

## Where Can I Store All the Stuff?

Here in Florida one of the most common concerns I hear about housing revolves around storage. We enjoy one of the best climates in the nation and a lifestyle filled with outdoor recreation opportunities. But despite the many benefits of life in the Sunshine State the one shortfall for most of us is having the storage space we may have been accustomed to enjoying in northern style homes. The loss of attics and basements leaves a big void in the world of storage capacity. So what do we do with all the stuff? Fortunately there are a number of ways we can meet the storage challenge.

For most of us the first place explored is finding some precious storage space by weaving around the roof trusses over the garage. By using a pull down stair access hole and some plywood we tend to create micro makeshift attics. However, this can turn into a risky solution. In reality, trusses found in most homes are engineered to support the roof with the bottom horizontal "chord" designed to support a finished drywall ceiling. They were NOT DESIGNED to take the weight of your stuff. So if you opt to do what so many of us do, make sure you keep the plywood thinner and the stuff lighter. The last thing you need is a truss to fail because it has been stretched too far beyond capacity and the giant dent in the roof of your car that would result (not to mention to hefty repair bill for your home).

The ultimate "upstairs" option is use of an attic truss that has been engineered to absorb significant storage weight and provide open storage space. Such a truss offers a more open center area to accommodate storage as opposed the crisscrossing of truss webbing generally found. They also have been designed to specifically act as a storage hold with capacity well beyond the featherweight items that you dare place on the bottom chord of traditional trusses. Planning this into construction of a new home is a relatively inexpensive modification to the roof design. However, modifying an existing roof by removing a few traditional trusses and replacing them with attic trusses is costly. The act of ripping apart and reconstructing part of your roof is not for the faint of heart.

Another approach to enhancing storage in the garage is use of the prefabricated storage systems that act as crates suspended from the ceiling. The capacity of the space created depends on the height available in the garage area. Again, this solution stretches the capacity of traditional trusses and/or drywall. Additional bracing on the side walls will help with weight capacity. This approach provides for easy access to items stored and a neatly finished way of providing storage area.

Perhaps the most common approach to stashing away our stuff is resorting to the many aftermarket storage systems that are available at the likes of Lowe's and Home Depot. This includes everything from simple plastic bins that can be labeled and stacked to ingenious storage systems that can transform the capacity and efficiency of interior closets. Use of coordinated storage systems not only provide greater efficiency in providing space, but will bring organization to what can be chaos. Such systems can range from beefing-up ventilated shelving with add-on bins and shelves to elaborate systems costing thousands of dollars.

Still another option for finding products that will boost storage capacity is making a visit to an IKEA store. This renowned worldwide retailer has numerous products designed for office and home designed to increase storage capability of closets, kitchen cabinets and dresser drawers.

If large quantities of paper records clutter your space, converting paper records to digital files will open up space. The use of a scanner or even a digital camera to convert paper records to digital files reduces the space needed to virtually nothing.

Then there is always the ever-present and numerous mini-storage facilities for stashing stuff. When you consider the cost of building a 10 X 20 garage in the \$12,000 to \$15,000 range, the \$150 per month rental fee may be a sensible solution.

Of course, the really sensible approach to solving the storage question may be determining if the stuff you think you want to store is worth storing in the first place. An old adage expresses that if you haven't used something in the last five years you probably don't need it. Give it some thought. It may make struggling with storage a lot easier to solve and the size of home you need more affordable.