

Organize LIKE A PRO

Missing hiking boot? Nowhere to put your bike? Climbing rope in knots? Sound familiar? It's time to get it together—no matter how much of a gear junkie you are.

By Shanti Sosienski

If you've ever stood in your garage and wondered how you ended up with so much gear, you're definitely not alone. Even the pros like Ketchum, Idaho-based adventure racer Rebecca Rusch, who've made a career out of working with gear, go through this momentary panic every time they open a closet or their garage. The difference between you and them, however, is that they've become experts at pulling everything together quickly through tried-and-true methods.

For Rebecca knowing where everything is all the time is crucial: midrace in somewhere like Borneo, she can't wonder whatever happened to those extra headlamp batteries or, even worse, her compass. After 10 years of professional racing, Rebecca has learned a thing or two and has turned the organization of gear into an art form.



MAKE A PLAN

Whether organizing for a race or getting an unruly closet together, Rebecca's strategy is always the same: set aside ample time so you won't have to stop in the middle of a project. "I am very visual, so I have to be able to see everything. The house becomes like a gear explosion, and it all gets spread out and put into little piles by sport."

When Rebecca organizes gear, she considers two things. First, how often will the items be used? And, second, where will it best fit?

Focusing on one sport at a time makes it feel more manageable. For Rebecca this means starting with her climbing gear, which is a priority to keep organized because it tangles easily and she uses it a lot. It mainly goes outside on shelves in a clear box. Once the climbing gear is in order, she moves on to another sport. Her bike box sits outside and contains everything from bike shoes to tools. Her camping gear, which she uses often for races, is on a middle shelf outside. Tents, sleeping bags, pads, and camp stove also go in a clear box. Gear for winter sports like snowboarding and Nordic, alpine, and backcountry skiing go on the back porch. Boots, however, live in a closet in the guest room so they can dry out properly. Gear she uses for racing—like map holders, compasses, GPS unit, and flashlights—goes on a bottom shelf for easy access in both summer and winter.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

How much gear do I really need? Rebecca asks herself that every three months. "If I haven't used something in the past three months or if I have two of something and I really don't need it, I try to get rid of it. This is really hard for me. I've been accused of being a pack rat."

Start by looking at your winter clothes. You know that old pair of snowboard pants you keep around in case you need them for some grubby project? Get rid of them. How many old pairs of running shoes do you have? How about old jog bras that you can't even remember when you bought? "If there are two things that do the same job, I keep the one I love and get rid of the other one," says Rebecca.

As you sort through gear, Rebecca suggests setting up two boxes and a pile. One box is for stuff you're going to keep, the second box is for things you "might" use, and the pile is for stuff to sell or give away. "My wrist guards for in-line skating are a good example of something I often reconsider. I never wear them, but I sort of feel like I should keep them. They have gone through a few rounds where I look at them and think I don't need them, so they are getting close to being banished."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

For Rebecca the key to organization is keeping gear for each sport in individual clear containers. “I really just have to see things when I am looking at the boxes,” she explains. “If I can quickly see which box is which from the outside, I can easily move the ones that I won’t be using until spring, like mountain-biking gear or like ski gear in the summer, to a new spot.” They also work great for transporting gear and keeping it organized while you travel. “The containers slide in and out of your car easily and back onto your garage shelf without much hassle.”

To organize within each box, Rebecca uses clear and colored bags. They also enable her to easily transfer things straight into a backpack, and the clear bags are easy to see in a dark compartment. In some cases she also uses colored sacks. For example, she has a turquoise stuff sack that always contains mountain-biking gear, and the red bag is for paddling gear. “When I color-code my gear, it’s easy to see and grab quickly,” she explains.

Two other essential tools she always has on hand are a big black marker and orange electrical tape. She wraps a little orange tape around every piece of gear she owns so that when she races or is on a trip with friends, she always knows which paddle, pair of snowshoes, or helmet is hers. Even her harness is marked with tape.

