

ORGANIZING

How to organize your car

Most of us spend so much time in our car that it can sometimes seem like a second home! AAA's most recent American Driving Survey found that during 2016 and 2017, on average, drivers spent 51 minutes driving approximately 31.5 miles each day, making an average of 2.2 driving trips. That's a lot of car time! In



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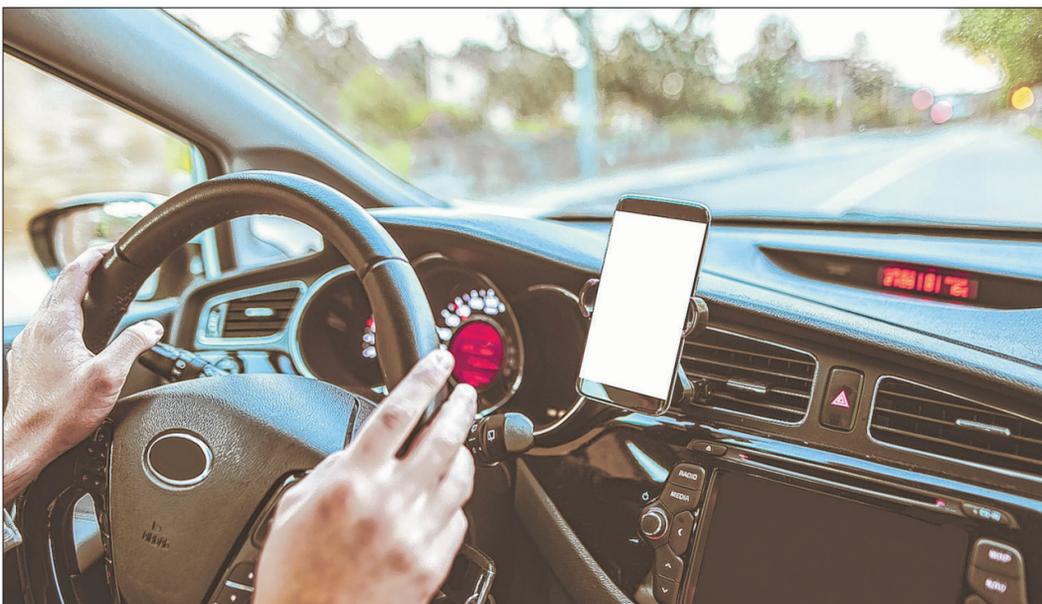
the summer, this is even more true. Summer vacations and long car rides go hand in hand, not to mention trips back and forth to camp, the pool, picnics and family reunions.

Since we spend so much time in our cars, it only makes sense that we would want to keep them neat and organized. This will make your car time more enjoyable, and you'll be spared the embarrassment of someone hopping into your car for those last-minute rides only to be greeted by a disorganized mess. Keeping your car organized will also lead to safer driving conditions. We can all probably recall a time when what we needed while driving was just out of reach. And of course there are a myriad of issues related to cell phone use and driving. Clearly, time spent organizing your car is time well spent.

Just like any area of the home or office, organizing requires a deliberate effort and regular maintenance. I use the same three simple steps whether I'm organizing a closet, garage, desk or car: reduce, arrange and maintain. This article includes a step-by-step plan for organizing your car using these three steps, including suggestions of helpful items to keep in your car and where to keep them.

STEP 1: REDUCE/DECLUTTER

The best way to do this initial decluttering is to take everything out of the car and only put back in the essentials. Carefully



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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examine each item that you've removed. Before replacing, make each item "earn" its spot. Yes, you want to be prepared, but keep it realistic. Don't forget to declutter the glove compartment, trunk, console, side door pockets, built-in ashtrays/small holders, and visor. While you're at it, be sure to check your spare tire to make sure it's properly inflated and that you have all the tools necessary for installing it. If you don't have a lot of time, you can do this in several small time segments for different areas (glove compartment, console, front seat area, back seat area, trunk, etc.).

Your car is NOT a mobile storage cabinet, so don't use it that way. If you are storing items that need to be delivered somewhere, don't put them back in the car unless you know you will be able to deliver them in the next couple of days. Put it on your calendar or set a reminder. Keep in mind that what you need to keep in the car changes with each life stage. Think about your family and your lifestyle to make the best decisions.

STEP 2: ARRANGE

From the front of the car to the back, here are some ideas for items you might want to keep there and how to best organize them. The glove compartment is a good location for small items. A few items that might be stored here include: owner's manual, proof of car insurance and registration (make sure the information is current), copy of your driver's license (just in case you dash out quickly and forget it), gloves, emergency contact information (this could come in very handy in case of an accident), small flashlight, tire pressure gauge, first aid kit, fuses for vehicle interior lights, and napkins (you only need to keep a few).

Other items that are useful in the console and front seat area: drinks and snacks, tissues, hand sanitizer, wipes, car freshener, cosmetic bag with personal care items, spare coins, phone charging cord, notepad and pen, and coupons.

I cannot overemphasize the need to follow safe practices with

your cell phone. Get your driving directions set up before you start driving. If you're going to be listening to something while you drive, get that set up as well. I love listening to music, podcasts and audiobooks while I drive, but I need to remember to set them up before I drive or to pull over to make adjustments. The safest location for your phone is to keep it out of reach so you won't touch it while driving. The next best solution is a hands-free system (Car Play, bluetooth headset, etc.). Not only will these practices keep you safe, they may also keep you out of trouble. As of July 1, drivers could face a fine up to \$200 for using their cell phone while driving.

In the main car interior, I highly recommend having a trash can, preferably one that is attached, since moving objects can be a hazard in a car. You can also utilize the back of the front seat for entertainment and comfort items for backseat passengers.

The main function of the trunk is to transport items, so don't

keep it filled up all of the time. That being said, there are quite a few items for which the trunk is the best storage area. I recommend some sort of container or trunk organizer for them so that you can remove them quickly if needed.

Emergency trunk items might include a spare tire with tools, jumper cables, first aid kit, car fire extinguisher, LED road flares, and a device for emergency escape and rescue. I only found out this tool existed while researching this topic. The original tool is called a Lifehammer and is available on Amazon for \$15.

Other helpful trunk items might include reusable shopping bags, umbrella, scraper, light jacket, portable chairs and blanket (you may want to load on the day you need them), and water bottles (although plastic ones may melt with heat). Families with children may need to also include a stroller, extra diaper bag supplies, and extra outfits. Pet owners may also need plastic bags for pet waste and a collapsible pet bowl.

STEP 3: MAINTAIN

Maintaining organization is always the most difficult part. However, spending a few minutes on a regular basis saves you from spending hours on it later. Commit to taking out trash daily. Adding a small trash can to the garage right beside the door into the house has helped us. Make it a daily practice when you pull into the garage or driveway to unload the car. Get the family to help. This is an important life skill for children. Reassess your organization occasionally. Assess what's working or not working, what you need to add or subtract to the car, and make adjustments as necessary.

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