

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

Spring 2008

Basement, Attic & Garage Organizing

If you're itching to do a little spring cleaning, consider tackling your garage, attic, or basement. Whether you've been accumulating things in those spaces for months or decades, it's never too late (or too early) to declutter and reclaim that lost space.

This issue of *Organize Today* will help you sort through the stuff, purge what you don't need or love, and create a neat system of organization for what's left. You'll also learn how to preserve some of your precious treasures, such as photos and memorabilia, so they can be enjoyed for years to come.

The first step

Sorting through basements, attics, and garages



The initial step to organizing a storage space — basement, attic, or garage — is to sort into categories. Set aside at least a few hours for this project, and involve the entire household. (You didn't accumulate this stuff by yourself, did you?)

To begin the process, designate a sorting area — such as your driveway — or clear some floor space in a corner of the basement or attic. Then, item by item, start sorting into logical categories. Some might include automotive, crafting, clothing, home improvement, lawn and garden, memorabilia, sports equipment, seasonal items, tools, and toys. Each household is unique, so your categories will mirror your lifestyle and priorities. What's important to you? What do you love to do? Create categories based on how you live (or want to live).

Try to touch things only once while going through this quick-sort process. Next, create sub-categories. Clothing can be further divided by person, size, or season. Sports equipment divides by activity or season. You might break out tools into smaller everyday tools and larger power tools for special projects. One great thing about sorting is that you'll easily see duplicate items.

If you see something obviously broken, stained, rusted, or mildewed, *immediately* place it in the trash. (Be sure to set aside any chemicals so they can be taken to your local hazardous waste facility.) Once you've sorted everything into categories, you'll start decluttering. Turn the page to take the next step toward a tidy, efficient storage space!

Declutter, downsize, release, and relax

Remember the past and look toward the future when organizing your storage space



Your storage spaces are likely a mixture of your past, present, and future. Well-loved toys, grade school memorabilia, and furniture from the college years may make up memories from your past. Perhaps golf clubs, cold-weather

clothing, and gardening tools may reflect your present. Baby clothes or gear being saved for a future child may represent your future.

Take a good look at the categories you've created and see if they reflect your current lifestyle and activities. Never going to play badminton again? Out go the rackets! Have your kids moved out of the house? Perhaps it's time to let go of their 20-year-old boxes of stuffed animals. Use a keen eye and steady conviction to get rid of the things that you no longer love, truly need, or find useful. If you're still not sure if you should get rid of an item, ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen if I toss this?" The answer may help give you the power to discard the clutter.

It will be helpful to have large, dark-colored garbage bags for trash, plus some large boxes on hand for

items to donate, sell, or give to friends. (For extremely large purging jobs, consider renting a dumpster.)

As you declutter, take note of the amount of "past" memories stored compared to the "current" and "future" items in the space. While it's wonderful to save *some* memories, don't allow yourself to dwell too much on the past. It's not coming back, and the future is what you make it. What do you want to do in the upcoming months and years? Out with the old to make way for some new hobbies and activities: a cleared-out attic could make a great artists' studio. Your tidy basement might morph into a fabulous home theater! An organized garage could allow your budding Tim the Toolman to come alive. (And let your car have a proper home!)

Once pared down, take time regularly to review and purge. Clutter has a way of sneaking up on us. Don't let it! If you don't know what to do with something, the basement/attic/garage is not its holding cell. Make conscious, deliberate decisions about the things in your life, and reclaim your space once and for all! Now, keep reading to learn how to store what's left in an organized, easy-to-retrieve manner.

Preserving memories

Attics, basements, and garages are prone to extreme heat fluctuations, moisture/humidity, rodents, and insects. Therefore, they may not be the proper places for your most prized possessions. Protect your family heirlooms, photos, and valuable memorabilia so they last a lifetime by following this advice.

Photos should be stored in archival-quality albums and kept away from light and out of moist or hot spaces. Store videotapes in protective plastic boxes

and on end (not lying flat on top of each other). Heirloom textiles and garments should be cleaned first and then wrapped in acid-free tissues and placed in acid-free storage boxes. Special books should also be placed in acid-free boxes. Memorabilia (when not being displayed) should be kept dust-free and in storage boxes as well. Then store these valuables in the main living quarters of your home — not in the garage, attic, or basement. Watch for rodents and insects, and deal with them promptly to avoid damage.