STUFF IT AND SHELVES IT

What do you do with all those boxes once you’ve organized them? Having enough shelves is Rebecca’s secret weapon. If you have to stack baskets and gear on top of each other, you are still digging. So throughout her house, she has all kinds of shelving. In closets where there weren’t any shelves, she installed the inexpensive snap-together wire units that you can find at home centers and discount stores.

Once you have enough shelf space, it’s important to designate different areas of the shelves for different sports. Put the things you use a lot at eye level and above. Things you rarely use should be on the bottom shelves. Think about how the shelves should logically be organized. If it’s summer, you will want your hydration pack in an easy-to-reach place; and though you may camp a few times during the warm seasons, that bigger pack should be in the back. Bike box with pump, spare tires, and helmet are useless to the front of your face in January if you live where the roads are covered in snow. Tuck away that box on a low shelf and replace it with the one full of ski goggles, gloves, hats, and hand-warmer packets. Rotate the boxes when spring comes, moving the winter gear to the bottom shelf.

MISCELLANEOUS ORGANIZING TOOLS

Look for obvious ways to organize your stuff as well. Last winter Rebecca found that her skis were constantly getting in the way of other gear and falling all over the place, especially when she wanted that one pair in the back. Her solution: she special-ordered a plastic rack like the ones in ski shops. It cost her \$20, and now her skis stand tall in her storage shed.

Another key organizational tool are hooks, which can be purchased in numerous sizes—from hefty plastic-coated meat hooks for bikes to little hooks that are perfect for webbing, mesh bags, sleeping bags, and more. Hooks are inexpensive and help keep snag-free those things that tangle easily. “Inevitably, when you need to tie a kayak on your car quickly, the webbing will take 20 minutes to untangle. If it’s on a hook, it’s just hanging there and easy to grab and go.”

THE ODD BOX

The “odd box” is where Rebecca puts everything that is sort of homeless, from kneepads to crummy tools she doesn’t often use. If she

ever has trouble finding something random, this is the first place she looks. “It’s a lot easier to organize at home than when you’re out camping. If you don’t have it together, once you’re out there it could be the middle of the night when your headlamp goes out and you’re rummaging through your car in the rain, trying to find a battery. It will never happen at a good time. If you’re prepared, it’s ‘I’ve got a battery right here’ instead of sitting in the dark. I can honestly say, with as much gear as I have, it’s paid off over the years to keep it organized.”

ESSENTIALS

Whether you are on a beer or champagne budget, here is a list of items that Rebecca picked out to make organizing easier.

Platinum elfa Garage Mesh Drawers

Rebecca likes how you can easily see the stuff in the wire baskets, and they allow damp things to air out. The wheels also make these drawers conveniently mobile. \$151.88. www.thecontainerstore.com

ALOKSAK Bags

These bomber-proof plastic bags cost quite a bit more than Ziplocs, but you’ll never worry about their getting punctured when you toss them into a box full of gear. \$6.25–\$13.29. www.watchfuleydesigns.com

Ziploc Bags

This old standby keeps things in order and protected from water and mold damage. \$2–\$4. Available at most grocery and discount stores.

Black Grid Stacking Shelves

These are shelves within shelves. If Rebecca wants to organize a large shelf unit, she’ll use collapsible shelves like these so she can pull one box out from under another without having to pull out both of them. \$11.99–\$15.99. www.thecontainerstore.com

Stacking Storage Boxes

The open holes are good for tennis shoes and things that get wet and muddy so they can air out. Similar to the wire mesh shelves but a better price. \$3.99–\$8.99. www.thecontainerstore.com

Basic Plastic Box with Flip Lid

These are Rebecca’s favorite because they are easy to see into and stack well in her car. \$6–\$16. www.target.com

Yakima Ground Control

This wall rack has various components that allow you to store major items like bikes, kayaks, and skis on the wall of your garage. \$250. www.yakima.com

Thule Load&Go Bags

These brightly colored bags are easy to grab and go; they’re great for climbing gear, bike helmets, shoes, and gloves. \$40–\$100.