



Take Back Your Garage

You can stash your stuff *and* have room for your cars

“THE GARAGE IS WHERE clutter goes to die,” jokes Amanda M. LeBlanc, a professional organizer in Birmingham, Ala.

Many of you said the same thing in our recent nationwide poll of almost 1,000 garage owners. Filled with tools, lawn mowers, sports equipment, and more, the garages of 62 percent of Americans are crowded, disorganized, or a mess. Shocker: Almost a third of us don't park our car in the garage no matter how large, and only 25 percent of people with three-car garages actually park three cars there.

Sound familiar? Even if you can still squeeze into your garage, getting from the car to the house shouldn't be an obstacle course. Help is at hand.

First, cull (be ruthless). Then plan.

Divide items in your garage into four groups: sell, donate, trash, and keep. That will give you a better idea of how much storage you need, and what kind. And if you call in a pro to install a system, you won't wind up with one that's more extensive and expensive than necessary.

Overall, your objective in this step is to get as much as you can off the garage floor and onto the walls or shelves. With that done, you can start planning. Ask yourself whether you prefer to store items behind closed doors, on open shelves, or a mix of both. Also, are there items cluttering up indoor living spaces that you'd like to store in the garage? And last, think

about future needs. If you own a Mini but will be trading it in for an SUV, or vice versa, consider the size of future cars.

Remember to allow for the swing of car doors, plus room to exit and enter, when measuring. That way you'll know how many linear feet are actually available for storage. Typically, the wall facing the hood will have room for deep shelves or cabinets, but side walls will have space only for shallow storage.

Consider our four scenarios on the following pages, no matter what you're storing. Tackle one problem or all of them if you're feeling ambitious. Then you might be able to park your car—or even another car—in your garage.

1 FOR DIY-ERS: EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

A whopping 78 percent of people surveyed store tools or a workbench in their garage, and 44 percent use the space as a workshop. A slat wall, wire grid, or pegboard will keep your tools in plain sight. Opt for cabinets with doors and drawers if you prefer things to be stowed away or you want to keep them from young children. Unless you have an oversized garage, cabinets that are 24 inches deep and a workbench will probably fit only at the rear of the garage.

- If space is a premium or you maintain your own car, consider tool cabinets on wheels, which you can move into the center of the garage or the driveway.
- A workbench that lets you adjust the height is handy for different jobs and for users of different heights.
- Consider a workbench with a sealed, laminate, or plastic surface. Those types resist stains best, according to our tests. A wood or metal table is also a good option.

2 FOR GARDENERS: CORRAL YOUR GEAR

You'll probably want wall storage and shelves for hand tools, potting soil, peat moss, and fertilizer. Lawn mowers and heavy pots will need space on the floor. If you need a new mower, consider the Toro 20339 SmartStow, \$350. It can be stored upright to save space and performed very well in our tests, though it was a bit difficult to push, pull, and turn. Check out our other mower picks on page 36.

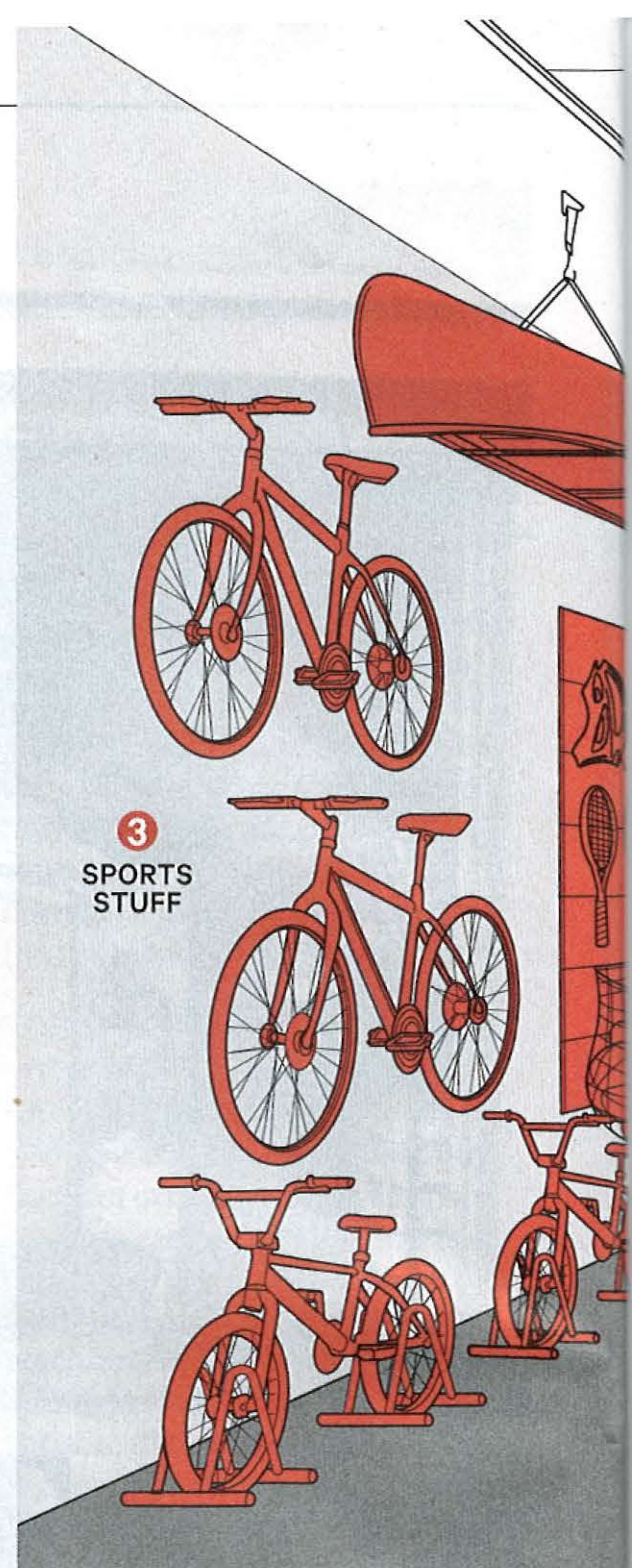
- Use a wall system for your rakes, hoes, and other tall items. An ideal place is along a side wall because those items don't protrude much. Mount trowels, bulb planters, and other hand tools on a pegboard, either on individual hooks or perhaps in wire or clear plastic bins for visibility.

