



Overcome Auction Phobia

Learn how get over your fears of bidding at auctions, enjoy the auction experience and take home the items you want.

By Jean M. Fogle

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Farm Auctions Auction phobia is a debilitating disorder.

It interferes with the pleasure of going to auctions, bidding on interesting pieces and the thrill of conquest.

The first auction I went to, I fell in love with an old wheelbarrow. As I stood admiring it, the bidding started; fear washed over me and kept me from bidding on my heart's desire. I stood stiffly, afraid to move or make eye contact, and watched as that incredible bargain went home with someone else.

I like to blame my phobia on Dick Van Dyke. I still remember the episode where he went to an art auction.

Watching the auction, Dick pulled on his earlobe, scratched his nose and nodded his head. Astonished at how high the price was climbing, Dick wondered who was bidding. When the auction ended, Dick found out he was the high bidder--each move he made was interpreted by the auctioneer as a bid--and hilarity ensued. I knew if it could happen to Dick, it could definitely happen to me!

© Sandy Hevener I eventually learned to get friends to do my bidding, but the day came when no friend was in sight and I wanted - no, needed - that weathervane!

With my two boys cheering (jeering) me on, I jumped in. Heart racing, pulse pounding and knees knocking, I found myself bidding; in a matter of seconds, I was the new owner.

As an avid gardener, I spend most of my time at auctions ferreting out garden bargains. I still get an aerobic workout from my accelerated heart rate and I improve my lung capacity by shouting out bids, but now I am a seasoned veteran. Here are some hints to make your auction experience easy and enjoyable.

Finding the Auctions

Most rural newspapers list the local auctions on a certain day. If you haven't noticed them in your paper, call the office and ask what day the auctions are listed. Scope out the auctions in print or go online to the newspaper's website and search. Once you find the listings for the week ahead, bookmark the site so you can check back on a regular basis.

County websites often list local businesses, so search there for auctioneers. Most auction services now have websites that list what is being sold, when and where. Try the National Auctioneers Association site (www.auctioneers.org) to find auctioneers in your area or use a search engine like Google; simply type in "auctioneer services" plus the name of your county and state. My favorite place to search is www.auctionzip.com; it's easy to use and has links to various auctions so you can preview the items up for grabs.

There are two types of auctions: estate and specialty.

Estate auctions involve the sale of property left by a person at the time of his or her death. An estate auction can involve the sale of personal and/or real estate property; they usually have a wide array of merchandise, from the kitchen sink to a crocheted toilet paper holder. Many estate auctions are held on the property of the deceased, so be ready to drive a distance and park in farm fields if it's rural.

Specialty auctions feature just one type of merchandise--clocks, guns, cars, farm equipment, antiques and the like.

Attending auctions with an experienced friend will help you learn the ropes. Listen attentively to become familiar with the auctioneer's cadence; some auctioneers are easier to follow than others, but listening without the pressure of bidding makes them easier to understand.



Watch the way the bidding flows and how others show their bids. If you find something you need at this auction, get your friend to bid for you and observe how she does it. Having an auction mentor makes understanding auctions much easier.

Going to the Auction

Farm auctions always have interesting parking arrangements.

Trucks park along the road at precarious angles and the overflow of cars ends up in farm fields.

At one auction, my sister managed to get my parent's new car stuck in a muddy field. Since it required towing, it's yet another story the kids love to tell and retell. Take a vehicle with high clearance and plenty of room to haul your treasures home (borrow one if you must). Events held at auction centers generally have decent parking.

Before you begin to preview the items up for sale, find the office and register so you can bid.

To obtain a bidding card, you will need to show at least one form of identification, and give your name and telephone number. On the card there's room for you to write down what you bought and how much you paid for each item so you can keep track of the money you spend.

Once you have your bidding number, you can start identifying the items on which you want to bid. Auctioneers will point out obvious flaws such as cracks and chips, but you should carefully inspect the pieces you are interested in since all items are sold "as is."

Try to create a mental reference as to where your desired pieces are located. Many auctions use two auctioneers; knowing where you need to be at what time will keep you from missing out on any bargains.

