

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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## The Art of the Yard Sale

If you were thinking about hosting a yard sale this year — there's still time!

I'm a huge fan of yard sales. By hosting one, we can make a little money, lighten our load, and pass discards along to folks who'll use them — including items thrift stores won't take. Folks visiting sales can get good deals and find unique items unavailable in the homogenized retail channel. In both roles, we keep objects out of landfills, reduce new products being made, and connect with folks who share our passions. This helps us make full use of our things and live a green, earth-aligned life!

So how can you hold a successful event? Here's some of what I've learned that'll help you save time, attract more visitors, pass along more goodies, earn more money, and have more fun. (And please feel free to email me your tips!)

### Eleven Steps to Success

**1) Choose your location.** It's great to have it at home or where the discards are. But some places are too inconvenient for folks to find or park, so you can choose another spot, such as a friend's house.

**2) Set your date.** Check with family members and others who might want to participate. Also invite neighbors to coordinate sale dates, to attract more buyers. You might also share preparation tasks and enjoy sale day socializing!

**3) Gather and group your discards.** This makes it easier for attendees to find their desired items. I have an area in my garage where I put my discards as I go along, in boxes labeled clothes, kitchen, office supplies, health & beauty, free, fix-it, creative reuse, etc. Then they're ready to go at sale time. Or you can pull and sort items in your pre-sale run-up.

**4) Promote your sale.** Start at least two weeks before. You can post notices on bulletin boards, craigslist, and local email lists. And tell your friends! Give the date, time, address, and any tips for finding your place. Describe your items, at least the categories, so people know if it's worth their time. Post key items in craigslist sections such as furniture, to draw people interested in them.

**5) Prepare your presentation.** Make it easy for folks to peruse your goodies. I put most items on large folding tables. You can hang clothes on a clothes rack or foldable clothes dryer. And provide a mirror! Find display items via craigslist or yard sales, or borrow from friends.

**6) Make directional signs.** It helps to have a chain of signs guiding people from major roads to your location. Make signs easily visible (fluorescent paper stands out) with big dark lettering. For signs at turns, add an arrow and your distance or road name, to entice folks to turn. In your promo, maybe mention the signs' color ("Follow the green signs from Main St."). I also put a Welcome sign in front, taped onto a big garbage can, with the sale date and time, parking instructions, and "no early birds."

**7) Consider creative ways to earn added income.** You might sell your crafts, plants, etc. Maybe put out business cards. Or sell snacks to attract and refresh. (Mention it in your promo and signs!) Avoid the waste of single-serve bottles by serving drinks (such as lemonade, iced tea, or water) from a big container (such as a covered pitcher or dispenser with spigot) into recyclable paper cups. Maybe offer healthy cookies or brownies. Post a sign with prices. Perhaps have one person in charge of food. It can be fun and educational for a child; offer them a percent of sales!

**8) Cash up.** Get enough cash to make change. I usually get \$20 broken down into bills and coins. Set up a secure holder for your money, such as a fanny pack. Learn how to identify counterfeit money, and maybe get a detection pen, to avoid losses. (See [www.wikihow.com/Detect-Counterfeit-US-Money](http://www.wikihow.com/Detect-Counterfeit-US-Money).)

**9) Finalize your setup.** Post directional signs a day or two ahead. I set up my tables the night before, putting out most items except expensive or fragile ones. Then I protect them with a tarp, so they're ready to go in the morning.

**10) Plan pricing.** Embrace this chance to practice negotiating! Decide in advance which items you want to sell at a decent price, vs. those you mostly want to just get out of the house. Some attendees do expect unfairly low prices, so planning will help you decide if you want to make the deal you can when someone's interested or hold out for a better one.

**11) After the sale.** Retrieve your signs, to be responsible and maybe reuse them. Find places to donate leftovers, including maybe putting a few items neatly at the curb with a "Free" sign. See more ideas for yard sales and reuse at [www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7a.html](http://www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7a.html).

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*Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of [The Organic Guides](#), and Editor and Lead Writer for [The Next STEP](#) newsletter. Email your questions about going green to [EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info](mailto:EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info) for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.*

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Published in the *Sonoma County Gazette*, August 2013.

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