How To Organize Your Garage

By Cathy Johnson

Are you one of those people who stashes everything in the garage except the family vehicle? Join the club. Everyone starts out with the goal of keeping the garage nice and tidy so there is plenty of room for the car, plus lawn care equipment, sports gear and holiday decorations. But little by little, boxes from the house get moved to the garage, new furniture replaces old, and all those items you just had to buy at the flea market start taking up space in the garage. Month by month and year by year the piles and stacks grow, and the chore of organizing the garage gets put off.

Get yourself psyched up to organize the garage by imagining how nice it would be to have an area in the corner to work on hobbies. Or think about how much better your car will look if you can park it in the garage and protect it from the sticky mess that falls from your neighbor's tree.

Set aside a couple of weekend days when you can sort through everything, and make a real effort to get rid of things you don't need. Have a lawn sale, donate items to charity, or simply throw them away if they are unsalvageable. Then take a hard look at what's left.

Make a list of items that have to stay in the garage and a list of items that could go elsewhere. (Consider renting a storage unit if you have a large amount of files, furniture or other bulky items that take up a lot of space.) If you want to use the garage for working on building or crafts projects, designate an area specifically for that purpose. Place all the workbenches, drafting tables, tools, etc. together and assemble shelves, bins, etc. to keep everything within easy reach. Home improvement stores are a great place to pick up countertops and tabletops that can be used to create a space for working on building projects, crafts and art projects.

Visit home improvement stores, hardware stores and discount stores to check out the huge variety of wire racks, pegboards, bins, hooks, clips and shelves that are available to help you get organized. You'll also find special hooks and hardware at sporting goods stores for hanging bikes on the wall or from the ceiling. Heavy-duty chains and S-hooks also work great for storing tools in a small amount of space.

If you're lucky enough to have some extra space along a wall, buy a few durable storage cabinets and shelves that are specifically designed for holding tools, lawn equipment, sports gear and household maintenance supplies.

Get in the habit of recycling household items that could be used to store things in the garage. Old cereal boxes, shoeboxes and detergent boxes can be used to hold craft patterns, small tools, sponges, duct tape,

etc. Baby food, jelly and pasta jars can be recycled to hold screws, nails, hooks, fasteners, etc. (To save space, nail the jar lids underneath a shelf and screw the jars to the lids after you've filled them.) They will always be within easy reach, but they're also out of the way and won't spill everywhere.

Arrange seasonal items such as Christmas decorations in one area and label the boxes so you can find outdoor lights, tree decorations, outdoor displays, etc. Invest in large plastic boxes with lids to protect your items from dust, moisture and insects.

Look for storage cabinets and shelves that can fit snugly against the garage wall. If you buy new kitchen cabinets, consider hanging the old ones in the garage for storage. You'll be amazed at how organized you can be once you have access to cabinets and shelves for storing things. Old dressers and trunks can also be excellent for storage. Dresser and file cabinet drawers can hold everything from maps to magazines, kids drawings, or woodworking patterns.

Plastic milk crates are an inexpensive storage solution for children's toys, lawn sprinklers, sports equipment and gardening tools. They hold a lot and can be stacked if necessary to make room for more.

Visit a few stores that sell garage organizers, wall racks, etc. Once you've looked at a few displays, you should get some good ideas for putting your own garage in order.