

How To Get Your Messy Garage Under Control

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Q: Our garage is a mess. There's stuff everywhere, no organization and it's honestly kind of scary to walk through. What can we do?

A: Messy garages are our homes' dirty little secrets. The rest of the house may look meticulous, but what lies behind that locked garage door is anything but. We store stuff in it. We throw strange items in there. And every once in a while, we park a car in there. Garages were meant for more than this. It's time you started treating yours with the respect and consideration it deserves.

Here's how to do just that in five simple steps:

1. Clear out the junk

Take a deep breath, and start throwing stuff out. Don't be judicious. If you haven't touched something in the past 12 months and don't plan on using it in the next 12, it's garbage — or a charitable donation, if you think it may be of use to someone.

Get help from family and friends, and don't donate huge unopened boxes before first knowing what's inside them. Store paint, propane tanks, paper and any food items (including pet food) elsewhere. Invest in a fire extinguisher.

2. Perform basic maintenance

Seal up any gaps to prevent moisture from sneaking in, and invest in a garage door lock to prevent unwanted visitors from doing the same. This includes the bottom of your garage door if there is any space between it and the ground when sitting closed. You'll also want to look into an epoxy floor coating for easier cleanups related to oil and other spills.

3. Get strategic with storage

Once upon a time, you had grand ideas about keeping a tidy, organized garage. Then life happened. Get back to your trim-and-tidy roots by re-racking the stuff you decide to keep in a sensible manner. Create a blueprint and plan on storing like items together, such as tools. That not-so-used item? It can be placed behind the stuff you're likely to use more often, like the lawnmower.

If you don't already have them, get cabinets, wall hooks, pegboards and open shelving units so that you can hang and store as many items off the ground as possible. And don't forget about the ceiling; hang long, obtrusive things from above, making sure that you have enough clearance for the car roof, of course. Clear, lidded bins are also a good idea for smaller items.

4. Don't forget the outside

A garage should not be an extension of your home, but rather a part of it. Think about upgrading that old, warped garage door for a custom design teeming with personalized character. If your budget doesn't allow for this, a new paint scheme can do wonders to existing surfaces.

Make that new addition or paint job shine by adding coordinated, functional lighting that pairs well with the rest of your home's exterior lighting fixtures. Suddenly, your garage is the envy of the block.

5. Stay the course

You've uncluttered your garage — now keep it that way. Don't revert to old habits after a few weeks or months; use your newfound space smartly and efficiently, and never go back to the untidy mess you once were too afraid to get near. Hey, you may even have space to park a vehicle now.