

MA's Mini Storage

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What makes a good storage facility good?

When it comes to storing *anything* under the sun, just about *any* storage facility will do. If what you're storing doesn't need a lot of attention, all you really need to look for is space. But is that really accurate? Is space *all* you need?

As you're about to find out, what goes into a good storage facility not only includes characteristics of the facility itself, but other issues like location and convenience. A great storage facility in Austria is not exactly a help to you if you live in Texas.

That's why this quick buyer's guide is going to take you through the world of storage facilities to really understand what makes a good storage facility. We'll cover the obvious issues - from getting a storage facility near you - to the more complex, such as finding storage options like controlled heating or even refrigeration.

All of these features go into answering the simple question: what makes a storage facility *good*? But if you're really paying attention, you'll find out that the real question at hand requires a bit of modification: *what makes a storage facility good - for you?* Let's take a look at the world of storage facilities and find out.

According to U.S. Census statistics, there were some 8,000 self-storage and mini-storage firms in the United States in 2006.

What You Need to Store:

The essential question of what kind of storage facility you need to find doesn't start on their end - it starts with *you*. What kind of equipment do you need to store? How much of it do you have? What kind of treatment does it need in order to stay fresh/usable?

These kinds of questions have to be asked before you go around looking for storage. In many cases, you may end up realizing that all you really need is square footage - or, in other words, *space*. But there's also a chance you could require something with a little more specialization and a little more care.

So what are you storing? Finding a storage facility for you means starting off with understanding what you need to store and finding out the types of storage facilities that can complement your materials - not necessarily trying out the "one size fits all approach." Here are the different types of storing you may need to do.

Just space, baby: Let's face it. In most cases, you're just looking for space. Any kinds of materials that just have short-term storage need only require a roof to protect them from the rain and that's about it. Items like lumber might fall under this category, although long-term storing of lumber can have special air requirements, as well. If you're storing general materials, you might even be able to find "just space" offered by your landlord if you live in an apartment. "Just space" will work for all kinds of materials so long as they don't have a special sensitivity to temperature and air quality.

Solutions:

- Just about anything under the sun with a lock and a roof.
- Self-storage units

Extra security: Even though gold is a durable metal, that doesn't mean it falls under the "just space, baby" category. Gold might not have extreme storage requirements in terms of air quality or temperature, but it does require another thing you need to consider: security. If anyone can get at your money, precious metals, or important documents then you're not doing this whole "storage" thing correctly in the first place. In many cases, having an easy-to-break lock is not enough security - you need something that's really hard to crack. But that doesn't mean a safe will do the job. Some people opt for safe-deposit boxes and other solutions. Speaking of those solutions...

Solutions:

- A safe. If you don't have a lot of valuable materials to sell, a safe can protect your valuables with a good degree of reliability - with some drawbacks, as you're about to find out.
- A safe-deposit box. The problem with just a safe? It can be stolen in your house - and since it's located in your house, it's tied to your location. A remote

safe-deposit box is a great way to find added security. Some people even store valuables in other countries.

- Highly-secured storage space. Some companies will simply offer storage space that has its security ramped up; this is a great option for people with a lot of valuables. The obvious downside: cost. But if you have a lot of valuables, you probably have the money for the fees.

Climate control: Temperature is another issue to consider. Refrigerated storage is important if you have a lot of perishables to save. Many bakers, for example, simply use giant refrigerators to store their cakes and pastries because that's the best way to keep them fresh. Keeping things cooler also can store non-food items like furniture and heirlooms. When you're looking for a climate-controlled storage facility, you'll often note that the hours can vary simply because they like to have someone on watch.

Solutions:

- Home refrigeration. Many times, your own refrigerator is all you need in the world of climate-controlled storage. You can also purchase industrial refrigerators if you have more extravagant needs.
- Climate-controlled storage.

Lotsa space: So far, we've generally addressed storage needs for people who don't have a lot of things to store - or require a lot of space. But vehicle and large-scale storage (think boats and RVs) can be crucial if you want to keep yourself mobile while always knowing where your *big* toys are located. You'll often have to find specialized facilities for large-scale storage. These same facilities might be able to offer good rates for short-term storage if you're going away for travel, but generally it's good to find a storage facility that offers a good long-term deal.

Solutions:

- Parking: Temporary storage can simply mean finding a good place to park a car - often airports, for example, will offer car parking by the day or by the week.
- Vehicle storage: Find the more elaborate facilities if you have more long-term needs than simple parking or docking.

