



SEATTLE@HOME

Friday, June 22nd 2007

Get Organized: Reclaim your garage

Just think: You could even park your car in there

By LAURA LEIST
SPECIAL TO THE P-I

The garage. Do those two words make you want to cringe? If so, you're not alone.

In the spring did the thought of digging out the lawn mower and yard tools make you want to give up and call a yard service?

Was it too much work to locate the camping gear for a quick Memorial Day weekend getaway?

Has your car (probably the second-biggest investment you've made) been relegated to the driveway so you can store "stuff" worth a fraction of that cost?

In a survey last year, the National Association of Professional Organizers asked which room was the most disorganized. Some 38 percent of those responding said it was the home office, while the garage came in second at 19 percent.

In my experience these are the two rooms that are the most difficult and time-consuming to organize; which is why my last article focused on the home office (goto.seattlepi.com/307575) and this one will help you reclaim your garage.

Perhaps you can relate to some of the reasons why a garage enters a state of chaos:

- You moved and the things that did not find a place in the new house have decided to make their home in the garage -- whether or not you really need them.
- When you aren't sure what to do with something, you toss it in the garage.
- You've inherited a bunch of stuff you don't know what to do with.
- You're a pack rat and can't let it go because you might "need it someday" or you "paid good money for it."
- You just have too much stuff!

Some garages may desperately need a Dumpster and a major overhaul; others may need only a bit of refining. Whatever the size of your project, you need a plan.

Your plan should include:

- How you will use the space
- What will be stored
- Who will participate
- When you want the project finished

Armed with a plan, you're almost ready to get started, but you will need some supplies:

- Garbage can/bags
- Recycle bin
- Lots of boxes of various sizes -- for donations and to help you sort
- A sense of humor and a willingness to make decisions and let go!

Notice that I've not asked you to purchase anything at this point; but if you must, purchase several plastic bins in various sizes. These can be used to help you sort and later to store items for visible, quick access.

If your garage mess requires the assistance of a trash bin and some Advil, plan to spend a lot of time sorting. You will need to make many decisions about what will stay and what will go. Initially, you may benefit most from doing a macro-sort and deciding what is trash and what's a treasure.

A treasure is anything you keep that still serves a useful purpose or is truly a treasure in the form of memorabilia. Trash -- well, I don't need to define that one for you. Just remember, as you are sorting: clutter results from decisions not made.

A macro-sort can be very helpful when you have years of accumulation. It also can be done in phases; you certainly don't have to do it all in one day. Just by eliminating the things that no longer serve a purpose in your life, you will have freed up space to store the stuff you need and use.

While you are working on the sorting process, create a list of the categories of things you will store in your garage. That might include yard equipment, tools, camping gear, sport activity gear, holiday decor, painting supplies, car supplies, the Costco stash, earthquake supplies, garbage and recycling bins, refrigerator, freezer, kid's toys, etc.

After you've sorted, you'll be able to see the volume of each category and it will become clearer as to how you should use your garage space. Design your space so that the items used frequently are in the most accessible places. Don't forget to look up -- there are many storage opportunities up high for items not used more than once or twice a year.

It is much easier to shop for products that will help you organize the contents of your garage after you know how much volume you have in each category and the amount of space you have to store it in.

There are many products to help you organize your garage. So many, in fact, that it can be tough to figure out where to begin. You'll need to determine if you want everything behind closed doors or if open shelving and pegboard will do the trick.

Here are a few products you might want to consider for your garage:

Onrax overhead storage rack

Weight limit 500 pounds; distance from ceiling is adjustable; up to 112 cubic feet of storage; 4-by-8-foot unit is \$249 from onrax.com, 866-637-8828

Hoist Monster bike hoist

Perfect for mom's and dad's bikes that may be used only once or twice a year. Rope locking mechanism prevents accidental release. \$31.99 on sale (regularly \$37.99) at organize.com, 800-600-9817

GearStash storage system

A simple, quick way to store all the gear for everyone in the family. 1 1/4 feet wide, with two vertical hanging strips, \$75; 2 1/2 feet with four strips, \$115; 5 feet with eight strips, \$185; at gearstoragesystems.com, 866-488-7744

Aluminum Folding Work Bench

The perfect solution for small spaces. Can also help in the kitchen or laundry room, even as a desk. 12 inches tall, 44 inches wide, 18 inches deep; \$139.99 at organize.com, 800-600-9817

BunjiPeg

Easier to use than hooks on pegboard, and you don't have to worry about the pegs falling off as hooks do. \$9.95 for 40 pegs and 18-foot cord; \$19.95 for 100 pegs and 40-foot cord, at bunjipeg.com, 919-571-1283

Snap-N-Stack

Stackable, storage boxes; helps contain and transport lots of small, similar "stuff." Utility Organizer Box includes two trays, each 4 1/4 inches tall by 12 1/4 inches square; remove only the tray you need; \$12.99 for the two-layer combination, at organize.com, 800-600-9817

Aluminum Can Rack

Holds six aerosol cans or flashlights for quick, easy access. Made from rust-proof aluminum. Also good for pantries. 32 1/2 inches tall by 5 1/2 inches wide and 5 inches deep; \$44.99 at organize.com, 800-600-9817

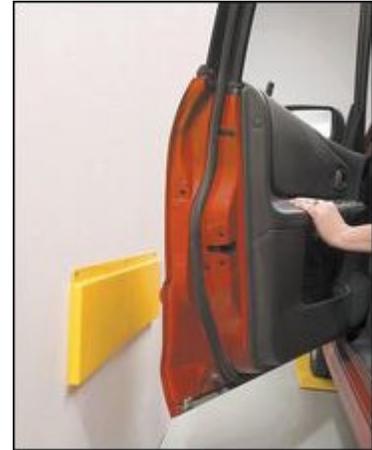


 zoom

GearStash
storage
system

Pro Park Wall Guard

Polyethylene protection against chipping and denting your car's doors; 7 inches tall by 24 inches wide for \$12.99 at organize.com, 800-600-9817



 zoom

Pro Park Wall Guard

Final tips and thoughts:

- Recycle boxes not being used, unless they must be saved for warranty reasons. They are a big space-waster.
- Don't be afraid to let go; you're not going to miss it, especially if it has lived in a box for years and you'd forgotten it was there.
- Your garage is an extension of your home. What impression do you leave with your neighbors and people who pass by on the street when the garage door is open?
- What are you waiting for? Get started now while the weather is perfect for this project. You'll be thankful this winter when you can park in the garage and don't have to scrape windows.

Laura Leist is president and founder of locally based Eliminate Chaos LLC. Her latest book is "Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life" (Sasquatch, 212 pages, \$19.95), available at bookstores or on her Web site, eliminatechaos.com. She can be reached at laura@eliminatechaos.com.

© 1998-2007 Seattle Post-Intelligencer