

By ALEXA STANARD
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Old bags, bicycles, old trophies, power tools, boxes of moldy books — Americans' garages are filled with stuff, stuff and more stuff.

Just one thing is often missing: cars.

"The garage is one of the places where, when people don't know what to do with something, it's a catch-all," says Donna Lindley, owner of Organize Your World in Rochester Hills. "A lot of things end up out there. People are storing things they don't need in the garage and having their expensive cars out in the driveway."

Several companies, including GarageTek and HouseWall Garage System, help people get their junk out of the way so their cars can come back in. Many companies offer specially designed wall paneling that allows easy installation of hooks to hang bikes and



Wilfredo Lee / Associated Press

Robin Levinson, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., shows off her recently renovated garage by HouseWall Garage System.

ladders, and elevated cabinets for storage. Flooring, lighting, workbenches and other accessories make the garage a place for work, play and entertaining.

If you're ready to roll up your sleeves and tackle your garage, local professional organizers offer these helpful tips:

■ Get a buddy. Organizing the garage alone can be overwhelming. Ask someone who can be objective to tell you what to keep and what to get rid of, suggests Cynthia Campbell, owner of Fresh Start Home Organizing and Estate Sales in Grosse Pointe Park.

■ After you've got help, it's time to sort and purge, Campbell says. Once sorting begins, people often see they have multiples of an item, she says, having purchased additional items when they lost the first one. Start with a trash bin, a

donation bin and labeled bins for things like kids' toys and gardening tools.

■ Make a decision about whether to donate or throw out an item as soon as you look at it, Lindley says, and donate unused items even if they're in good shape. "I can't tell you the number of times I've gone into a garage and they have five or six rakes," Lindley says. "At most they're using two."

■ Create zones for different items — a zone for tools, one for toys, another for sporting goods, etc. Place frequently used items in easy-to-reach spots. "Finding a home for everything is the main goal," Campbell says.

■ Start storing. Choose stackable, clear plastic containers, or those that can be easily labeled. Consider plastic shelving units so you're not pulling five boxes down to get to the one you want. "Think about going vertical," Lindley says. "Shelving allows you to take advantage of vertical space in a garage without using a lot of floor space."

Overhead storage is good for off-season stuff and helps make room for your car; it also protects your stuff from moisture and critters. Basic, inexpensive hooks are good for everything from ladders to shovels, rakes, lawn chairs, hoses and extension cords. "You don't have to spend a fortune to get your garage organized," Lindley says.

Alexa Stanard is a Metro Detroit freelance writer. The Associated Press contributed to this report.



Dan Bailey

When you see an item, decide to keep it, donate it or throw it out, advises Donna Lindley.