How to Measure Your Garage Before Buying a Car

Getting the numbers right before you shop

Buying a new car is exciting. But few things spoil that feeling faster than pulling into your driveway and realizing the vehicle won't fit through the garage door, or that once inside, you can't open the doors. Before you fall in love with a particular model, take an hour to measure your garage thoroughly. The process is straightforward, and knowing the dimensions gives you a concrete filter for your car search.

What you will need

Grab a tape measure that reaches at least 25 feet, a notepad, and a pencil. A laser distance measurer can speed things up, but a standard tape works fine. You'll also need the car's published dimensions, which every manufacturer lists online or in the owner's manual. Keep in mind that those numbers usually include the mirrors. For a realistic fit, you want the overall length, width, and height, including mirrors and any roof-mounted gear.

Step 1: Measure the garage door opening

Start at the garage door itself. Measure the width from one side of the opening to the other, at the narrowest point. Do the same for height, from the floor to the top of the opening. If the door track or weather stripping reduces the clear space, measure the actual opening, not the door frame. A car that is wider than the opening by even an inch will not go in. Most garage doors are between seven and eight feet wide and about seven feet tall, but older homes or custom builds vary widely. Write down these numbers as your hard limits.

Step 2: Measure the inside depth

The inside depth of your garage is the distance from the closed garage door to the back wall. This number determines how long a car you can park inside. Park your current vehicle as you normally would, then measure from the back wall to the inside face of the closed garage door. Subtract at least two feet from that total for clearance in front of the car, you need room to walk around the front bumper and to open the garage door without hitting the vehicle. If you plan to store items like bicycles, a workbench, or storage shelves along the walls or at the front, subtract their depth too. A standard car is about 14 to 16 feet long, so a garage depth of 20 feet or more is comfortable. At 18 feet, you start to feel tight.

Step 3: Measure the inside width

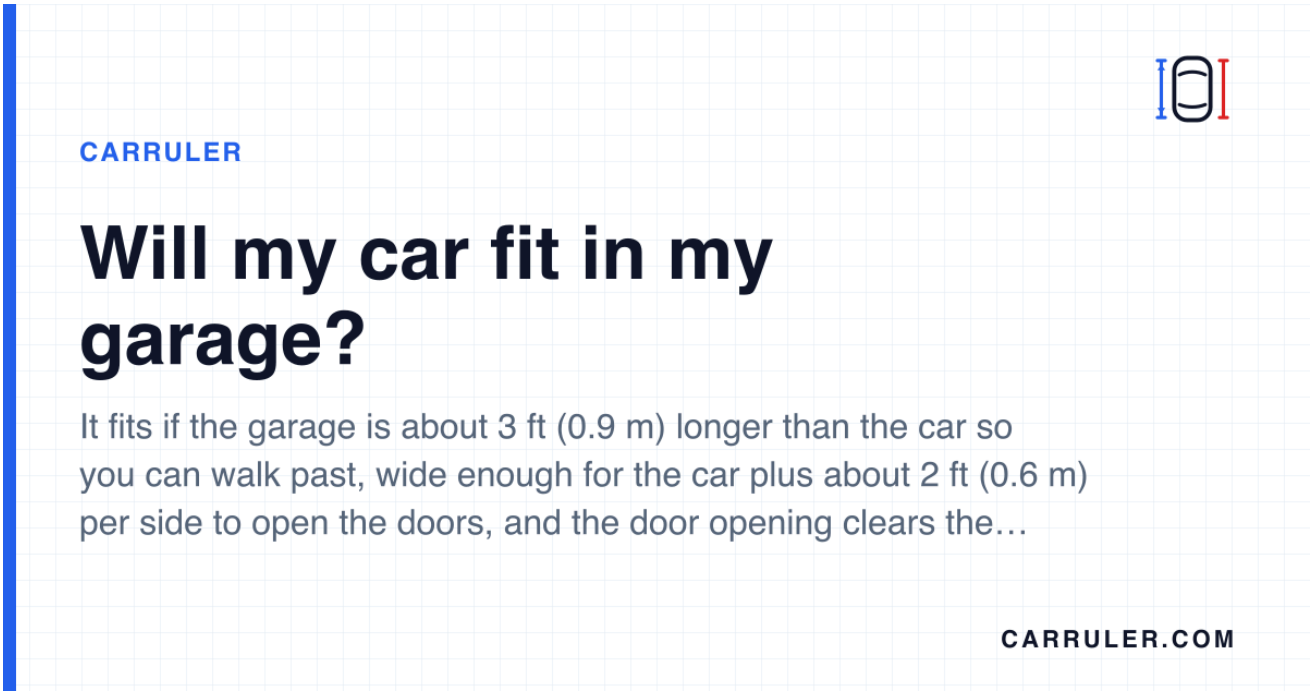
Now measure the clear width between the side walls. If there are storage shelves, cabinets, or a water heater on one side, measure to the face of those objects, not to the wall itself. The usable floor area is what matters. Parked in the center, a car needs at least 12 to 18 inches of side clearance on each side to let you open the doors without hitting the walls or stored items. If you have a family, you'll want more room for loading kids and groceries. Measure from the wall on the driver's side to the wall on the passenger side, then subtract the width of any obstructions. Compare that number to the car's width plus the clearance you want. A garage that is 12 feet wide works for most sedans, but a large SUV or a truck may need 14 feet or more.

