

Garage makeover: clutter consultants come out of the closet

BY PAT STEIN
Copley News Service

When it comes to scary places, Halloween haunted houses are nothing compared with a garage filled with months, if not years, of accumulated clutter.

"Organizing and cleaning up a cluttered garage seems like such a daunting task that a lot of people just keep adding to the piles of clutter rather than dealing with it, but it doesn't have to be that way," said Kristina Ferrigan, a spokeswoman for the National Closet Group, an association that represents independent closet and garage organizing specialists around the nation. The more the clutter accumulates the more impossible it seems to sort it all out. But closet organization specialists can help. Most garage/closet specialists will do a free consultation that can be invaluable, according to Ferrigan.

"These consultants have no emotional attachment to the stuff in the garage and they are experts in creating storage solutions," she said.

The first step is to get rid of what you don't need, according to Ferrigan. How do you know what you can part with either by giving it to charity, tossing it or selling it in a garage sale?

"Ask yourself if it's something you would replace if it were destroyed in a fire? If it's not, you don't need it," Ferrigan said.

Chances are you haven't seen some of the stuff piled up in the garage for more than a year and that's another clue to what you can let go of.

"If you haven't used something in a year, get rid of it," said Brooke Newton, a spokeswoman for the nationwide Container Store chain.

They offer free space-planning service by experts who have plenty of experience in organizing messy garages. The service can be accessed over the phone, online or in person by visiting a store.

"Organizing your garage doesn't have to be a daunting task. It's something you can do in an afternoon," Newton said.

Once you've discarded

what you don't need, Newton suggests grouping like items into piles so you can see how much stuff you actually have in each category.

"You may discover that you don't have as much gardening stuff as you thought or more nuts, bolts and nails than you thought," said Newton. "Grouping things by category helps you assess how much space you'll need to store it and what kind of containers you'll need."

The Container Store has a garage organizing system called "elfa," which is easily installed by homeowners includes hardware, wire shelving, bins and other clear containers that allow you to see what's inside.

The flexible system can be configured to fit any wall space and there's a container to hold everything from nails and screws to skates in an efficient manner. Think about your needs, your lifestyle and what you want to accomplish in organizing the garage.

"Think of the garage as a box with floor to ceiling storage possibilities. Use all of the space. The mistake that most people make is trying to store everything on one level — usually the floor. The goal is to transform piles of stuff on the floor into order," said Ferrigan. "Store things that you don't often need on high shelves or hooks. If you have children or pets, it's a good idea to create storage spaces where they can't get into toxic substances like antifreeze, rat poison and fertilizers. This can take the form of high shelving or locked cabinets."

The art and science of garage organization has come a long way and there are many solutions. They range from \$400 for the Container Store's elfa sys-

tem to several thousand dollars for built-in cabinets. Part of what makes tidying up a garage so difficult is that it's the storage space for objects such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, power tools and rakes that are not shaped for easy stacking.

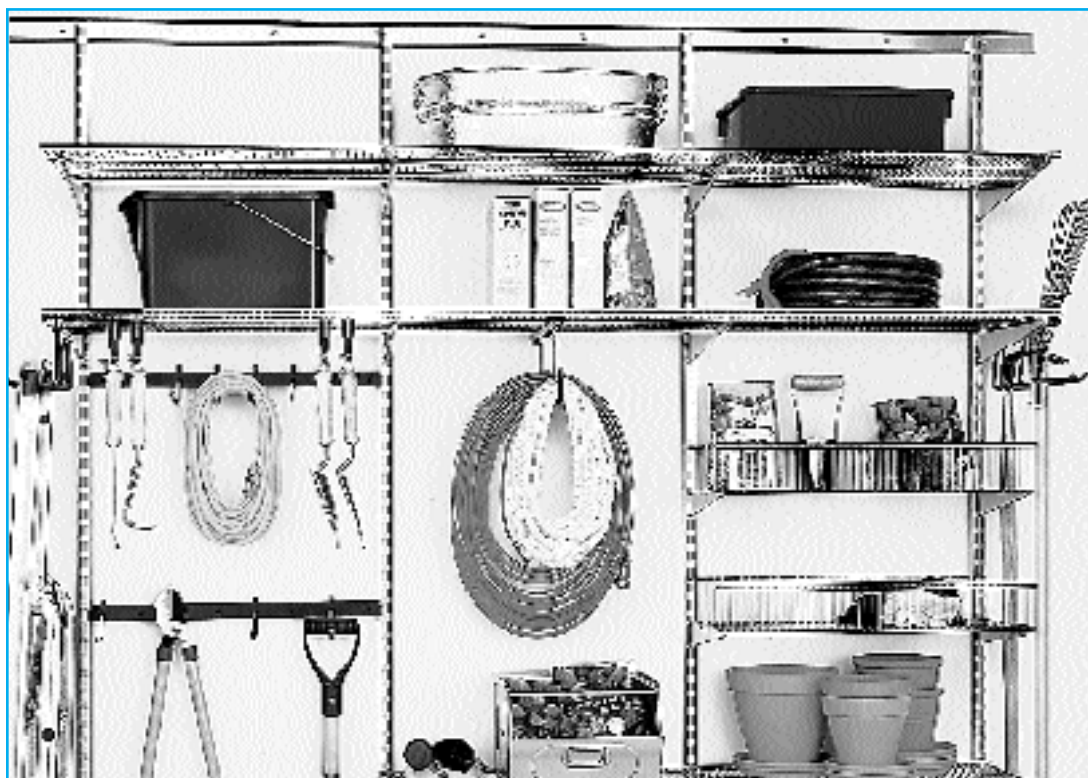
"Keeping similar things together is a key rule of garage organization," Ferrigan said. "Garden implements, household tools such as hammers and saws, sports equipment, camping gear, auto tools, paint cans, paint brushes all need to be grouped together."

