



the new
Flex
room

Evolving from mere auto storage units, today's garages are often serving multiple roles. The most common is **storage**. But increasingly, garages are being used for a variety of other purposes, dictated by the activity(s) envisioned. Here are issues and solutions for expanding the usability of your garage, based on what we've been hearing from you.



STORAGE AND ORGANIZATION

Did garages get larger because of the increased popularity of minivans, SUVs and pickups, or due to our unwillingness to part with our stuff? Both are probably true, thankfully, because regardless of the size of vehicle you drive, you probably don't have *too much* storage in your home!

Especially if you live in a neighborhood where covenants forbid outbuildings such as a shed on your property, garage storage is a non-negotiable. From lawn mowers and garden tools to skis, golf clubs and bikes, to auto supplies and even the kids' waterguns, where are you going to put all the stuff so that you can easily find what you're looking for and not have to worry about running into (or over!) said items when you pull in or out of your garage?

Several companies make garage storage and organization products, from simple Do-It-Yourself shelves and tool hangers to professionally designed and installed elaborate, attractive storage systems. For 2-car garages, the rule of thumb is a 24' x 24' garage which is typically large enough for such storage products, a second refrigerator or even a freezer on the back wall and along one side wall. A 22'-dimension may work if you have smaller vehicles.

Another storage opportunity may be going *up* rather than *out*. Overhead storage in a garage, whether it's open storage over the

garage door tracks and opener or attic storage space accessed via pull down stairs, can be a smart use of available space. If your garage presents the overhead storage option, garage door manufacturer LiftMaster offers a neat garage door opener that mounts on the side wall of the garage rather than above the garage door. This creates a lot more overhead storage opportunities!

If cleaning out the garage isn't high on your list of favorite things to do, mobile storage products are a blessing. Storage units on wheels can be easily moved to clean out under them. Similarly, storage/organization products which are adjustable for easy reconfiguration are sure to be appreciated as your needs (or vehicles) change.

Finally, don't limit your evaluation of storage and organization solutions merely based on your needs today. Consider changes in lifestyle and household composition. For example, if you were to start that home-based business in a year or two, will you need space for inventory? Or, if you get married/as kids get older/if Mom were to move in with you, how would your garage storage needs change? Planning now can eliminate regret later!

ACTIVITIES

Beyond just added storage space, garages can be ideal environments for a host of other activities. Among the most common activity areas are space for a workshop and hobby areas such as a planting/gardening center.

But nowadays, garages are also becoming an extended entertaining option. The guys (especially the ones with the big cigars) coming over for cards? The garage can be the smoking lounge/gaming area if tobacco is not welcome in your home. Maybe it isn't cards—maybe it's a billiards/ping-pong/air hockey table that will entertain friends and family. Just know that by building code the garage floor has to slope slightly for water to run out, so you'll need to raise one end of the gaming table to make it level. And of course, we've let (or sent) the kids and their friends out to play in the garage for decades...

The fastest growing garage entertaining activity revolves around watching TV or movies. Having a bunch of friends over for the "big game" but not into the game yourself? You're not alone—and you won't be alone when some guests are watching the game in the garage and others are enjoying your hospitality indoors. And those video projectors—they're getting smaller and more compact while the picture sizes are growing. Have you seen the new crop of inflatable projection screens? Yes, you can even buy 'em through Target's website. Though they were undoubtedly designed to be used in the backyard, if it's raining...or too cold...or such a bright day outside that you can't see the projection, the garage is a great alternative! Kind of reminds you of "*drive-in movies!*"



LEFT: TV's, soda machine, games...this garage is truly multi-purpose.

BELOW: LiftMaster's side mount model 3800 garage door opener expands overhead storage options.
photo courtesy of LiftMaster



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAKING YOUR GARAGE A "FLEX SPACE"

ELECTRICAL. Building codes only require one electrical outlet in your garage. Obviously, that's not going to be enough. If you have planned how you want your garage to "flex", you can have sufficient electrical outlets installed exactly where you want them.

CABLE TV. Wireless cable TV signals are in the not-too-distant future. But for now, it only costs a few dollars more to have a cable TV jack run into your garage. Do it.

LIGHTING. A couple naked light bulbs. If you don't ask for more, that might be all that's

included in the base price. You'll want to increase the overall lighting if you have other uses in mind for your garage. Specifically, task lighting over work areas is a "must".

HOT AND COLD WATER. From gardening to washing out paint brushes to bathing the dog, talk with your builder or plumber about hot and cold water into your garage. It can be as simple as Moen's exterior hot and cold water silcock run into the garage to having a more traditional faucet and laundry tub/sink.

FLOOR DRAIN. It rains. Our vehicles track in snow that melts. Garages get wet. Having a drain installed in the garage floor helps keep everything else inside your garage from getting wet/damaged by water.

SEALING THE GARAGE FLOOR. Whether it's to keep spills from staining the floor or just to enhance the appearance of your garage, there are several sealants or coatings that can easily be applied to the garage floor.

HEAT. You would be surprised at the number of homes in colder climates with heated garages. You've paid for the space, why not get the most use from it year 'round? Talk with your builder about both forced-air heaters (similar to your furnace) and in-floor radiant heat, which warms the garage through the concrete garage floor, avoiding the "add-on" look of most supplemental heaters.

Finally, we return to the **garage door opener**. Noise and vibration are a given with most chain-drive garage door openers. For a little

more money, you could step up to a screw-drive model which is quieter. But the smart money is on belt-drive openers, which are typically the quietest and smoothest openers on the market, causing less interruption for whatever you're working on in the garage (not to mention reducing irritating noise throughout your home.)

Still, there's that garage door opener. Function, yes—even a necessity. But it's a bit of an eyesore and sure gets in the way of overhead storage. Must have been designed by guys. Manufacturing types—all practical, little (if any) thought given to aesthetics. So, in the middle of your flex room you have an industrial machine hanging from the ceiling.

Or, perhaps you checked out LiftMaster's side mount model 3800 garage door opener with no overhead unit! I don't know if it won any industrial design awards, but in creating a great garage/flex room, it should win a design award. This sleek unit mounts on the wall beside the garage door, so ceiling space is freed up for maximum storage. It even has an optional standby power system that will continue working, even when the power goes out!

How far you go in terms of turning your garage into a multi-purpose area is up to you. But when one of the ladies we talked with suggested a Murphy (wall) bed in the garage for her husband... 