- If there's space, consider a potting bench along the back wall, with some grow lights. Benches made of cedar, cypress, or galvanized steel will stand the test of time.

3 FOR SPORTS EQUIPMENT: MAKE IT EASY

"If kids have to open a door, put in something, and close the door, forget it," says Derrek Holland, who owns The Closet Doctor in Lincoln, Calif. "They'll leave it on the floor." A slat wall, track, or grid system can be fitted with hooks for specialized holders for balls, mitts, backpacks, rackets, skateboards, skis, bikes, and more. You can also mount hooks and other holders directly on the wall. Ditto for pegboards, which also come in galvanized steel. More tips:

- A slat wall or grid system allows you to easily raise hooks and accessories as kids get taller.
- Wall-mounted wire baskets, mesh bags, and clear, open bins stow items in clear view.
- An exception to the keep-the-floor-clear rule is a floor bike rack, which allows youngsters to ride right into the garage and park. When they're older and stronger, swap it for a wall-mounted rack.



3
SPORTS
STUFF

No kids? Consider suspending bikes from the ceiling with a bike lift, either motorized or manual.

- A hoist allows you to get your canoe or kayak up and down without damaging it or harming yourself in the process. Be sure to check the weight that the units can hold as well as the head room your garage door needs.

What's in the Typical Garage?



