

Stow it well, find it later

Kayak on the floor of your garage? Camping gear spread all over? Organizing experts tell you how to get your gear in order so it will stay clean, safe and ready to go.



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So many families face the same dilemma – where to store bulky outdoor gear that takes up a lot of space.

Some of it might be stuffed in a corner of the garage, while some gear might be stashed in a closet. Still more might be tucked out of the way in a crawl space or attic.

Spending some time organizing your gear and developing a storage plan will help protect your gear, keep it cleaner and help you pack it up quickly before your next outing.

“You know there’s a problem if you’re busy looking for things,” said Shannon Ronald, a professional organizer in Tacoma. “It can be frustrating to not have a place for everything and then not putting things away.”

No matter how you decide to tackle the matter, it has to make sense to you, Ronald said. “You’re doing it right if it’s working for you, if you’re finding what you put away.”

When considering your storage space options, think beyond the garage floor or closet, said Steve Webber of Steve’s Organizing in Tacoma.

“Make sure you use your vertical space and keep things off the floors. Going vertical is huge because people tend to use the floor and don’t use the ceiling or walls. There is a ton of wasted space,” he said.

The key is to come up with a plan.

“You don’t want to get caught up in the detail of organizing, but you need to find a place for things,” Ronald said.

The process, she warned, might call for some tough decisions.

“If your goal is to get everything into the garage, but you have X amount of space and you have Y amount of stuff, something has to give,” she said.

Here are 12 tips for organizing your gear

Decide where you are going to store your kayak, bikes or hunting gear. “You have to decide what’s the purpose of this room and have a floor plan for it,” Ronald said. “Often times that’s when it comes down to ‘I have five bikes, but do I need five bikes if I want it all in the garage?’”

Ask a friend about your plan. “Sometimes it’s helpful to talk through it with someone, your exercise buddy, your spouse,” Ronald said. “Do the helicopter view. It’s kind of looking at the forest through the trees.”

Use plastic tubs. They are perfect for storing many car-camping essentials. You can use one for gear like cookware, plates, cup and utensils. The second can be for things like matches to light your stove, napkins and items to be added before each trip such as spices and hot chocolate mix. The boxes can be stacked in the garage and pulled out when needed.

If you have the space, set up shelves to hold your plastic tubs and larger items. You can even use hooks on the posts to hang wet waders and raingear, or keep trekking poles out of the way. Target has a 5-shelf plastic unit that holds 150 pounds on each shelf for \$65.

Look to the ceiling for extra storage space. Webber recommends the Tote Trac system. You bolt the rack to the ceiling and then hang standard plastic containers from the handle. “It’s a way to keep the clutter off my work bench. I grab it when I need it and then put it back when I’m done,” he said. A two-rack pack sells for \$21.95 at totetrac.com.

If shelves are not feasible, consider wall hanging options. Webber said many homeowners use pegboard or slat board. “There are all kinds of hooks and hanging objects you can use on them so you can see what you have and keep them from picking up dirt,” he said.

Masking tape and a Sharpie or a labeler helps you quickly identify which tub you need for your next outing. You also can take a photo of what’s inside and tape it to the outside of the container. “Label them so you don’t have to do the work twice by checking to see what’s inside of them,” Ronald said. “I get pretty detailed. You can have a blank piece of paper that you can tape on the outside of the container.”

Look to recycle storage items. Instead of throwing away a storage cabinet no longer need in the laundry room, see if you can use it in the garage. You can use it to hang your hunting clothes, store the pump for your air mattress and keep folded tarps, put gas stove canisters or keep shooting range gear handy but protected from the elements.

Get your hands on a used milk crate or two. They are a convenient way to store fishing waders, boots, gravel guards and wading belts. Once your gear has dried, pack it into the crate and it’s ready to go for your next fishing trip. The crate also makes a good spot to sit while changing into your gear. Or spray paint it black and you can use it as a seat in a duck blind.

Use a rod rack or caddy to store your fishing rods. This keeps lines from tangling as they would if you were to pile rods and reels in a corner somewhere. A rod caddy lets you grab the gear you need and toss it into the vehicle when you’re ready to go. The Racor fishing rod rack attaches to a wall and sells for about \$55. Cabela’s Tote-Um Pole Rod Caddy sells for \$30.

Develop a system for handling items when you come home from a trip or an outing, Ronald said. “When you come home from a snowmobiling trip, have a system for what needs to be cleaned, what needs to be put away. If you’re hunting, you know you have to clean the gun, then put the gun here, the oil there and the ammunition there. That’s so you don’t have to rethink it each time, so it becomes second nature.”

If you don’t use it anymore, get rid of it. Why take up precious space for something that never makes it out of the garage? “I ask, do you love it, do you need it? If it isn’t ‘yes’ to those questions, maybe it’s time ... for someone else to use that item,” Ronald said.

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