Where they are grouped within the garage is also important. Garden tools, for example, should be located near a door that leads to the yard or outdoors.

Most family garages have to serve a number of purposes. Depending on what part of the country you live in, the garage may need to serve as a storage space for off-season clothing, in which case Ferrigan suggests cabinetry that will protect clothing from dampness, mold and dirt.

Whatever it costs to organize the garage is a small price to pay considering the savings in repurchase of items you can't find amid all the clutter or items that have deteriorated to the point of uselessness because they were improperly stored. And not to mention reduction in frustration when you can't find what you need and the stress of looking at the mess that calls out for order. Once the garage is organized, it's relatively easy to keep it neat.

"Once you have a place for everything, it's easy to put things back where they belong rather than letting them pile up," Ferrigan said, adding that a well organized garage is also a good way to teach children



Copley News Service/The Container Store

The more clutter that accumulates in your garage, the more impossible it seems to sort it out. Shelving and racks can help homeowners organize and maximize garage space.

how to keep things in order. "If there's a place for them to put their bikes, skates and other stuff, it teaches them a valuable life lesson in keeping things in order."

"Once you organize the clutter, you'll be surprised at how much usable space there is in your garage," Ferrigan said.

She added that a well organized garage also adds to the value of your home when you want to sell it.

The National Closet Group can be reached by calling (866) 624-5463 for referrals or visit their Web site at www.nationalclosetgroup.com.

Reach the Container Store's customer solutions department by calling (800) 786-7315 or visit the Web site at www.containerstore.com.

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Contest offers to trade in garbage garage

Dremel tools and television's "Trading Spaces" handy guy Ty Pennington have teamed up to give one lucky garage a makeover in their "Trade in Your Garbage Garage" contest.

Those entering the contest should submit a creative essay (500 words or less) explaining:

- 1) How the garage evolved into its current messy condition (focus on the interior of garage)
- 2) Why the garage interior is in need of a revamp
- 3) What problems a Dremel tool could solve in the garage
- 4) A 3 x 5 index card with name and daytime phone number for the person making the nomination, the garage owner's name, address, garage size and owner's daytime phone number

Contest entries should be postmarked by Sept. 2, 2003 and mailed to: Dremel Trade in Your

Garbage Garage Contest
P.O. Box 1809
Elgin, IL, 60121-1809

Entries will be judged on the three main criteria:

- Degree of garage clutter
 - Improvement potential for the garage
 - Essay creativity
- Grand prize winner will be awarded the garage renovation and a Dremel tool kit; Second-place winner will receive \$250 and Dremel tools for renovation; third place will receive \$100 and tools; and random drawings will be conducted for Dremel tools.

A Dremel renovation team led by Pennington will be sent to the grand-prize winning garage to consult and complete the reorganization at the end of September.

For more information, call Dremel at 800-437-3635 or to their Web site at www.dremel.com.

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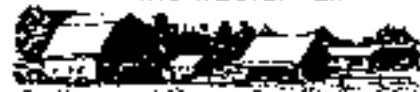


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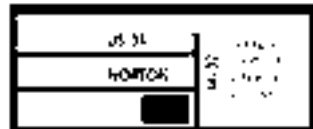
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