Auction Survival Kit

Sunscreen: No matter what the weather is calling for, take sunscreen. Every time I have forgotten it, the weather cleared and the sun came out.

Also, the rule of auctions is that the one item you want will be one of the last things offered, so you'll be spending a lot of time standing out in the elements.

Water: Take a big bottle; talking to everyone and shouting your bids will keep you thirsty.

Cash: While you can write a check or put your auction purchases on a credit card, you will need cash for food.

Auction food is often prepared by local organizations as fund-raisers. I always check out the pies since they are homemade and worth every penny of their price.

Boxes and newspapers: You never know what you might buy at an auction, so be prepared with packaging materials.

Bidding

When the piece you covet comes up for auction, the auctioneer will start by suggesting an opening bid.

Rookies often want to jump right in, thinking this is the lowest bid they will take. Since the price they mention is only a suggestion, wait and let someone else open the bidding.

Once the bidding is active, add yours by holding up your auction number or showing some other clear signal that you want to be in the bidding. Experienced auction-goers exhibit more subtle bidding techniques. Once you're in, the auctioneer or his assistant will continue to make eye contact to see if you want to increase your bid; if not, a clear shake of the head indicates you are done bidding.

Remember the amount you last bid. My boys love to tell about the time, in the frenzy of bidding, I bid against myself--they never tire of telling the story. In the excitement of bidding, you might get caught up and bid over your limit, so have a firm idea of the maximum you will pay for an object.

Having a limit will keep you from getting carried away and spending more than you want. If you enter the bidding late, it is sometimes hard to catch the eye of the auctioneer or his assistant, especially at a crowded auction. This is when jumping up and down and shouting will be helpful. Newbies often miss items they want because they couldn't catch the



auctioneer's eye. If you win the bid, officials will ask for your auction number, so be sure to have your card handy. At most auctions, once you've won the bid, you are responsible for the item. Larger items such as furniture can stay put until you check out, but smaller purchases should be kept with you or placed where you can see them.

Absentee Bidding

The most common way to bid is in person, at the auction. But if an auction takes place when you can't attend and you know there is a piece you would like to buy, you often can participate by absentee bid. A staff member will then do your bidding. Absentee bids require prior credit approval or a deposit. Contact the auction house to get the forms for absentee bids.

Cell phones have made telephone bidding easy. To bid this way, you need prior approval and often a deposit that will be returned if the piece is not won. On the day of the auction, the bidder will be called when the piece is coming up and a staff member will do the bidding. It is best to give the staff member an idea of your limit since bidding can go rather quickly.

After you've won all your treasures, you will, of course, need to pay for them. Staff members will total your purchases at the auction office. Auctions accept cash, credit cards and local checks. Some auctions require a bank letter of credit to prove that the bidder has the funds to pay for the item.

If you have won a large piece you can't remove that day, arrange a time to pick it up when you check out.

What You Might Find

Over the years, I have collected many nice pieces for my gardening addiction at auctions.

Ranging from downright cheap to moderately expensive, there are bargains for every budget. Most of my old gardening tools--including unusual, old rakes and wooden-handled shovels--were purchased for under \$5. Watering cans have become hot items, but you can still find them for reasonable prices. Look for old garden furniture; it is often sold far below the price of new furniture. I once bought an old park bench for \$75 and I often see wicker pieces sacrificed for very low prices.

Plant containers abound at auctions and can be anything the imagination can visualize. Wooden boxes, old crocks and graniteware look lovely filled with flowers.

I like to search for unusual pieces to use in the garden; one auction yielded an old lightening rod that now tops our gazebo. In my garden: Old wooden ladders support climbing plants Sections of wrought iron fences serve as backdrops to flowers. Blue telephone insulators are often sold by the box; I laid a strand of mid-sized Christmas lights and placed the old insulators over the bulbs. When night falls, the insulators glow a lovely blue and light the way to our deck.

Keep your eyes open and your imagination active, and you'll find some unusual garden accents.

This spring spend some time at auctions and become familiar with the process. You'll find unusual bargains and have fun in the process. Happy bidding!

About the Author: Jean M. Fogle is a freelance writer and photographer who is passionate about gardening and dogs. She can be reached at her website, www.jeanmfogle.com.

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