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What's in *Your*  
Garage?



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Above and pages 16 and 18: GarageTek systems in use.

# What's in **your** GARAGE?

**Lots of "stuff," probably. Here's how to make order out of chaos and create some space you (and your Toyota) could really use**

by Brian Cook



**W**e certainly love our automobiles, don't we? The same can also be said for our garages. Yet we don't always make the best use of that handy space with the big door(s), nor do we always use it as originally intended: to park our cars, trucks and SUVs.

Instead, for many people a garage is a workshop. It's a studio for hobbyists, artists, crafters and future rock 'n' roll stars. It's a home office. It's a business incubator for entrepreneurs. It's an entertainment arcade (think ping pong tables, billiards, air hockey and video games) or an extension of the family room. Turning the idea selector 180 degrees, it's a





fitness center, complete with various weightlifting stations, a treadmill and a stationary bike.

But for all too many homeowners, a garage is a disorganized, cluttered and just plain messy holding pen for all sorts of things besides vehicles—from furniture you'll never use again to toys the kids have long since outgrown. Admit it: We tend to store a lot of "stuff" in the garage without giving much thought to making better use of it.

"America is a funny place," says Marc Shuman, president and founder of

GarageTek, maker of custom-designed garage storage and organization systems. "We'll keep a \$40,000 vehicle in the driveway in the weather and sun, and keep [a lot] of junk that nobody ever touches in the garage. GarageTek lets you bring your car back into the garage and put order to the rest of the stuff that's in there."

As much we love our garages, we don't necessarily want them to be visible to passersby, so increasingly, garages are being built on the sides of houses or in some sort of courtyard arrangement,

if the lots can accommodate them. If the garage does face the street at the front of the home, often it's designed to appear as being separate, or to replicate the "carriage house" quality of older residences.

Many houses—and not just those of the rich—now feature three-car garages, but that extra bay, especially in areas where basements are rare, is often converted for other uses. But for most people, a garage means precious storage space, with or without the automotive element. And that means maximizing its capacity and efficiency.

On the upscale side of garage makeovers is the nationally distributed GarageTek ([garagetek.com](http://garagetek.com)), whose typical customer spends an average of \$5,500 on the system, according to the company. The backbone of it all is TekPanel, a strong, glossy, seamless wall panel—originally invented for retail businesses—to which the various storage and organizational pieces are attached. A typical setup includes cabinets, shelving, activity racks, accessories and even flooring. GarageTek components are custom-made for the products they'll be storing, be it lawn equipment, sporting goods or something else.

"Our motto is: 'We design it. We install it. You enjoy it,'" says Shuman. "As part of our initial consultation, we analyze the individual's garage and discuss what they want to use [it] for. We then provide a computerized 3-D drawing of the final [space] using a software program called GarageVision. [This allows the] customer [to] see what their garage will look like after the product is installed."

A major appeal of the GarageTek



system is its flexibility; while the components are securely installed, they're not permanent and can be easily rearranged. When a homeowner moves, everything can be disassembled and shipped to the new residence for reinstallation. And just because the word garage is in the name doesn't mean that's the only place the GarageTek system can be put to use. Shuman says his company has outfitted a variety of other spaces including sheds, pool houses, basements, laundry rooms and even airport hangars.

Another guy who knows his way around a garage—to say nothing of building, repairing and renovating the houses to which they're usually attached—is Danny Lipford, a home-improvement expert who appears on a variety of national television outlets including The Weather Channel and CBS TV's "The Early Show." Lipford, who started his home-remodeling business in 1978, is the host and executive producer of the weekly syndicated show "Today's Homeowner with Danny Lipford." His website, [dannylipford.com](http://dannylipford.com), offers practical, useful, budget-friendly tips for do-it-yourselfers of every description.

"The garage is the one place that always seems to be disorganized," says the Alabama-based Lipford. "But when your garage becomes overrun with sporting equipment, gardening supplies, miscellaneous tools and other various odds and ends, it's time to create some order in all the chaos." He suggests a three-part plan of attack:

1) **Divide and conquer:** "Start by separating everything into categories," advises Lipford—sports equipment, lawn-care items, toys, etc. This gives

you the best idea of what you're dealing with and helps you determine the best way to organize and store everything. "Remember, when in doubt, throw it out. You can always [have] a garage sale or even donate items that you no longer use to charity."