It shouldn't take you long to figure out exactly the type of storage facility that you'll need, simply based on what you already have that needs to be put away. Do you have an automobile that needs storing for the winter? Do you have some precious materials that need to be stocked away? Looking at what you have should guide you in your road to find the best storage facilities near you.

A word about finding storage through amateur facilities

Many times, you'll be tempted to park a car with a friend or call in a favor to store your automobile. This can be a perfectly fine solution, but here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Always return the favor if you're using a friend's space. If a friend has an extra space for a car in the winter that you need to use, they're giving you a great deal that could save you a *lot* of money. You don't want that kind of debt (even if they don't give you debt) racking up. Take them out to dinner or do them a similar favor just so show them how much you appreciate it - and if you can offer similar accommodations in the future, try to do so.
- Use friends but beware of acquaintances. Friends of friends aren't necessarily friends, and you have to be careful about the kind of recommendations you follow. Sure, a friend of a friend offering storage might be trustworthy - and you certainly want to trust your own friends' word - but sometimes it's simply better to pay a little extra so that you're not really worried about storing your materials in a stranger's space who doesn't have a professional storage reputation to maintain.
- Check out the facility yourself. Even if the "Facility" simply refers to a garage, there's no reason you should take anyone's word when it comes to the security of your materials. Sure, you might trust your friend, but the old slogan "trust but verify" is important here. Mixing friends with business - even if it's just storage business - can be a tricky path to follow, which is why you'll at least want to do your homework. You won't offend your friend if you reject your favor - and if you do, well, that's a whole other guide for you to read.
- Availability might be an issue, so be sure that you can retrieve whatever's in storage at the right time. Your car being locked up in a garage while your friend's away doesn't do you much good if you don't have a lock. Sure, there are solutions at that point, but wouldn't you rather have a key of your own?

Even with the above in mind, storing with your friends can be a perfectly reasonable thing to do and can really save you a lot of money. But when your demands are a little more extravagant, you'll not only want be asking *where can I find a better storage that at my friends' place?* You'll also be asking *where can I store this that works much better than storage does at home?*

Option #1: Self-Storage

The simplest way to store is to use self-storage. Self-storage is the "Just space, baby" option we mentioned earlier: the kind of storage that you handle yourself and all you really need is a key and a roof. Self-storage is great for all manner of items, from furniture and old computers to a few family heirlooms. Fact of the matter is, simply by putting our clothes in the closet, we're engaging in a habit of self-storage. So let's take a look at how you can ramp up your self-storage process.

What constitutes a space of self-storage? Let's take a look at the different options you might have available.

Locker	Not exactly a safe-deposit box because lockers aren't that well-guarded, a locker is the kind of thing you can find at a school,
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	<p>university, even a large business setting. Lockers are just enough security (and space) to handle the little things: an extra pair of clothes, some toiletries, etc. But you don't exactly want to put your college diploma in one.</p>
Apartment Storage	<p>Many apartment buildings can offer either free apartment storage or storage that you can pay for. Depending on the quality of the apartment (and the amount of rent they charge you), the quality of said storage will vary. You might even have to purchase your own lock. But there's good news: apartment storage can be functional, cheap, and give you more space than in a locker.</p>
Home garages	<p>Every time you pull into the driveway and put your car in the garage, you're self-storing. The garage is the storage facility of the home and many people treat it that way: we recommend you do the same and keep things tidy and secure. It's a good idea to keep as much as possible in a garage; if a storm comes you don't want to be caught off-guard.</p>
Basements and cellars	<p>Similar to the garage, a basement and a cellar can be ideal for storing materials - but be careful about storing more important materials in them because you never know how difficult they can be to find after years of adding things to your own personal storage area.</p>
Safes	<p>With a little added security, safes can be great - but keep in mind they're not fool-proof. Keeping a safe in your home is great because you'll know where your important materials are, but just make sure that your safe itself isn't susceptible to theft. If you have really valuable items that you don't want exposed to a burglary, you're best going with a safe-deposit box in a remote location.</p>

There are, of course, plenty of other options to consider in the world of self-storage. But when it comes to these options, you may find that many of your material possessions will work just fine in these settings. After all, there's no point keeping everything tucked away neatly in a safe-deposit box because it's really not too important if someone steals your old hand-towels or childhood toys.