Power tools, hand tools, workbench

78%



Lawn mower, gardening equipment and supplies

68%



Bicycles, scooters

59%



Exercise/sports gear

55%



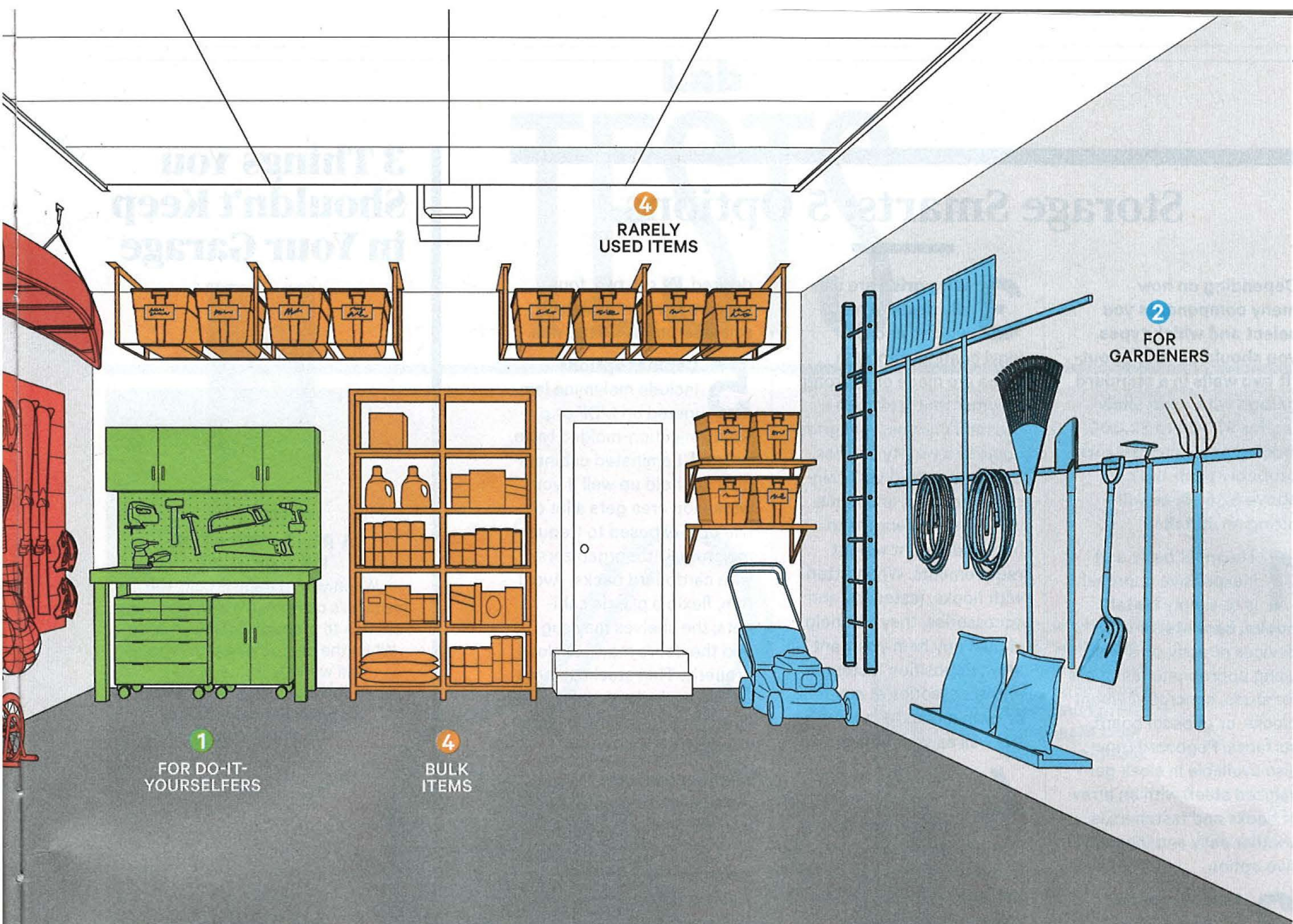
Cleaning supplies

47%



Seasonal decorations/off-season clothing

45%



4 'TIS NOT THE SEASON: STOW RARELY USED ITEMS

The ceiling has become the new frontier in garage storage, with systems designed to hold items as varied as hurricane shutters, big coolers, and surfboards. Overhead storage is an economical alternative to a cabinet for large, long, and relatively flat objects.

- A ceiling-mounted shelf is the ideal place for such lightweight items as holiday decorations and out-of-season clothing. Most are designed to allow plastic bins to sit securely in slots. Mesh sides add another measure of stability.
- For bulk purchases, keep extra cleaning supplies and nonperishable foods near the inner door to the house.

- Paper records can go into bins, but the weight makes them better for a shelf mounted high on a wall rather than above a car. Some rail-storage systems have wall braces and accommodate bins above.
- Use clear plastic bins to hold more than one type of item. Opaque bins are fine for out-of-season clothes, old business records, etc., if they're clearly labeled.



Children's toys
or lawn games

40%



Camping
equipment

37%



Furniture

26%



Nonperishable
food

17%



Electric
generator

14%



Boat, canoe,
kayak

8%

Storage Smarts: 5 Options

Depending on how many components you select and which types, you should be able to outfit two walls in a standard garage with open shelving for \$1,000 to \$2,000. Adding some cabinets will probably push the cost above \$2,500, as will hiring an installer.

1 The most basic and inexpensive approach is to simply **install hooks, baskets**, or other devices directly on a wall, using appropriate fasteners for studs, concrete/cement blocks, or gypsum board surfaces. Pegboard (now also available in sleek galvanized steel) with an array of hooks and fasteners is another easy and inexpensive option.

2 A **track system** can simply be a horizontal rail that allows you to attach various kinds of hooks, baskets, or mesh bags; others can also support cabinets or shelving. The highest-quality tracks are made of steel, preferably with an enamel coating, which can handle more weight and won't rust unless scratched. You can reconfigure the system as your needs change.

3 **Wire grids** are usually made of metal with an epoxy or vinyl coating, although some are made of a strong polymer that looks like brushed chrome. Wall grids come in a variety of sizes, can be mounted vertically or horizontally, and come in different strengths to handle different weight requirements. When fitted with hooks, fasteners, and accessories, they can hold almost any item you want to stow. Reposition fasteners and accessories at any time or even move the grid up the wall as your kids grow.

