

Question: I would like to host a garage sale this summer, but I'm overwhelmed with the task. Can you tell me how to organize a garage sale step-by-step?

I love a garage sale. Not going to one, but – call me crazy - *hosting* one! For 12 straight years I've humbly displayed my clutter on the driveway, traded it for cash, and then basked in my clean and fresh home, free from unloved and unused items. But garage sales are labor intensive, which begs the question: are they worth it? They certainly can be. A weekend garage sale can fetch hundreds if not thousands of dollars. As with most adventures, though, a little organization goes a long way. Follow these five steps and you'll be on your way to garage sale success.

Step 1 - Build your Inventory Gather a couple boxes and tackle your house room by room. Collect anything you no longer want, use or need. Explore every closet, cupboard and drawer for potential merchandise. Don't forget the attic! Pile the goods in your garage and keep returning for more. Children can help by paring down their own toys – let them keep the proceeds as a bonus. Try not to get distracted with cleaning and organizing – this is strictly an inventory gathering phase. Timeline: 3-4 weeks before the sale.

Step 2 - Pick a Date Weekends in spring and summer are best, but try to avoid holidays. Open on a Friday (serious garage salers *always* start on Friday) and continue on Saturday if you have enough merchandise. Hot days and cloudy days are fine, but rain can really hamper your efforts – try to reschedule if the forecast calls for precipitation. Consider hosting with a few neighbors to increase traffic flow. Place a small ad in your local paper; they might even offer a garage sale package. Highlight top selling items like furniture, electronics, baby gear and collectibles. Timeline: 2-3 weeks before the sale.

Step 3 - Set Up Time spent setting up will directly affect your profits, so make sure you plan accordingly. Use folding tables to sort your inventory into groups – just like a store. Household goods, electronics, books, toys, and clothing are some common divisions. Wipe down and freshen up the merchandise. Once you've sorted, start pricing. Consider an item's original value and price it at 10 cents on the dollar – more if it's in awesome shape or highly desirable. Use your computer to print signs for large items (Treadmill - \$100 – Works Great!) as well as groups of items (All Books \$1). Keep as many items on tables as possible, and “merchandise” whenever you can – display the wine glasses near the picnic basket, coffee mugs with the espresso machine. On the eve of your sale, pick up \$40 worth of singles. You'll need them! Timeline: the week before the sale.

Step 4 - The Sale Rise early on sale day and move large and enticing items to the driveway. Place signs at the entrance to your neighborhood and at every turn. Money should be kept on your body in a purse or fanny pack, rather than in a cash box. Prepare for an early rush when you first open. You will have two kinds of customers – those who bargain and those who don't. I bargain with everybody – it's fun and I want to move merchandise. Don't forget to take a few snapshots of your day. It's a riot to look at them years later and see the things that have moved in and out of your life. Just for fun – put out a box of free items. Timeline: 8 AM – 2 PM sale day, longer if you're busy.

Step 5 - Wrap it Up Close your sale on the day of your choosing, when traffic has slowed – usually mid to late afternoon. Abide by the cardinal rule of garage sales: never take anything back into your home! Inventory what's left, for tax purposes, and then pile it in your car. Drive straight to your local donation center, picking up your signs along the way, and give a final farewell to your clutter. Timeline: last day of the sale.

Of all the garage sales I've hosted, only one was a bust. The others have paid for patio furniture, golf lessons, home improvements and even summer vacations. I've yet to regret a thing I've sold; in fact, I think it's necessary to clear out the old and stale to make room for the fresh and new. So if you're considering a garage sale this summer – go for it – you might make room for something fresh and new in your life!

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