But you will have to be careful that you are responsible with your self-storage. By definition, you're the one in charge when it comes to self-storage, and that means you'll be responsible for keeping the elements out of your storage, for keeping your materials secure, and for keeping things organized and accessible. If you can't keep things clean, it might be best to work on your organizational habits. You want to store things minimally, not become a hoarder.

Option #2: Secure Storage

Secure storage is the most important storage you do. Having your documents and valuables securely locked away where they can't be found by burglars or common thieves will really keep you sleeping soundly at night. But that doesn't mean you can simply buy a lock for your house and consider yourself "secure." Let's take a look at the secure storage options available these days.

Safes	Yeah, we just mentioned them under "self-storage" too, but a safe fits under both categories because its essential purpose is protection, not necessarily space. Safes can be small and larger ones can cost a pretty penny, but if you buy a good one it should last for a long time and help you avoid worrying about your valuables. Safes that are hidden or fixed to walls often work better than safes that can simply be removed from your home and cracked elsewhere.
Safe-deposit boxes	A safe-deposit box is essentially a safe you hold at a remote location like a bank. Finding a good place to store your valuables is important not only because they can offer heightened security, but because you have the added security of keeping real valuables in a remote location.
Secured storage facilities	Most storage facilities you come across will offer some sort of security, from locks to video cameras. But a storage facility that places a good emphasis on security and monitors its space can be a great way to store a lot of valuables that won't fit into a safe-deposit box.

Secured storage requires a good degree of reputation and trustworthiness - you don't necessarily need to do a lot of homework to be good at self-storage. But if you really want a secure storage facility, you'll have to make sure you can find a bank or company that can really offer not only a solid reputation, but outstanding customer service as well.

Option #3: Special needs and requirements

Of course, we can't simply discern what your storage needs are based on how valuable your storage is. You might also need special storage depending on the *kinds* of materials you'll be storing. Making sure you have a climate-controlled storage facility, for example, can be crucial to maintaining the quality of what you're storing over a significant period of time. More often than not, special needs and requirements come along with the type of business you're in, but everyday Joes will sometimes find themselves requiring extra facility options as well.

Climate-controlled storage	Whether you're storing perishables or heirlooms that need to be maintained well, a climate-controlled storage facility is ideal for making sure that things stay fresh and new - or at least relatively new. Climate-controlled storage can also be necessary in highly-specialized fields like medicine but hospitals can often offer their own storage facilities (with backup generators to maintain power) in these cases.
Large storage facilities	Good for storing RVs or even cars (though we'll look more at those next), large storage facilities have a lot of space. If you require a specialized function like climate control with this extra storage space, however, it can cost a pretty penny.
RV, Boat, and Vehicle storage	Making sure that you've got enough storage or parking - or docking, for that matter - to take care of your transportation machines is important if you plan on going overseas for a while or simply need a place to store your vehicles while they're not in use. Look for places that can offer this kind of storage and parking while maintaining a good reputation.
Other storage needs	If your needs are even more specialized, you will have more trouble finding the right kind of storage. But don't fret - finding the right kind of storage is not as difficult as it might seem as long as you can find people who have similar items to store and ask them where they find their solutions.

Choosing the Right Facility: A Step-by-Step Guide

Now that you know not only the kinds of materials you'll have to store (you know what you need to store, right?) but the kinds of storage that are available, it's time to sift through the actual facilities that exist out there. And that means following this brief, step-by-step guide.

- Narrow your storage down to the type of storage you prefer. We just spent a lot of time going through the different types of storage available. What best suits your needs? Do you need to find a safe-deposit box? A place to put your RV? What are you looking for?
- Gather a list. Once you understand the *kind* of storage you'll need, it's time to weight the competitors against each other. What kind of banks in your area offer the best safe-deposit boxes? What storage companies has the best reputation for quality service and quality storage? You can begin your search online and check out online review sites and eventually take your search in person and examine the storage sites yourself.
- Ask around. When you're putting enough items in storage that you need to pay for that storage, that means you deserve to know your materials are in good hands. So ask around and be sure that the company you're working with has the kind of reputation you're looking for.

Resources

SelfStorageGuide.com - A guide to self-storage and the different options available.

[Food storage guide](#) - A guide, but not necessarily a rulebook, about storing items like foods.

PublicStorage.com - Find public storage facilities in your area.