

11 Steps to an Organized Garage (Plus the Products to Keep It That Way!)

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Is there any spot more desperate for organization than the garage of a busy family? Wayward basketballs, buckets of screws and nails, last year's unused potting soil — you name it, if it's an item you're not sure how to deal with, it's probably lurking in your garage. If the state of your garage causes you anxiety (and embarrassment) every time you open the door to park the car, it's time to reclaim your space. Follow these 11 easy steps for a tidy garage you'll want to show off to the whole neighborhood.

- 1. Enlist your troops.** The best way to get the whole family to keep the garage organized? Have them help create the system, advises Westmont-based organizer [Kim Cosentino](#). "When you put your energy into something, you're more likely to maintain it," she says. Also, label each corner, shelf or category to remind everybody to put things back where they belong.
- 2. Empty the garage.** First things first — take everything out of your garage before you attempt to reorganize it. If you can't move everything to the driveway or alley, Chicago professional organizer [Amy Trager](#) says to at least move all items to the center of the garage floor. "Then, you can put everything away with new eyes," Trager says. "It's easier to imagine items stored differently when you're looking at an open space than a shelf full of stuff."
- 3. Think of a department store.** When Cosentino is helping clients revamp garages, she tells them to imagine they're setting up their own personal department store. "A typical garage has four corners, therefore think of the four broad, but specific, categories of items that are important to your family," Cosentino says. For instance, if you golf frequently, store golf clubs and other sports equipment in the corner closest to your trunk.
- 4. Create zones.** Group like items together — a simple guideline, but easier said than done. Professional organizer and life coach [Jane Carroo](#) recommends creating zones in the garage — one for sports equipment, another for garden tools, cleaning products, paint supplies, a workbench for tools, and so on.



Before (Photo courtesy of Jane Carroo.)



After (Photo courtesy of Jane Carroo.)

5. Look up. The most valuable real estate in the garage is on the walls and ceiling. That's why Cosentino says to deck them out with hooks, shelves and pegboards. "A 2-foot plastic shelf unit with five shelves gives you 10 feet of storage space," she says.

6. Tackle sports equipment. Sports equipment will take over your garage if you let it (all of those balls and odd-shaped items!). Chicago organizing consultant [Pooja Naik](#) says to reorganize sports equipment each season, putting the gear you need now on hooks and storing out-of-season items in cabinets or on shelves.

7. Discard hazardous liquids. Chicago organizer [Amber Kostelny](#) says old lawn treatment products and other chemicals are difficult to purge because you have to find the right recycling plant or drop-off site for them. Do your research before you begin so unwanted products don't get left behind as clutter.

8. Reward yourself. You'll be more motivated to finish what you started if you know there's a treat waiting for you at the end. Cosentino says to stick to a timeframe for organizing the garage, and then reward the family with a pizza party or a trip to the ice cream shop.

9. Sort, purge, organize — repeat. Despite our best intentions, the garage usually becomes a dumping

ground for items we're not quite ready to deal with. That's why [Monica Friel](#), the "chief executive organizer" at [Chaos to Order](#), says you need to commit to going through the garage at least twice a year to keep your organizational system intact.



Before (Photo courtesy of Monica Friel.)





After (Photo courtesy of Monica Friel.)

10. Store bulky items strategically. Don't crowd floors with lawn mowers, snow blowers and bikes. Instead, Trager says to store them on wall racks or from pulleys on the ceiling. "Items that have handles, like shovels, rakes and even weed-wackers can be hung from hooks or nails in the wall," Trager says. "It's so much easier to access and return items to hanging homes instead of large buckets of sharp, strangely-shaped tools or leaning them all in a corner."

11. Change with the seasons. Trager says the best organizational systems can get derailed when the seasons change. "Snow blowers make way for bikes," she says. "Bags of hockey gear get buried under pool bags." If you don't have room in your garage for all of your items, spend some time at the end of the season to take out the items you need for the next one, and stash the stuff you won't use again until next year.

Need more storage solutions to keep your garage in tip-top shape? Check out some of these expert-recommended products:

- **FastTrack Rails:** These easy-to-use rails are the foundation for Rubbermaid's garage organizing system. Carroo says they are customizable and can be changed as needed. *Prices vary*
- **Whitmor Storage Cubes:** Stack some colorful cubes near the car to catch frequently used items. Assign a different color to each family member so ballet slippers don't get buried beneath soccer cleats. *\$25*
- **Sports Storage Bench:** Stow balls, pads and shoes in a wire bench that keeps gear in clear view. A bench gives little sluggers a place to slip off their shoes before they track dirt into the house. *\$93*
- **Gladiator Wall Slat System:** Friel recommends these heavy-duty wall slats that can hold 75 pounds per linear foot. *\$29*
- **Urbana Sacs:** These eco-conscious storage containers are as pretty as they are practical. Use them to corral odds and ends on shelves. *\$77 for 3-piece set*
- **Closest Works Custom Garage System:** If you want to make your garage as beautifully organized as the rest of your house, Friel says a custom system from Closet Works is the way to go. *Prices vary*