Contain yourself

Containerize and place your keepers

Proper storage is the last (and most fun) part of the organizing process. Now that your items are sorted by category, decide on the best location for each group of items. Should they stay in their current space? You may decide that items once kept in the basement might be better off in the garage, or attic treasures should move to the basement, for example. Some ideas for placement:



Basement: crafting, emergency supplies, out-of-season clothing, home improvement materials, durable (non-delicate) memorabilia, sports equipment, seasonal items, tools, toys

Attic: baby items you're saving for the next child or grandchildren, crafting, out-of-season clothing, furniture, luggage, durable (non-delicate) memorabilia, seasonal items, past tax documents

Garage: automotive, home improvement, lawn and garden, outdoor toys, seasonal items, sports equipment, tools

Once you decide on a location, "containerize" small- to medium-sized similar items in plastic or cardboard boxes. Make sure they are well-labeled on the front and sides (not just the tops) for easy identification. Then, make use of vertical space by investing in some *sturdy* shelving units. Your local hardware or home improvement store will have a wide selection.

Things that you use frequently should be easily accessible. Place the heaviest items on the bottom, the most-used stuff at waist to eye level, and things that you rarely (or never) use high up or in the back. For example, special toys that you are saving for future grandchildren can be placed in the attic or on a top shelf in the basement. Sports equipment that you need daily or weekly might be stashed in the garage near the door.

When storing paints and chemicals, use caution. Paints need to be kept out of freezing temperatures, so garage storage is usually not a good idea. However, if you store them in your basement, be sure to keep them at least 10 feet from your hot-water heater and furnace so vapors aren't ignited by the gas flame. Consider a locked cabinet if you have young children in your home.

Finally, add a humidifier in mildew-prone areas, add some rodent traps (just in case), and bask in your newly organized storage space.

Quick garage tips

No matter if you purchase an expensive custom garage storage system or just hang a few hooks for your bikes, investing in your garage is a good idea. Hey, you might even fit your car in there once it's organized!

- Think of your garage in terms of zones: automotive, gardening, sports, tools, toys, etc. Consolidate items for easy retrieval, placing items as close as possible to where they will be used. For example, keep gardening accoutrements in a large basket by the outside door. Set recycling bins right next to the interior door. Put tools near the workbench.
- Install pegboard on one wall. Use hooks to hold tools and gardening equipment. Pop in brackets and you can install shelving as well. Then use labeled jars or a multi-drawer storage system to separate small pieces of hardware.
- Get things off the floor and onto the walls and ceiling. Install inexpensive hooks to hold bikes, rakes, brooms, sleds, ladders, and hoses. Install cabinets and shelving along the back or side walls.
- Make it easy for kids to access and put away their own stuff. A tall can will neatly hold hockey sticks, baseball bats, and other long items. Corral balls in a large bin.
- Finally, keep a fire extinguisher handy, mounted on the wall.



What's left? Discard and disposal options

Organizing a basement, attic, or garage is a great opportunity to pare down. Wondering what to do with the leftovers? Here are a few options:

DONATE: Give yourself a tax break and help others in need by donating items in *good* condition to a local charity. Some organizations, such as Vietnam Veterans of America, offer pick-up service.

GIVE TO FAMILY/FRIENDS: If you find a treasure that may be meaningful to a loved one, offer it to them. (But let them know it's okay to decline. Remember, we don't want to add clutter to their lives!)

GARAGE SALE: If you have a large amount of good-condition cast-offs (especially baby and kids' items, tools, or other highly desirable stuff), consider a garage sale. But remember, sales are a lot of work, so this option is only good if you have time to dedicate to pricing, setting up, promoting, and staffing a garage sale.

EBAY/CRAIG'S LIST: Computer savvy? Try listing furniture, antiques, and other higher-value items online. Or take treasures to an antiques dealer.

FREecycle: With over 4,000 groups across the globe, this nonprofit connects people who are giving and getting stuff for free in their own towns. Its mission is to reduce waste, save precious resources, and ease the burden on landfills. Visit www.freecycle.org for details.

TRASH: Rent a dumpster if you have a lot of unsalvageable junk. Or hire 1-800-GOT-JUNK, North America's largest junk removal service, to do it for you. They load the truck, and then recycle and dispose of your stuff as required.



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