



Declutter Your Garage



Give this neglected space an organizational makeover – and make enough room to park, too.

Can't fit your car in the garage? You'd like to do some gardening, but you have no idea where your pruning shears might be hiding? Are you stepping over a jumble of scooters and bikes that your kids have outgrown? It's time to take control of your garage, says Helena Alkhas, a San Diego-based professional organizer and a NAPO (National Organization for Professional Organizers) instructor for new professional organizers. Here's how.

Purge

What do you need to keep? What can go? The easiest way to purge if you're not doing it all at once is to start from the entrance, working clockwise. When that purging session ends, close the door. When you're ready, come back to where you left off. Don't get distracted by everything else. Make piles for recycling, donations and trash. "For the sake of simplicity and convenience, I work with charities that send a truck to remove all that my clients won't keep," says Alkhas. Cans of paint can be taken to local paint stores that recycle.

Clean

Give your garage a thorough cleaning from top to bottom once you've culled your belongings, Alkhas recommends. This will most likely be the only chance you'll have to see the space empty until you move again!

Plan

"Identify the types of things you'd like to store," says Alkhas. Common items include luggage, sports equipment, bikes, camping gear, tools, paint, chemicals and holiday/seasonal decor. "Think about where would be the most practical area to place them and how easily you'd like to retrieve them," she adds. Before buying anything, measure (then measure again!) your space. "Create a plan that includes any pipes and equipment you may have there, such as a water softener and the phone/cable TV box," Alkhas advises.

Think vertical

The ceiling is your friend. If the height in your garage permits, install ceiling racks to hold large bins and suitcases. Your most-used items should go on the walls for easy retrieval. "While cabinetry can hide the clutter, its depth will really limit what can be stored in there, unless you have a large garage," Alkhas notes. She's a big fan of shelving-and-hooks systems for optimal use of space. You'll find these systems in retail stores or through specialty companies. Specially designed wall-mounted brackets can store bikes out of the way.

Store for visibility

Once you've installed shelving, you're ready to add bins for storing all the things that you won't hang on hooks or store elsewhere. "I suggest choosing clear, see-through bins that allow you to spot what you need right away," says Alkhas. If you choose colored bins, just make sure they're clearly labeled.