a large tarp and some clean, blank cardboard to make a display on the ground. Guess what? Nothing on the ground sold. NOTHING. The lesson? Get everything up off the ground and onto tables, shelves, and clothing racks. Even if you have to fake a clothing rack with a sawhorse, do it. People browsed the...ahem...WELL-LOVED snowboarding jackets my husband put on a clothing rack far more than the adorable, barely worn baby clothes I had on the cardboard/tarp on the ground. It makes literally no sense – baby clothes are usually a hot ticket item at yard sales. And being a picky perfectionist, these were barely worn, excellent condition, name brand clothes. Next time, that stuff gets a prime spot on a table and we’ll see how it goes.



TIP #10 – Tools, scraps, etc.:

We had a steady traffic jam over in the “tool section” where my husband was selling old tools, as well as what amounted to a mini hardware store. He threw all of the boxes of screws, nails, fixtures, etc. that were either unopened or barely used out there and they sold like hot cakes! Even the old tools (that I totally made fun of for being “antique” with their sad old cords) sold out fast. Have old bricks, wood scraps, cement blocks, garden pavers, or bagged mulch that you’re not using? Price it and put it out. You’ll be shocked.

TIP #11 – Put the good stuff in plain view:

This is veering into Captain Obvious territory, but here’s where I almost went wrong with my layout. I had a plan in mind so that buyers in our driveway would see a few key, big ticket furniture pieces first... until my husband pointed out that by placing those items where I wanted them, the “drive-by” shoppers wouldn’t have a good view. And we wanted anyone driving by giving our sale the slow roll glance to stop. So, we reorganized the layout so that the antique mahogany bedroom suite was front and center, calling out “Yeah, you should stop. This is worth your time,” to everyone who slowed down to take a peek at what we were selling.



TIP # 12 – CASH:

Do. Not. Forget. The. Bank. Barely by the skin of our teeth, we remembered to go get plenty of ones, fives, tens and quarters. By the end of the day, we were swimming in ones and fives, but in the early morning, everyone was passing us twenty dollar bills for purchases of \$1.50. Eeeesh.

TIP # 13 – Treats:

Have kids helping out with your sale? Why not let them get in on the money making lesson by selling homemade cookies, brownies, donuts, muffins, coffee, or lemonade? You’ll be shocked at how much money they make.

TIP #14 – Stow the Little Ones with Family or Friends:

Kids helping out with baked goods is one thing but trying to keep track of a toddler while managing a yard sale is a totally different type of cat herding. Not only are you likely/hopefully going to be in a high traffic location (i.e. close to the road) but there will be strangers roaming around, and people buying the toys that your child might suddenly decide are NOT FOR SALE. If you can, save yourself the stress. Our daughter spent a blissful day with her Nana, unaware that we were unloading her baby toys that we'd been hiding in the basement to the highest bidder. She'll never know they're gone, we didn't have to stress about keeping an eye on her, and we made plenty of money to splurge on some new, age appropriate toys for her. Win-win.

TIP #15 – Let go of expectations, and be ready to do it again next weekend:

I thought I had a pretty good idea of what would sell and what would be in the driveway at the end of the day. But I was totally shocked. Some of the things I thought would be gone by 8:15am didn't sell and a few things I thought weren't even worth putting out got snapped up. I was chatting about it with one gentleman who stopped by and after he told me he's an antiques dealer, he told me that we needed to have another sale again in a week or two, because it's all about who stops by your sale. There might be an event or activity going on nearby that draws all of the people who you want to buy your baby clothes, your boating equipment, your tools. This self-professed lifelong yard sale pro advised that we give it another try and see if we hit it right the next time.