

More storage might be right over your head

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No matter the size of a home, creating more storage space is always a priority. With the proper planning and help from a few of the latest gadgets, homeowners can get more room from designated storage areas.

At the top of the list of premium storage spaces is the attic. It is easily converted to allow for some type of storage. It can also provide either heated or cooled space, or full walk-out space. Usually it's simple to install plywood for a make-shift floor. But there can be a catch, depending on how much is stored. "It may be that the floor system is not as strong as it needs to be to support the material you're putting up there for storage," says John Allen, owner of Southern Construction and Design. "Knowing you're going to use that space for some type of storage, you may have to come in and do some additional structural modification to the floor systems," he says. "You want to make sure it can support the load you're putting on it."

In new home construction, that's simply a matter of working with the builder. Sometimes the roofline dictates how much space can be used. The pitch and the ceiling height will be factors. Even so, Allen says an alternative is to look at the space often found over the garage. Usually referred to as a bonus room, the space is heated and cooled for use as a living space. Obviously it's not fully available as storage, he says, but there are areas on either side of the main living area that can be accessed for storage. He suggests adding insulated doors or small, cut-down doors, to get into the nooks and crannies on the other side of the walls in the garage space. It's enough space for seasonal items, winter clothes and similar items. When building a home, it's an easy added storage solution for the cost of a small door. When building a home, there's another possibility. "It's basically a rotating shelf system that's about 10 to 12 feet wide," he says. "It's a fantastic solution that you can build into a wall system and utilize for storage." The two-story automated unit has multiple shelving in a vertically rotating track. It's available in multiple heights, such as five feet, 10 feet, or even up to 20 feet tall. Allen says it's suitable for storing everything from shoes and golf clubs to holiday boxes and clothing. Because of its height and the fact that the entire system rotates, it's a bulky unit. The custom installation requires the system be designed into the house from the start. It might be installed in between two floors, such as the basement to a first floor. And the systems typically range between \$10,000 to \$15,000, not including installation. If that's out of the question, homeowners may look to another popular place - the garage. Britt Meeks, owner of Garage Solutions, works with homeowners to utilize every inch of it. "Putting cabinets and shelving in the garage is usually the first solution," says Meeks. Cabinets are available in stainless steel, a Formica finish, or the basic wood-grain look. The stainless steel not only provides a sharp appearance, he says, but is high quality and durable for the garage area. Open wire steel shelving units on walls also extend storage capabilities.

But Meeks says he prefers putting up cabinets with doors so storage items are tucked away and out of sight. "There's a varying amount of activity in the garage, as well as a variable amount of accumulation," he says. "The key is to get stuff off the floor." A suspended or hanging shelving unit is one way to achieve that goal. It's also an alternative to putting in flooring above the ceiling of the garage. These are usually wire grid shelves suspended from the ceiling with a couple of steel straps. It can give up to a couple of feet of storage. In some garages where foundations are higher at one end than the other, it may offer five or six feet of available space from the ceiling area. Sometimes converting attics and garages to storage space still isn't enough. As decks continue to increase in popularity, a simple suggestion is to add lattice skirting for storage of outdoor items, such as lawnmowers or other lawn equipment. A swinging door added to the latticework provides easy access to additional storage. "That does wonders, giving more dry space needed for storage," says Wade Short, owner of Archadeck of the Tennessee Valley. Built-in deck benches with storage underneath can provide extra space for patio cushions and accessories. Or make the entire bottom of the deck weatherproof, he says, by adding a rain-deck system. It fits between the joists and keeps the rain out, essentially acting like a roof. Max Miller, franchise owner of Dry-B-Lo of North Alabama agrees this could be a good - albeit expensive - solution for extending outdoor storage space. Miller's company uses its systems to create a dry space that can extend the homeowner's living area. The original product, which consists of rolled aluminum panels, is installed from under the deck. The newer version of that product is installed from the top of the deck, putting the system in between the joists. Then a conventional ceiling can be placed underneath for a fully finished look.