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Your Last Chance to Organize that Garish Garage

[Aaron Broverman](#)

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We've all heard of spring cleaning. There are countless articles every year giving tips & tricks on how to prepare and stay organized in the spring and summer. But for many of us, that "fresh start" or "clear the decks" mindset really doesn't set in the spring, but instead finds itself firmly entrenched after Labour Day.



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"I think everyone still has that September, back to school feeling, even though we don't go back to school," says Jaclyn Ray, a Toronto-based professional organizer known as [The Clutter Wrangler](#). Of course, people with kids are going through the back to school thing of putting away summer stuff and some people are closing their cottages. A lot of stuff just sort of happens around September 1st."

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This makes it the perfect time to clean house, especially the garage since people will get too busy to take on big household projects and the weather will start to turn cold very soon. "It's a room in your house that's not insulated, so it may be true that the only time you spend any time in there is the summer and in the winter you just want to park your car and get inside," says Ray.

So with that in mind, Ray took time out from her busy schedule to give you some tips on how to turn a seemingly daunting task into something that can be done in less than an afternoon.

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It Starts with What You Store

The lack of insulation and temperature control within the garage means you have to be mindful of what you store in there. "I sometimes have clients who put boxes of books out there, records, old stereo equipment, or something like that. Then, you go back six months later and it's just totally wrecked."

So because of the way collectibles and other sensitive objects can get damp and weather beaten in the space, Ray's first crucial piece of advice is to think twice before putting your paper or other objects with the potential to warp in the garage.

"I think some people think, 'Oh great, I'll just shove this old box of books out there' and it's just not going to be the same."

dampness of the space. If you're really into sports like skiing and biking, you can actually nail hooks into your ceiling or wall, so that they're not in the way. You can do the same thing with your broom, rake or snow shovel just by nailing some pegs into the wall.

As for organization, the simplest way to find things is just to put like items with other like items. "All the gardening stuff in one corner, all the sports equipment in another corner and all the tools together -- just that kind of basic stuff," describes Ray.

When you can't raise something off the ground, Ray says, go with bins. "I like those large clear plastic bins, but not so large that you can't lift them." Then, just go at them with a magic marker and label what's in there.

Additionally, you'll want to store sharp tools up high where the kids can't get them and hazardous chemicals could go in a locked cabinet with a door. "Just let everyone know they need to be careful in the garage because remember, dangerous material is always going to be in there first."

At the same time, get your hose wrapped up on the wall because if there's a kink in it it could crack and then leak all over the place, but make sure you drain it before you wrap it to the wall. "If there's water in it, it will freeze," says Ray.

Purge What You Didn't Use

For some, it can be hard to get rid of things, but Ray says all you need to do is ask yourself one question: "Did I really use this in the last four months?"

If you didn't, now is the time to sell it, give it away and put it on the curb. If your kids didn't use it this summer, chances are good that they're not going to miss it. "If your kids didn't use those pool toys or that patio chairs are broken, now's a good time to toss it."

In case you're worried, it's not too late to have a garage sale. In fact, Ray says now is the perfect time to have one last kick at the can and off-load some stuff. "I think the weather is great and students are coming back into town. "All of the moving trucks are sold out this weekend," she says. "People are saying, 'I need a lamp, I need a cheap table, I need a push-mower for the apartment that I'm renting.' I think Labour Day Weekend into September is still great for garage sales."

Plus, the winter and summer sports equipment is bound to get smaller, so Ray recommends looking up those used sports equipment stores now, before the hockey rush in the winter, and see if you can do some trades. "As winter comes up, there's going to be more demand for certain things, so this is the time for you to get a little ahead of the game if you need to trade-in skis, skates or hockey equipment," says Ray. "There are those families that get new equipment every year and these stores would love to have those type of customers right now, as opposed to when the first snowfall hits and everyone is trading in their old equipment."

Before carting everything to the consignment store, first just make sure everything fits, even the summer stuff because you can project ahead to next year. "Why store something that doesn't fit all winter long?" asks Ray.

Keep the Car in Mind

When cleaning out the garage and re-arranging everything, make sure there's still room for the car. Ray recommends a strategy my mom still uses to this day, where you tie a string from the ceiling or garage mechanism so that it dangles just in front of your windshield, so you know when to stop the car, so the garage door will still close behind you.

"Another trick for when you're putting shelving up, park your car and open the driver's side door," says Ray. It's not as important that the rest of the doors open because the driver can always back out and let people in. You'll probably drive out and put up your shelving, but you've got to make sure that at least the driver's side opens."

You can also use chalk to remind you where your car sat prior to the reorganization.

Do Your Maintenance Now, Not Later

You are always better off thinking ahead for next season, so while you're de-cluttering the garage, take some time to do that regular upkeep most of us always forget to do until next season. Ray suggests sharpening your gardening tools in a few weeks, so they don't come out of the box dull in the spring.

More important however, is your bike. "If you leave the chain un-lubed all winter long, it's just going to be rusted out by the time spring comes. You should just lube your bike now, so you can ride on the first great day in spring, instead of the opposite, where you're joining everybody in taking it in to the bike shop."

It Doesn't have to be Perfect

When you're done, don't sweat it if your garage doesn't look like a big reveal on a home makeover show. "I think there's such a thing as being too organized," says Ray. You don't need to invest a whole lot of money into this and the garage should at least look used. It is the garage after all, it can afford to be a little bit messy."

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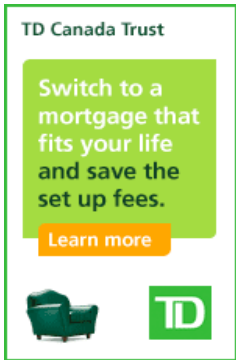
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