

ORGANIZING

Are you ready to reclaim your garage?

Happy spring! I hope you've been able to enjoy some time outdoors on the warmer days. Lawn mowing season is in full gear, and many people are working on their vegetable and flower gardens. Or maybe like me, you're enjoying trips to the Kingsport Farmers Market, where you can enjoy the fruits and vegetables of someone else's gardening

efforts. As you enter your garage for supplies to begin these tasks, odds are that over the fall and winter, your garage has accumulated some clutter and may need some attention.

Garages are definitely a household hot spot. Sometimes we work so hard on the common areas of our homes that it leaves us no time or energy to work on the garage. Consequently, the garage becomes a cluttered, neglected mess. If you deposit enough stuff in there, you end up with no room to park one (or both) of your cars, and you end up avoiding the area altogether because it only brings you feelings of guilt.

Like a household receptacle, if you don't know where to put something, it usually winds up in the garage. It's also the repository for our "delusions of grandeur," like that sports activity, home renovation or yard improvement you were just sure you were going to get around to soon. If that's the case, be realistic about your chances of actually participating in that activity. It may be time to let these things go guilt-free so that someone else can get some use out of them.

Does the thought of organizing your garage fill you with dread because it's a complete disaster? I am thankful to Lisa Woodruff of Organize 365 for her excellent podcast, as well as fellow organizer Vicki Norris' of Restoring Order. Are you ready to reclaim



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your garage? I suggest that you block out a day (or at least two to four hours) when most of the family can participate and follow these steps. I promise you it will be well worth the effort!

If your car(s) are parked in the garage, drive them out of the garage and empty them out. You are going to use both cars for this project. One will deliver items to donate, and the other will deliver items to people that you have borrowed them from or to a consignment shop.

Gather some large, sturdy trash bags (the black heavy duty ones work best). The bags can be used for trash or to donate some items. You may also need a few empty boxes or bins to take donations.

Empty everything out of the garage into the driveway.

As you pull things out, if an item needs to be recycled or thrown away, go ahead and put it in the appropriate container. One item I see a lot of in garages is empty boxes from shipping. They can take up a lot of space! It doesn't take very long to break

them down to be recycled. If you just can't part with them, at least break them down and store them flat so that they take up less room.

If an item needs to be returned or donated, go ahead and put it in the appropriate car. When a car gets filled up, one person needs to make a delivery and come back. You need to be ruthless in this stage in order to really get big results. If you don't have a specific plan for how and when you're going to use an item, let it go! Get rid of all of those "what if" items that have been crowding your garage for years.

Put everything that you plan to keep into categories. It might help to use sidewalk chalk to delineate the areas (plus it will give the kids a fun way to help).

Continue this process until everything is out of the garage. Give the garage a good cleaning; break out that Shop-Vac for those leaves, spider webs and dead bugs.

As you work, make a list of things you need or things you

have plenty of and don't need to buy. Examples might include: "Replace the broken broom," "We have 23 pairs of work gloves, so stop buying them!" and "We're almost out of windshield washer fluid."

Now that you've got an empty and clean garage, before putting everything back in, carefully consider whether the way it was organized before was functional and make a plan for the space. What issues were you having in the garage? Get everyone's input on the plan if possible.

You might want to establish several different zones. Perhaps one wall could be purposed for children's items (riding toys, sporting equipment, etc.), one for household tools, and one for gardening tools. A lot of this decision will depend on what activities your family enjoys and the ages of your children.

Keep in mind that items you use frequently should be easily accessible. I love Vicki Norris' suggestion of having a "grab and go" area of the garage for items

that are moved in and out of the car frequently. This may change seasonally.

Items for long-term storage or items only used occasionally can be stored on upper shelves.

I really like either plastic or metal sturdy adjustable shelving and clear labeled bins. With this arrangement, it is very easy to see the contents of the bins and very easy to move them around on the shelves.

Make good use of wall space to get as much as possible off the floor. You may not realize how much can be hung on the walls of your garage. A few years ago, my husband installed a FastTrack system. Now we have three bikes, our wheelbarrow, and many of our tools and sports equipment hanging on the wall. We love the versatility of attachments that can be hung on the rack. It has freed up lots of floor space and shelf space. FastTrack is made by Rubbermaid and is available at Lowe's and Home Depot. There are other similar brands of these easy-to-install systems.

This is also a good time to consider what habits have contributed to the problems in your garage and how you will change those habits. For example, if you tended to come back from a shopping trip, vacation or sports tournament and just drop things in the garage without putting them in their proper place, consider how you can change that habit in the future. One suggestion for this particular problem is to block out a period of time after these activities for proper unpacking.

When you finish, you will be amazed not only at how much better it looks, but also how much easier it is to find things and move around in the space.

Enjoy your organized garage!

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