

Stimulate Your Economy with an Organized Garage!

Question: I'd like to get my garage organized, but I don't have much of a budget. How much will it cost, and how long will it take?

I'm convinced the "American Garage" is the answer to our economic revival. Well, maybe not *the* answer, but certainly a good place to start. While our cars (our second largest investment!) sit on the driveway suffering wind, rain and hail, our clutter is safe and dry in the comfort of the garage. What's more, that clutter might be a gold mine! Antiques, sports equipment and power tools are hot items on the resale websites. If having a proper place for your car and earning some extra cash aren't reasons enough, a good garage organizing project can also improve the look of the neighborhood (think property values). And it can be done on a weekend with little or no financial investment. Let's organize your garage!

The Goal: The whole family uses the garage, so try to agree on a common goal. Are you hoping to park two cars in the garage, gain easy access to bicycles, or simply clear a path? Either way, this is a group project; you're going to need everyone's help. Choose a date, preferably a whole weekend. The weather should be dry so you can utilize the driveway for "staging."

The Budget: Set a budget before you begin. The costs involved are mostly in storage materials – shelving, cabinets, hooks and bins. Low cost options (\$0 - \$250) include using what you have, like old dressers, bookcases and boxes, or purchasing inexpensive but sturdy plastic shelving units. Local home improvement stores have plenty of build-it-yourself storage solutions for the mid-range budget (\$250 - \$1500). Custom cabinetry and flooring are available for the high-end spenders (\$1500+).

The Plan: Garages, like most rooms, function best when organized by zone. Consider all the things you'd like to store in your garage, and then map out their logical location. For example, bikes and outdoor toys might be located near the exit for easy in-and-out. A recycling center is best suited near the house door. Other common garage zones are tools, lawn and garden, sports equipment, car maintenance, and pantry overflow (excess soda, canned goods). If your garage has high ceilings, you might consider loft-like storage for infrequently used items like snow tires and holiday décor.

The Sort: Alas, it's time for the sort. If you've got time and lots of help, this can be done all at once. If not, work in sections to keep the project manageable. Be prepared: things will look worse before they look better! Remove everything from your garage and sort it into piles according to your pre-determined zones (tools, sports gear, etc.) Most importantly, have piles for garbage, recycling, donations, and stuff to sell. These piles need to be bigger than the "keep" piles if you're hoping to park a car or two in the garage!

The Install: Once cleared, give the garage a good sweeping and set up the shelves and cabinets. Return items to the garage zone by zone. Use boxes and bins with large, clear labels to corral loose items. Hooks are great for hanging garden tools, ladders and even bikes. Hazardous materials should be stored safely away from pets and children. Once finished, stand back and admire your orderly garage. And for the grand finale, drive your car in and lower the door! You did it!

The Discard: Now comes the fun part – getting rid of all that excess clutter. Deliver your piles to appropriate recycling and donation centers and prepare to sell remaining items. Sports equipment, toys, tools, collectibles and furniture are great fodder for Craigslist and eBay. I'm also a big fan of the garage sale. With a little more effort, you'll turn your garage project into a money-maker.

Is it possible our garages (and basements and attics, too) are potential cash cows? The process of organizing always reaps financial rewards – whether in increased productivity, decreased waste, found valuables, or yard sale revenues. So if you're looking for something affordable and constructive to do this weekend, tackle that garage. You'll love the results (your car will, too!), and you might even line your pockets with a little extra cash. Not bad for two day's work!

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