

Make the Garage Useable

Or at least.... Just a tad bit more useable....



Introduction

Ok, some of you are feeling some anxiety about this one just from reading the headline. I get it. It seems like a big job. It's time to find that inner honey badger and do hard stuff. I promise, your brain is making this seem way harder than it actually is. **In ONE DAY, you can go from a headache to a useable space.** One day of hard work will give you serious gains. It may not be perfect, but **it will be way better.** This task can be as involved or as basic as you want it to be.

Main Goals

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The 4 main goals of this task are to:

- Be able to access your circuit panel, hot water heater, and whatever else you might have in your garage or basement that will need maintenance.
- Be able to access tools quickly and without effort.
- Make it easier to keep everything clean and tidy. (Bonus - this makes it easier to figure out if rodents are getting in. Ask me how I know.)
- Set up a small workspace (optional).

When you feel overwhelmed, go back to these goals. **This is all you need to accomplish this go round.** Whatever else you get done will just be icing on the cake.

It's more about making it a useable space, rather than achieving Instagram perfection.... for now. In the next course, we will cover things like garage door maintenance and weatherstripping that will push us towards the kind of garage/basement that makes other

people jealous. But for now, it's just about making it more useable so that when maintenance tasks come up, you can work without any hiccups.

If even reading this gives you anxiety

I recognize that for some people, this is NOT a task they are ready to start. I understand. Don't let this be a showstopper though. Skip it for now if truly needed. Or you can baby-step it by putting it on your calendar to tackle one box a week, or one section a week, or whatever you are ready for. (Literally put it on your calendar. Every Saturday or so carve out time to deal with one thing or area in the garage). If this is too much, maybe you start with just getting obvious things out, like trash or broken stuff. Look, you know you.

You joined this program so there must be something pushing you forward.

Dig deep and concentrate on that feeling. Use it to propel you to action.

Be willing to push yourself but be gentle! You likely didn't make this mess overnight, and it might not go away in one day. BUT in one day, it can get a lot better, and progress is progress.

If it's a real mess, it might take you a while. Just make sure you **plan for positive change**. If you do not put it on your calendar and make space for it in your life, IT WILL NOT HAPPEN.

Find your inner honey badger. You CAN do hard things.

Power yourself up and let's begin.



Tools Needed:

- Labels
- Plastic bins for the stuff that is staying
- Cardboard boxes to use sorting, donating, and returning
- Tape to close up the boxes
- Broom
- Rags and paper towels
- Contractor sized trash bags
- Murphy's Oil (optional) and a bucket with warm water (optional) in case you have something to wash or wipe down.
- A free weekend (hint: schedule it right before bulky trash pickup day)
- If possible, recruit family, friends, and/or hired help
- Cold or hot drinks. Seats for breaks. Fan or heaters. Premade meals and snacks so you do not have to stop to prep or go get food.
- Happy music (or death metal, whatever it is that powers you up).

Pre-Task Steps

This task has some homework you might want to do before you start moving stuff around.

- **Visualize your dream garage** (2-3 weeks before). Close your eyes. Imagine your dream garage. What do you want the main function to be? To store sports equipment? Lawn and garden tools? Toys? A handy person's paradise? A little of everything? Spend a little time on Google or Pinterest to get ideas or inspiration if needed but don't get sucked up in ideas of perfection. Or ask a neighbor about their dreamy setup. They would likely be thrilled to show it off. Every time you go into the garage, think about how you would like to use it. Really spend time envisioning it. Get excited about the possibilities. Keep in mind, we are not focused on installing fancy storage systems this go around. This is about clearing out the clutter and getting an idea of what you have in there.
- **Schedule a full weekend.** Check the weather before deciding a date and try to align with your trash pickup day or better yet, bulky trash pickup day.
- **Make a plan for stuff to leave.** Determine how you will get rid of stuff (landfill, donate, yard sale, etc.). How will you get it there?
- **Choose a large space to sort.** Prepare sorting areas in the yard or driveway. It might be nice to bring some folding tables to have a place to sort.
- **Throw away obvious trash.** Walk through now and throw away obvious trash. This makes it better for your helpers, makes it take less time, and ensures you don't overflow the trash bins later.
- **Find Helpers.** Recruit the family or offer to help friends do their garage if they help you. Or hire the neighborhood teenager to help. Bribe them with food and drink too! Be direct with your ask - ask them to perform a specific role or ask them which role they would like. Some possible roles are:
 - Helping you move stuff around
 - Cleaning (sweeping, dusting, wiping down items/shelves)
 - Sorting items for keeping, returning, storing elsewhere, or donating.
 - Assessing value to see if it's worth selling or donating.
 - Extra pair of hands - food, getting supplies, making decisions, etc.

