

clean house

Too much clutter?
Clear it out for good
with a garage sale

BY LORI L. THARPS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AIMEE HERRING

Homeowner Huff
(left) and Doman
prep for a sale.





1. Garage-sale novice Janice Huff (left) and professional organizer Jen Doman inspect items for cracks and other imperfections that may hamper a sale. 2. Huff posts a color-coded pricing key in plain sight that buyers can refer to as needed. 3. Be creative with the way you set up your items at the sale, Doman advises: "Stage it so it looks like a store. Put out a bowl of candy to entice buyers to come by and browse."

On the East Coast they're called tag or garage sales. In some urban areas they're stoop sales. And in parts of the Midwest they're rummage or yard sales. Whatever you call them, these sales can be a fun and profitable way to clear out the clutter. Just ask Janice Huff, an on-air meteorologist for a New York City television station, who recently called in a professional organizer to help her pare down and sell off items she no longer has use for. "I've never had a garage sale before, but I've gotten to the point where I've run out of space in my house," says Huff, who shares a four-bedroom home in New Jersey with her husband, Warren, and their black Labrador, Malik. An admitted pack rat, Huff has a basement that houses a collection of lamps, furniture and knickknacks that she wants to get rid of. Huff also has two walk-in closets that are stuffed with clothes, shoes and accessories.

Enter Jen M.R. Doman, founder of Get It Together, a home, office and estate organization company in Brooklyn ([718] 783-2077; getit-together.com). Doman (shown sorting items with Huff, opposite page) helped Huff go through her belongings and decide what she could sell. "In general, 70 percent of the items you choose should be useful and practical," Doman says. "The other 30 percent can be quirky." Huff has plenty of the latter, like her collection of frog masks from Thailand. She also has nearly 400 pairs of shoes, some of which she knows should go. "I love, love, love shoes," Huff admits. "Those are the hardest to purge." Still, Huff says she's ready to reclaim her basement: "I've just really got to do it."

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TIPS ON SETTING UP THE SALE Doman suggests these do's and don't's: **Do sort through your belongings** to come up with the best selection. The more attractive the assortment, the more likely you are to move the merchandise. **Don't sell personal items** like underwear, bathing suits or bed sheets. **Do pay attention to seasons and weather.** Never have a sale during the big holiday season between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. **Do spend some time and energy on advertising your sale.** Try the local paper, or partner with other organizations that distribute fliers in your area. **Do start your sale early**—at 8:00 or 9:00 A.M. **Do be flexible with pricing.** Check the value of items on Web sites like ebay.com or comparison-shop at local retail venues. Color-code items with stickers that represent different price ranges—yellow for the "under \$1" items, green for the \$1 to \$5 range and so on. **Don't bring items that don't sell back into the house.** Prearrange for a pickup by a charitable organization at day's end, or drop off the leftovers. Or plan your sale to coincide with the neighborhood bulk-trash pickup and leave unwanted items at the curb.

Other Ways to Clear the Clutter

DONATE IT Items that charitable organizations generally accept include clothes, toys, dishes, furniture, kitchen gadgets and small electronics. All items should be "gently used" and cleaned before donating them. Investigate local organizations in your community that help the less fortunate, such as churches and homeless shelters. Or contact these national organizations:

The Salvation Army (salvationarmy.com) accepts most items, except mattresses. **Goodwill Industries** (goodwill.org) will take clothing and furniture donations, as well as small electronics such as microwaves. **Catholic Charities** (catholiccharitiesinfo.org) will accept different types of donations, from cars to clothing. To find a center near you, check the Web site or call [800] 919-9338.

SWAP IT Call up some friends who also want to get rid of clothes and accessories they no longer have a need for and organize a swap party. It's a great way to socialize and refresh your wardrobe.

SELL IT Consignment, or resale, shops offer gently used items at thrift-shop prices. Owners will pay well for items that are clean, in style and in good condition. Call beforehand to find out what they're looking for, how much they'll pay you (generally 50 percent of the total sale), and how long the item will stay in stock (typically 30 to 90 days). For tips, contact the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shops ([800] 544-0751).

—L.T.

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