2) **A place for everything:** "Designating certain areas and corners of the garage for certain activities is often a solution that keeps everyone happy," explains Lipford. A basic principal in garage organization, he says, is to free up floor space, "so if it's on the floor it's time to store." Using hooks designed to hang things from the ceiling or the wall, for example, is an ideal way to get those bicycles out from under foot. Suspending a metal rod from the ceiling, using hooks and chains, creates a spot for hanging out-of-season clothing. For that jumble of garden and lawn tools, inexpensive and easy-to-install wall rack systems are available from your local home center. Don't forget about simple shelving and "even the lowly nail" that can be used to store all sorts of items on the walls, says Lipford.

3) **Flooring:** It's probably not something that immediately comes to mind when you're trying to reclaim your garage, but you'd be surprised at what a targeted floor treatment—say, along both sides and at the back—can do. "Installing a thin, inexpensive indoor/outdoor carpet over the high-traffic areas will help limit the amount of dirt and water that's tracked inside," says Lipford. He recommends using double-sided carpet tape, which holds the carpet securely in place and makes it easy to replace; just be sure to first clean the floor

and let it dry thoroughly before installing any sort of covering.

Finally, a few words about tools—which always seem to make their way into the garage, whether to be stored or put to work. After all, when employed by even a novice "handyman" (or woman), the right tool makes almost any job easier. Here are 10 must-have tools for anyone who regularly tackles home improvement and repair jobs.

**Hammer:** Buy a heavy-duty one for building things and a lighter one for

## United States Garage Trends

1. There are more than 65 million garages in the nation.
2. In 1950, 41% of new homes had a garage; today, 91% do, with 83% of them two-car or larger.
3. 25% of new-home buyers want at least a three-car garage, while 54% prefer the standard two-car variety.
4. As recently as 2003, the garage ranked as the No. 1 area of the home for storage- and organization-product spending.
5. More than 50% of consumers plan to reorganize their garage within the next two years.
6. The latest trend in home-space usage by architects and builders is "flex space": oversized garages that can be used for multiple purposes such as vehicle storage, workshops and children's play rooms.
7. Americans consider having a garage just as important to their home lifestyle as a porch, deck or balcony.

*(Information courtesy of GarageTek. Sources: Appliance.com, National Association of Home Builders, Peatrice Consulting, Survey: Professional Builder Magazine, Housing.com, United States Census Bureau 1999 American Housing Survey.)*





## Tool Safety: A Powerful Concept

Whether you're a Danny Lipford in training or just one of the millions of do-it-yourselfers looking to save a few bucks, you know that power tools are tough to beat for convenience, speed, precision and results that at least approach professional grade. From saws and sanders to drills and (nail) guns, having a well-stocked arsenal of equipment makes tackling many household projects a bit less daunting. But power tools can also be dangerous if you're careless, so work smart and heed Lipford's advice:

- Follow the tool manufacturer's directions and usage guidelines.
- Wear adequate eye protection.
- Be sure your clothing doesn't hang or dangle loosely; if you have long hair, tie it back.
- Wear gloves? Leather ones are best for working with power tools.
- Ensure the tool's safety guards are in place and operating properly.
- Replace damaged parts or damaged tools before using them.
- Always keep a firm grip on the tool.
- When sanding, wear a dust mask.
- When operating a noisy power tool for an extended period of time, wear earplugs.
- When using tools outdoors, plug them into a GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlet to reduce the risk of electric shock.



more delicate jobs (hanging pictures, squashing bugs that walk across your freshly stained deck, etc.).

**Screwdriver set:** Be sure it includes both the flat-head and Phillips styles.

**Pliers:** Just imagine trying to do without a good pair.

**Utility knife:** The metal (not plastic) ones with an adjustable blade are best; you won't believe how many uses you find for it.

**Tape measure:** See "pliers" entry.

**Drill:** Cordless and with a keyless chuck, please. All of the newer models not only make holes but also drive screws with the handy adapter bits.

**Circular saw:** A light-duty model works fine for cutting single pieces of wood. You'll soon forget you even owned a saw that didn't require electricity.

**Laser level:** Far more accurate than the old-style liquid models. Arguably one of the handiest inventions in recent memory.

**Wet/dry vac:** Whether it's the kids' water-balloon skirmish or the effect of swirling winds on that once-neat pile of sawdust in the garage, it spells m-e-s-s.

**Electric sander:** Woodworking projects will suddenly become less loathsome.

*Brian Cook is the editor of Toyota Connections.*