The Process

Step 1: Gather Supplies and Do an Initial Assessment

- Set out contractor garbage bags, boxes for stuff to donate or return, and bins to sort stuff (stuff to repair, holiday, lawn care, toys, etc.). When I do this, I set everything in the yard and driveway.
- Go through and do a quick assessment of what you have. Is it mostly sports? Tools? Holiday? Throw away any obvious trash.

Step 2: The Big Move

- Moving everything out to the driveway/yard. This seems terrible but it really doesn't take much time. As you pull stuff out, try to group like with like. If it is truly more than you can handle, pull out a section at a time.

Step 3: Clean the Garage

- Cleaning the garage. Sweep and clean cleared areas. Use broom on walls to get rid of dirt and spiderwebs. Fill bucket with warm water and Murphy's Oil. Wipe down walls and doors with old rags. Clean off any shelves. Clean any dirty/dusty items that stay.

Step 4: Sort and Decide

- Gather items to be returned, stored elsewhere, or donated.
 - Clean off items.
 - Pack it up and make a plan to return, store or donate. Then actually TAKE items away.
 - If for some reason it must stay, clearly mark those boxes. Nothing is worse than making decisions, forgetting what you decided and having to do it again..... Mark a day on the calendar for this stuff to leave.
 - Have this person also plan for junk removal. Will you need to rent a dumpster? Do you have hazardous materials to dispose of? Have them look at your city or county's website to learn how to dispose of chemicals or old paint. This is a great task for an older helper or teenager.
- Assessing value. See if things are worth selling on eBay or other online marketplaces. List it or sell in garage sale ASAP. This task is also ideal for a teenager. (Be careful here-selling stuff can be a real stumbling block. Ask yourself if you really want to deal with this or would it be better to donate. When you donate, you get to help your community AND get the task done faster and easier).

Step 5: Categorize and Organize

- Organizing things into major categories. (E.g., tools, holidays, sports, pets, yard, etc.).

Step 6: Moving Back In

- Once you have all of one category together, make a space for it in your garage. If needed, now that you understand what you have, buy storage organizers or tools. Set aside any house related paperwork. We will sort through this in our next task.

Decision-Making Tips

It can be really difficult to let go of stuff. I highly recommend Marie Kondo's books. She has you ask if the item brings you joy. She isn't talking about the kind of joy you get when receiving an amazing gift.... She is asking if the item is in line with your values and path. For example, a broom doesn't bring me joy, but a useable garage does. Questions you can ask yourself when you are unsure:

- Do you really need it? Have you used it at least once in the past year?
- Did you forget you had it? If so, how sentimental can it really be? Consider taking a picture of the item and letting it go. Kondo has you thank the item. It seems silly but it can work, especially for sentimental items.
- Is it ruined? Could you repurpose it? Will you? How long has it been out there? If it hasn't happened yet, it likely will not happen. Get rid of it so you can make new space in your life.
- Could someone else benefit from it more than you could? This one has helped me. Once I had trouble letting go of a lamp that was in my daughter's room when she was a baby. I took a moment to envision the little girl and her mom who would use the lamp next. I smiled as I imagined a little girl getting her own room after living in a shelter. I gave it joyfully after that.
- Could you make money selling it AND will you do in within the week? (Do you donate to nonprofits? If so, consider skipping the effort of selling for donating. Someone benefits from your donation, and you benefit from getting rid of the item quickly. Some nonprofits will even come pick it up. Win-win).
- Is the item worth the space and time? Does it help you have the life you want? Or will it weigh you down? If it's hard to decide, spend a minute envisioning your dream garage. Is keeping the item in line with that dream? Or will it get in the way?

General Tips

- Do not see your garage as a storage locker. Think of it as a functional space.
- Create "zones" in your garage and don't let them merge. Sports stuff stays with sports stuff. Tools with tools.

- It's easy to make excuses (aka lying to yourself). It's easy to say "I do not have the right storage system or containers or have money to fix it up." It just needs to be functional. It doesn't need a new coat of paint. It doesn't need new shelves. It just needs you to work with what you have now. Progress is progress.
- Make a dedicated space for whatever it is you want to store. Limit yourself to that space. For example, I am allowing myself to save some of my children's toys. I made a space and will not let myself store more than will fit in that space. This means that I do have to reassess from time to time and get rid of something to make room for a new thing.
- Here is a fun thought: Look, you will have to downsize at some point in life..... Might as well enjoy the benefits of a useable space while you can. When in doubt, donate or throw it out.
- Keep in mind the next course will use tools, ladders, and chemicals. Make sure you have room to grow.
- Make sure you have easy access to your circuit panel, hot water heater, or whatever else might be in your garage.
- For real, anything you decided doesn't belong in the garage---- take it where it needs to go asap.

Conclusion

- Remember: Progress is progress. You CAN do hard things.

When you are done with this task, please take a second to rate it! [Make some space!](#)



