

Your iPhone has a secret 'hoarding' problem — here's how to fix it

Summary

iPhone storage can be quickly consumed by text message attachments, including photos, videos, and files. To manage this, users can review and delete large attachments through iPhone Storage settings, delete attachments from specific conversations, or set Messages to auto-delete old conversations after a set period. These methods help free up storage space and prevent the Messages app from growing indefinitely.

How To By [Kaycee Hill](#) published yesterday [April 29, 2026]



(Image credit: Shutterstock)

iPhone storage fills up fast. Photos, apps, videos, and downloads all compete for space, but one storage hog flies under the radar: text message attachments.

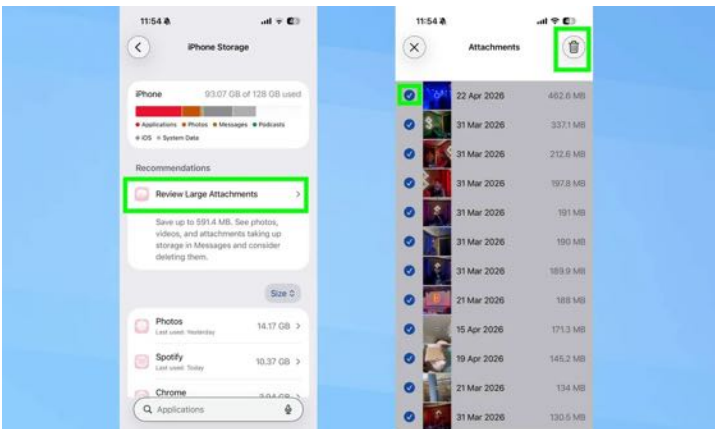
Every photo, video, GIF, and file sent through Messages gets saved to your phone automatically, even if you never intended to keep it. Group chats with hundreds of photos, funny videos forwarded months ago, duplicate screenshots — all of it sits in Messages consuming storage you didn't realize was

being used.

Most people overlook message attachments since they aren't visible like photos, but they can take up gigabytes of storage. Here's how to find and delete them.

Article continues below

1. Review and delete large attachments



The iPhone automatically flags large attachments taking up significant storage and makes them easy to delete without removing your actual text conversations.

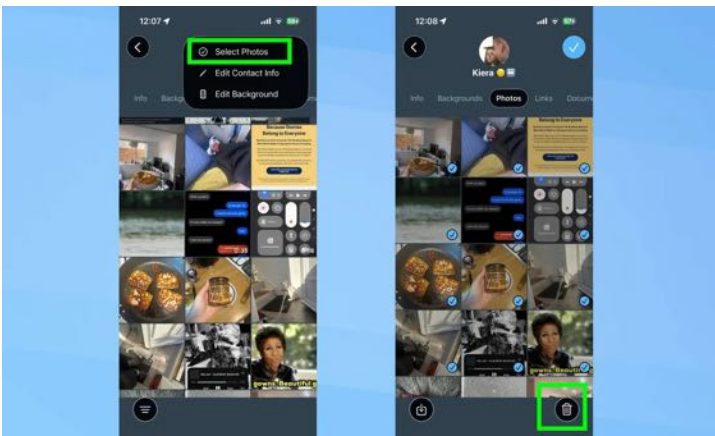
Go to Settings, General, iPhone Storage. Scroll down to "Recommendations" and **select "Review Large Attachments."**

A list appears showing every attachment stored in Messages, sorted by file size and date. This includes photos, videos, GIFs, and other files sent or received in any text conversation.

Swipe left on any item to delete it individually. To delete multiple items at once, **tap "Edit" in the top right corner**, select everything you want to remove, then **tap the trash icon**.

Check this list regularly if you're in active group chats or frequently receive media through messages. Storage builds up faster than you'd expect.

2. Delete attachments from specific conversations



If you know which conversations contain the most media, you can delete attachments directly from individual text threads instead of scrolling through the master list.

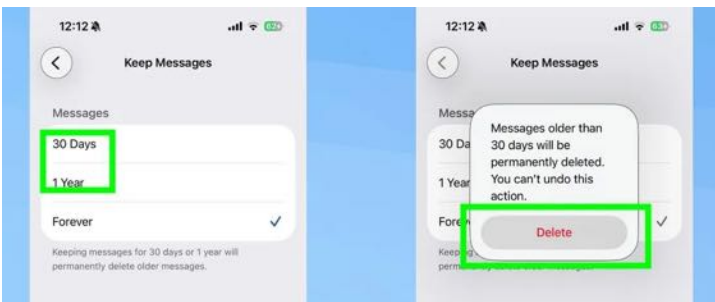
Open Messages and select a conversation. Tap the contact name or group name at the top of the screen.

Select "Photos" to see all images sent and received in this conversation, or tap

"Links" to see files and other attachments. **Tap Edit and Select Photos, choose the items for deletion and tap the trash can to confirm.**

This method works well for group chats filled with memes, family threads with long videos, or any conversation where media has accumulated over months.

3. Set messages to auto-delete



Instead of manually clearing storage every few months, you can set Messages to automatically delete old conversations and their attachments after a specified time period.

Go to Settings, Messages, and Keep Messages. Then simply choose how long to keep your messages: **30 Days, 1 Year, or Forever.**

Selecting "30 Days" or "1 Year" automatically deletes messages and all their attachments once they exceed that age. This keeps your Messages app from growing indefinitely and consuming increasing storage over time.

When you first change this setting, iPhone asks if you want to delete messages older than your selected timeframe immediately. **Confirm to free up storage right away**, or cancel to only apply the rule going forward.

What do you think?

What's your biggest iPhone storage pet peeve?

Not being able to take a photo in the moment

Deleting photos only to have your storage stay full anyway

Deleting apps I actually like to make room

Realizing my 5-year-old memes are taking up 5GB

Protect your iPhone

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Kaycee is Tom's Guide's How-To Editor, known for tutorials that get straight to what works. She writes across phones, homes, TVs and everything in between — because life doesn't stick to categories and neither should good advice. She's spent years in content creation doing one thing really well: making complicated things click. Kaycee is also an award-winning poet and co-editor at Fox and Star Books.