It is summer and every street corner is adorned with a gaggle of garage sale signs. Garage sales are great places to pick up bargains, but not everything should be purchased at them. Some things aren’t a good idea from a money or safety standpoint. So today we are going to have two lists — what you should buy at garage sales (or secondhand) and those things you should not buy, no matter the price.

Always buy at a garage sale:

- **Solid wood furniture.** Even with small imperfections, most older furniture is sturdy. You can buy wood furniture secondhand at the same prices that you can purchase new particleboard pieces. Scratches can be covered with new paint, or one of the fill-in crayons available at the paint stores.

- **Books.** As long as the pages are intact and there’s no water damage, books can be a great buy at the garage sale. Stock up on your winter reading now.

- **High-end clothing.** Clothes are expensive, especially good brands. Most of the time, clothing is quite durable and will last a long time. Check clothing for stains, tears and missing buttons before purchasing.

- **Sports and exercise equipment.** Tennis rackets, bicycles and hockey equipment are often featured at garage sales. Check the items carefully before purchasing, but they are often a good deal. Free weights are another great bargain. They are often purchased with the best of intentions, but are sometimes not used much. However, never buy a treadmill at a garage sale. You don’t want to buy someone else’s problem and the new ones purchased at a store come with a warranty.

- **Dinnerware or glassware.** Dishes and glasses are often a steal at a garage sale. Just because someone has broken a few pieces or has grown tired of a motif, that doesn’t mean it won’t have a new life in your house. I often stock up on pretty, single plates at sales. If I’m taking something to a potluck or a friend’s house, I
don’t have to be so intent on getting the plate back. They are also great to hold a plate of cookies or a cake for a gift. Be sure to check for chips or cracks that can harbor bacteria before purchasing.

Now that we’ve talked about good things, let’s take a second look at things that should probably never be purchased at a sale:

- **Bike helmets.** Helmets are designed to withstand one crash. So when you buy one secondhand, you never know if its life is used up.

- **Cribs and car seats.** There are so many recalls on these items that it is difficult to keep up. If you buy one that has been recalled, all your money is for naught. Car seats are also a one-crash item, so like the bike helmets, its one crash may already be behind it.

- **Mattresses and upholstered furniture.** As much as we hate to admit it, we have a bedbug infestation in many areas of the United States. We’ve been slower to have the same numbers here in Alaska as in the Lower 48, but the bedbugs are here, so don’t bring them into your house to infest the rest of your furniture.

- **Footwear.** Shoes conform to the feet that are wearing them. Those feet are probably not exactly like your feet. If they look unworn, they might be a good buy, but otherwise, give them a pass.

- **Socks, underwear and swimsuits.** These items were probably washed prior to the sale, but they just fit too closely to the body to chance purchasing them used.

Garage sales and secondhand purchases can make sense to stretch your dollars. Just make sure you make careful purchases.

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