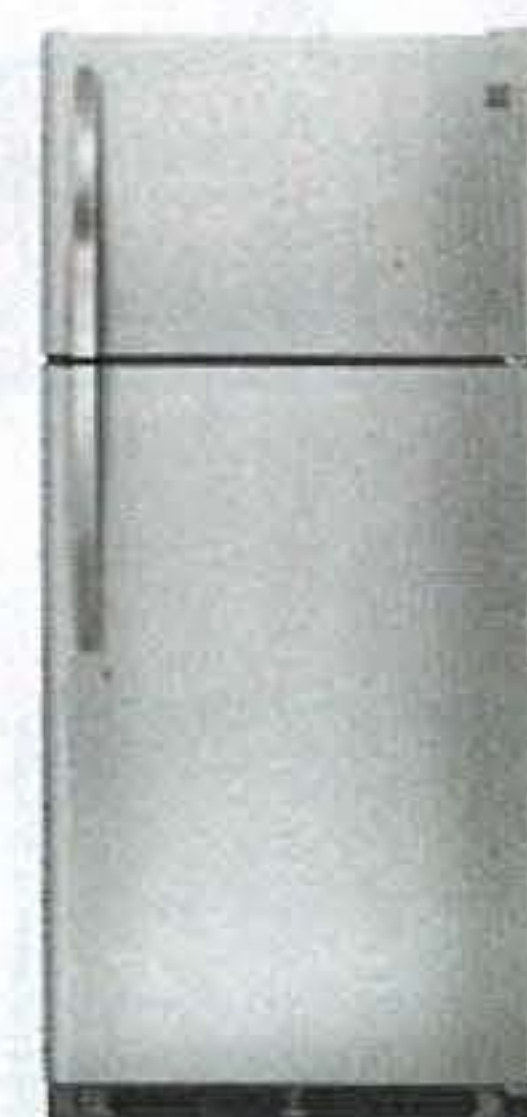
4 **Slat walls**, originally made of melamine clad particleboard or medium-density fiberboard for store displays, are the latest trend in garage storage. And now they also come in aluminum, PVC, resin, and steel, all of which are more durable than melamine. Horizontal grooves in the board accept baskets, bins, hooks, and other accessories. You can go whole hog by lining an entire wall with 4x8-foot panels. Some systems offer cabinets that can be mounted right on a slat wall and repositioned as

desired. Or run two, four, or more horizontal slats at selected points on the wall.

5 **Cabinet options** include melamine laminated on MDF or plywood, injection-molded resin, or steel. Laminated cabinets may not hold up well if your workshop area gets a lot of use or is exposed to frequent moisture. Ditto organizers with cardboard backs. Avoid thin, flexible plastic cabinets; the shelves may sag, and the doors may not close properly. Thin steel cabinets can have similar problems. Look for thicker, lower-gauge steel, which is stronger.

Hanging cabinets reduce the likelihood of moisture transfer from the garage floor, which can delaminate melamine cabinets and rust steel ones. Hanging cabinets also ensures that they will be level; otherwise, the slight downward pitch of the floor that diverts water toward the garage doors means the cabinets may not line up perfectly and the doors may be more difficult to open. Some companies add front legs to deep cabinets for added support. Sliding cabinet doors make access easier than swinging doors when a car is parked nearby.

3 Things You Shouldn't Keep in Your Garage



A REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER

When your garage is cold, the machine's compressor won't run long enough to properly cool the freezer. When the garage is hot, the fridge will work overtime to stay cool, driving up your electric bill.

43 percent keep a fridge in the garage.



GASOLINE OR OIL

Pilot lights, like those on a water heater, and flammable vapors are the problem here. The vapors could cause a fire or an explosion. Even in a detached garage, you want to be sure that gas is stored in an approved container. Keep only as much gas as you'll use in a few weeks.

52 percent keep paint in the garage.



PAINT OR SOLVENT

Wide temperature swings can damage paint. Cold is especially bad because it can freeze the water in paint.

53 percent keep it in the garage.

Tips for a Smooth Installation

No matter the storage system and the clarity of the directions, a second set of hands will usually make the work easier. These simple—though often ignored—steps can help avoid problems:

- Plan to spend several hours assembling and installing a unit.
- Read all of the directions before you start putting the pieces together.
- Find and mark wall studs before attaching anything to the walls. Most studs are 16 inches from center to center.
- Do an inventory of the parts. If something

is missing, it's better to find out early so that you can request a replacement. If it's a crucial part, you might want to wait until it arrives to get started.

- Measure twice, cut once. Before you cut wall brackets and other pieces, make sure that your measurements are accurate.
- Use a cordless screwdriver or drill to speed the work of driving many screws.

→ **SEND YOUR TIPS AND PHOTOS FOR PUBLICATION**
Inspired by our organization advice? Please send your garage storage before-and-after photos to garagemakeover@cr.consumer.org.