Step 4: Check the height limits

Garage height is often overlooked. Measure from the floor to the lowest overhead obstruction. That could be the garage door opener mechanism, an open garage door panel, a light fixture, a beam, or a duct. The car's height, including any roof rack, antenna, or cargo carrier, must clear that point by at least six inches. If the garage has a ceiling-mounted storage rack or a pull-down attic ladder, measure to the lowest part of that system when it is stowed. A typical sedan is about five feet tall, so a seven-foot ceiling works. But a lifted truck or a van with a high roof might not fit.

Step 5: Account for the parking position and turning room

Even if the car's length fits the depth, you still need to get it into that parking spot. If your garage has a narrow driveway or a sharp turn at the entrance, the car's turning radius matters. A vehicle that is too long may not be able to swing into the garage without hitting the door frame or a wall. To test this, you can use a simple method: mark the garage floor with tape to simulate the car's wheelbase and overall length, then try to walk the car in. If that sounds tedious, a smart alternative is to use a garage fit checker tool that lets you input your garage dimensions and the car's specs to see if the geometry works. One such tool, designed for this exact purpose, helps you visualize the fit before you commit.



Step 6: Consider the door swing and the mirrors

A car's doors and mirrors add width and reach that the published dimensions might not fully convey. Measure the width of the open driver's door from the car's side to the outer edge of the open door. Add that to your side clearance requirement. If the garage is tight, you may need to park closer to the passenger side to give the driver room to get out, or install a sliding door on the house side. Similarly, side mirrors often stick out beyond the car's body. A car that fits the opening width on paper may still scrape a mirror against the door frame. Include mirror width in your overall width calculation.

Step 7: Look at the floor and the approach

The garage floor might slope toward the door for drainage, or the driveway might have a steep pitch. A sloped approach can change the effective height of the car as it enters. A low-hanging front bumper may scrape on a steep driveway lip before the car even reaches the garage. Measure the height of the driveway's transition into the garage. If your garage is below grade, water pooling can be an issue, but for fit purposes, the main concern is clearance at the threshold. Drive the car in slowly on the first try, and have a spotter watch the low points.

Step 8: Account for future changes

If you plan to add storage shelves, a workbench, or a second car later, factor that in now. A single-car garage that fits your sedan today might feel cramped if you add a deep shelf along the back wall. Measure the usable floor area with your planned storage included. That same

garage fit checker tool can help you model different layouts. It’s easier to adjust the plan on paper than to move a shelf after you’ve bought the car.

Putting it all together

Once you have all the numbers, compare them to the car’s specs. If the car is within the opening dimensions and leaves at least six inches of headroom, a foot of side clearance on each side, and two feet of front clearance, it will fit comfortably. If the numbers are tight, consider a different car or a different parking position. Some garages allow you to park diagonally to gain length, but that wastes side space. A better approach is to narrow your search to vehicles that match your garage’s profile. Many online tools and a good garage fit checker can show you the match in seconds. The time you spend measuring now will save you the headache of a car that lives outside or a garage that becomes unusable for storage.

Final checks before you buy

Take your measurements with you when you test-drive a car. Open the garage door at home and park the car inside before you sign the papers. If that’s not possible, ask the seller for the exact dimensions and compare them to your notes. Do not rely on memory or guesswork. A tape measure never lies. With clear numbers and a little patience, you can buy with confidence, knowing your new car will fit right where it belongs.