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Sell your stuff with savvy

By Sarah Colburn Special to the Times

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Each year for the past 15, Patty Scott has pulled out clothes, books and housewares to set up a temporary store in her garage.

Scott is a veteran garage sale hostess. She said the sale gives her time to catch up with neighbors and make new acquaintances while bringing in a little extra money.

"It cleans things out and it's just kind of fun," Scott said.

Although garage sales can do all of the above, they also can be time-consuming.

Veteran garage sale hosts and professional organizers have tips for creating the ambiance that will have shoppers looking and lingering.

June Saruwatari, host of TLC's newest program, "Home Made Simple," shows homeowners how organizing can look like art. She suggests using the same techniques to stage a successful sale.

She recommends grouping similar items and displaying them to make them more appealing.

"You're staging a set," she said.

For example, she said, if there are a handful of same-sized shorts, fan them out in a colorful rainbow. Use matching hangers to hang clothing from racks or bars. Any clothing that's going on a table should be neatly folded and spread out rather than stacked, so it's accessible, Saruwatari said.

Instead of throwing jewelry in a basket, she proposes covering a piece of cardboard in black velvet and hanging the items from screws.

"Have it displayed beautifully so it's a kind of a fun, enjoyable experience," she said.

She also advises sellers to put books on a shelf rather than in a box and arrange them by color or size, stacking them vertically and horizontally to add interest.

Pricing

Pam Hix is the co-owner of Everything's Together Organizing Services in Minnetonka and she's been on HGTV's "TIPical Mary Ellen."

She's also provided garage sale advice on many local television shows.

To drive up sales, Hix advocates bargain pricing. If the seller has a bunch of thread and needles to sell, they should be bagged and priced as a set rather than selling pieces individually. Instead of pricing books at a quarter each, price them six for a dollar.

"You'll sell more, you'll be more successful and you'll have fewer things left over in the end," Hix said. Which is the point, after all.

In general, Hix said, people tend to overprice their merchandise. Expect to receive 10 to 20 percent of the retail value. If the item has never been used, label it as such and mark the price at 30 to 40 percent of retail.

It's always a good idea to display similar items together, but don't underestimate the power of room-grouping displays.

Hix once redecorated a bathroom and put out all the pieces that had been in the room. One buyer bought the whole lot.

In addition, she suggests assembling large items, such as tents. This draws

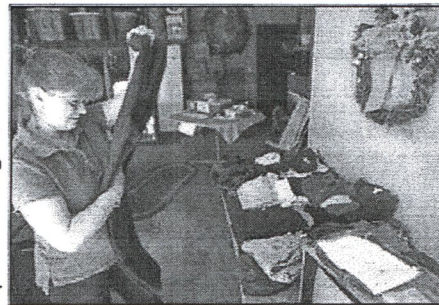


PHOTO CREDIT: Times photo by Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@sctimes.com

Patricia Scott folds items for sale during a garage sale at her home in St. Cloud.

More Info

PULL OFF A SUCCESSFUL SALE

June Saruwatari, host of TLC'S new show, "Home Made Simple," and Pam Hix, co-owner of Everything's Together Organizing Services, offer these tips for a successful garage sale:

- » Think about what's happening in the community as you plan a date for the sale. It may be good to have a sale during a city festival — or it may make for a horrible turnout.
- » Alert neighbors, so they know to expect extra traffic.
- » Collect items for the sale throughout the year.
- » Don't put out trash. If something is damaged or missing pieces, or if you're inclined to price it as low as 10 cents, put it in the free box or toss it.
- » Consider selling valuable items at a consignment store. You may get more for them there.
- » Plan ahead to allow time to distribute fliers and advertise in the local paper and on local Web sites.
- » Make your garage sale signs eye-catching. Use bright colors, clear penmanship and consider adding balloons or streamers. Advertise large items and items that are in demand. Be sure to check with the city about rules that may apply to signage.
- » Clearly mark things that aren't for sale — such as your son's bike.
- » Price items with removable stickers that won't leave a residue. Masking tape can melt on hot days.
- » If you're willing to barter, put up a sign that says so. It may be better to barter than to lose the sale.
- » Consider playing music at the sale. People tend to linger longer to hear a song.
- » Put pets in the house so they won't bother or scare off shoppers.
- » Put out chairs so people can take a break. Consider selling or providing beverages.
- » Set up a children's area where kids can color or play while their parents shop.
- » Lock your house, and don't give shoppers access to your home.
- » Never leave the money box unattended.

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attention to the sale and shows potential buyers the item is in good condition. Big-ticket items should be set up closer to the street to draw customers in, Hix said.

Best face

Not only does the garage sale set-up draw in customers, so does the look of the house.

Hix urges garage sale organizers to take stock of their front yard. Mow the lawn and water the plants.

"It gives the house a fresher look and makes everything you put out more appealing," Hix said.

When advertising the sale, be sure to list some of the choice items to draw people in. Also, try to coordinate the timing of the sale with neighbors.

"If you're having a five-family sale, it gives the appearance that there's a lot of merchandise to go through," Hix said.

Even though times may be advertised, expect customers the night before the sale and before the listed opening time in the morning.

Patty Scott advertised her sale for 8 a.m. but in the half-hour before she opened, 15 people came in to shop.

"The ones that come early are really looking for the bargains," Scott said.

Those shoppers, Scott said, tend to look quickly and inquire about large items advertised on signs.

Throughout the course of Scott's first day of her two-day sale, she had about 125 customers and made almost \$400. She closed the sale early the second day because most of the merchandise was gone.

Wrapping up

For Saruwatari, it's important to plan for the end of the sale before it even begins.

Decide whether it's more important to get rid of everything or make money.

That way, she said, there's a clear mission, merchandise can be priced appropriately and the seller can freely barter on items if the goal is to get rid of them.

She also suggests working with a favorite charity to schedule a pick-up of the remains the day the sale closes. If an immediate pick-up isn't possible, Saruwatari said to cover the items so they're not visible. Don't bring them back into the house.

"Get it out of your space and consciousness as soon as possible," Saruwatari said.

Sometimes, she said, a person is courageous enough in a moment to say, "I don't need it," but the longer it's around, the easier it is to bring it back into the house.

» If you're selling electronics, be sure to have batteries and extension cords on hand so people can try the merchandise.

» Have a tape measure on hand so customers can measure furniture.

» Provide bags for people to carry their purchases.

» Periodically straighten and organize merchandise.

Parting ways

People often struggle with giving up belongings though they may have become obsolete.

Saruwatari offers this checklist of things to think about as you debate whether to part with what you think you need:

» Truth: Consider who you are today and decide if the item represents who you are. When was the last time you used the item? Do you have the space for this?

» Love: Do you absolutely love it, not just kind of like it?

» Meaning: Does it have meaning for you, not for somebody else? If you have a box of your grandmother's belongings, do you need to keep everything in the box or just one item?

» Purpose: Does it serve a purpose? If you have 10 scissors, which ones are you using?

Tips on organizing a sale or shopping for bargains