

EXTREME GARAGE MAKEOVER:

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR GARAGE ONCE AND FOR ALL

By Tonia Tomlin

Is your garage filled with items you don't need – or worse yet, useless, impractical items you're hanging onto thinking that you might need them some day? If so, you are not alone.

For many, the garage – though technically a place to keep automobiles protected from the elements – has become more of a catch-all space for items such as bikes, toys, trash cans, tools, garden machines, etc.

Studies show that nearly 32% of people who own a two-car garage can only comfortably fit one vehicle into the garage because of all of the other stored items taking up space!

While a garage can be a great place for storage, too often, homeowners lose functionality as the garage becomes a hodge-podge of items that really don't have any other place. The sad part is that, over time, many of these items become no longer useful or practical, leaving garages everywhere filled with clutter.

It's easy to procrastinate when it comes to getting the garage organized, but the sheer space-saving alone can be invaluable, as it can allow for extra storage space – even work space.

Here are some tips for giving your garage a makeover:

First, have a plan. Don't look at the garage as a whole entity; you can get overwhelmed easily. Pick one specific area where you would like to start. Then work clockwise to keep yourself on track. Creating a plan of action before you start in the garage is a necessity because of the project's size.

Second, sort through all of your garage items. Throw away cracked, chipped or broken items that simply take up space. If you haven't repaired them yet, you probably won't. Then make a donation bag for items you haven't used for at least a year. Keep in mind: Even though you don't use the item anymore, it may be very useful to a charity, not-for-profit organization or person in need.

Third, arrange all items by category. Put all the sports equipment, camping gear and holiday decorations together. By categorizing items, it is easier to decide what organizing systems will be the most effective. After the sorting and purging process is complete, then you can move on to cleaning, painting and refurbishing the area.

Here are some tips for arranging specific garage items:

SPORTS EQUIPMENT: Take the time to examine each sports item. Ask yourself how long it's been since you've used that basketball or ping pong table – and answer honestly! Once again, donate the items you haven't used in the past year. If items are broken, worn out or cannot be repaired, throw them away. Make sure that any items you decide to keep are clean and repaired before you store them. Storage of sporting equipment can be done in two different ways: current season storage or year-round storage. Either system will allow you to easily locate the equipment when you need it. Always label your sports gear, so putting it back will be easy for the entire family.

TOYS: Sort toys by either the appropriate age category or by the collection. An example is a train set: Store all the accessories with the track. Or, keep age 2-3 year toys together and 4-5 year toys in separate bins to make cleanup easy and maintenance free. Keep toys in fun, bright-colored bins that are labeled with the child's name. If your child shows no interest in the toy, donate it.

GARDENING SUPPLIES: If you hire a lawn service, consider getting rid of your yard equipment. Of course, if you enjoy gardening or yard work, keep the necessary tools and items, but donate the usable items you don't need. If you enjoy lawn and gardening work, sort and categorize all of your items. Place them where you have easy access to those tools you use on a regular basis.

TOOL TIME: Organize miscellaneous tools by different hobbies. If you regularly do woodworking, store hammers, screwdrivers and drills together. Finding the appropriate containers will be easy when you have the tools sorted out. Pegboards with shelving underneath are great for these items. Clearly label all of your containers. That is a helpful technique for when you need to quickly locate an item.

SEASONAL DECORATIONS: Seasonal items should be stored together. If holiday decorations are stored in both the attic and garage, decide which location is the best for all of it. It is much easier to store like items together, so when you need them, you can find them without having to search. After all, the goal is to have a place for everything!

COMBUSTIBLES: What should you do with gasoline or charcoal lighter fluid? Store all gasoline and other flammable fluid in a dry, cool place. Never just throw away gasoline, paint or other toxic waste substances. Contact your local toxic waste professionals to find out locations for proper disposal. If you don't want to call to dispose of these items, donate them to someone who can use them.

Now that you have tips on where to start and how to categorize similar items, what type of organizational system should you use? I suggest that you research and study at least three different types of systems. The amount of garage equipment you have plays a big factor on the system you choose. Wall-mounted systems for bikes and ladders are a great alternative, leaving the garage floor space open. Be sure to pick the system that best fits your needs and is functional for your lifestyle. Some other organizing systems you might want to consider are offered by www.garagetek.com, www.closetmaid.com and www.closettailors.com.

Also, if you need help in getting the garbage out of your garage, consider using a service such as www.1800gotjunk.com.

Commit to getting – and keeping – your garage organized, as this can be a terrific way to protect your investments and turn the garage into a functional space. Storing, cleaning and repairing the expensive equipment warehoused in the garage can help save you money, time and energy. You won't no longer need to search for items once they're properly put away. In addition, shouldn't your car have a place of honor under a covered roof? After all, it is one of your largest investments. And just think, if you effectively use containers, you will save lots of money by not buying items you thought you needed. With good organization, you can get right to work in a clean, functional and useable garage!

Tonia Tomlin is the Founder and President of Sorted Out™ and Sorted Out Publishing. Tonia is an author, publisher, speaker and mother of twin girls. She has been featured on HGTV's *Mission: Organization* and is the author of the book *Chaos 2 Calm: The Moms-of-Multiples' Guide to an Organized Home*. For more information, please email: Tonia@SortedOut.biz or visit www.SortedOut.biz.