

title: "Chicago Moving Day Survival Guide: How to Beat the May 1 and October 1 Rush"

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Chicago Moving Day Survival Guide: How to Beat the May 1 and October 1 Rush

If you have ever tried to rent a truck, book a mover, or find street parking on May 1 in Chicago, you already know the problem. Half the city seems to be moving on the exact same day. This guide is for Chicago renters and homeowners whose lease turns over on one of the two big moving dates, and who want to move without overpaying or losing their minds.

Chicago's May 1 and October 1 moving days are a genuine phenomenon. An estimated 60 to 70 percent of Chicago apartment leases turn over between May and late September, and May 1 dominates that window. When demand compresses into a handful of dates, prices climb and availability disappears. The good news: with the right timeline and the right supplies, you can sidestep most of the stress and save money at the same time.

In this guide you will learn:

- Why so many Chicago leases start on May 1 and October 1
- A week-by-week countdown to a peak-day move
- How to lock in movers, trucks, and parking before they sell out
- Why reusable green moving boxes are a peak-season advantage

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Why Chicago Moves on May 1 and October 1

Chicago's twin moving days are a leftover from a legally enforced system that dates back centuries and was codified into local leases until 1918. Even after the rule

vanished, the habit stuck. Landlords found it easier to turn over every unit in one coordinated push, so 12-month leases kept starting on May 1 and, to a lesser degree, October 1.

More than a century later, the cycle continues. New construction with off-cycle lease dates has chipped away at it, but the majority of Chicago rental turnover still clusters in late spring and early fall. That means on your moving date, you are competing with thousands of other households for the same movers, the same trucks, and the same curb space.

Understanding this is the first step to beating it. Everything else in this guide flows from one idea: on a peak date, the scarce resource is not boxes or muscle. It is time slots. Book early.

The Real Cost of Moving on a Peak Date

Peak demand does not just make booking harder. It makes moving more expensive. Local moving companies routinely charge more during the summer turnover window because their crews are fully booked. When supply is tight, the customer pays.

Here is where your dollars leak on a peak-day move, and where you can plug the gaps:

Expense	Peak-day risk	How to save
Professional movers	Higher hourly rates, surge pricing	Book 4 to 6 weeks out, or move a few days off-peak
Rental truck	Sold out or premium pricing	Reserve early; consider a weekday
Moving boxes	Last-minute cardboard runs, tape, disposal	Rent reusable green boxes, delivered and picked up
Parking	Tickets or towing without a permit	Apply for a CDOT permit at least 72 hours ahead

The box line is the one most people underestimate. On May 1, hardware stores near dense rental corridors sell out of cardboard, and you end up paying full price for flimsy boxes plus tape, plus the time to build and break them down. Renting reusable boxes removes that scramble entirely, since they arrive pre-assembled and get picked up after. For a full breakdown of the numbers, see our guide on [how much it costs to rent green moving boxes in Chicago](#).

Your Peak-Season Moving Timeline

The single most effective peak-day strategy is starting early. Here is a countdown built specifically for a May 1 or October 1 move.

6 Weeks Out

- Get quotes from at least three moving companies and book your date immediately. On peak weekends, reputable crews fill up more than a month ahead.
- Reserve a rental truck now if you are doing it yourself.
- Start decluttering so you move less. Our [Chicago room-by-room decluttering guide](#) walks through where to donate in each neighborhood.

4 Weeks Out

- Order your reusable moving boxes and schedule delivery for about two weeks before moving day. [Reserve your green boxes online](#) in under five minutes.
- If you are moving into or out of a high-rise, reserve the freight elevator now. Peak-date elevator windows book fast. Our [Chicago apartment and high-rise moving guide](#) covers building requirements in detail.
- Contact ComEd, Peoples Gas, and the City of Chicago to schedule utility transfers.

2 Weeks Out

- Boxes arrive. Start packing room by room and label as you go.
- Apply for your CDOT moving truck parking permit. The city asks for at least 72 hours of processing time, and signs must be posted 48 hours in advance, so do not leave this to the last minute.
- Confirm your move time with your building and your movers.

Moving Week

- Pack an essentials box for the first night.
- Post your parking signs 48 hours ahead.
- Confirm everything one more time. On a peak date, a missed confirmation is hard to fix.

After the Move

- Unpack the essentials, then work through the rest at your pace.
- Schedule your green box pickup. The team collects the empties from your new address, so there is no cardboard pile and no recycling trip.

How Green Boxes Make Peak-Day Moves Easier

Peak days reward anything that removes friction, and reusable boxes remove a lot of it. Because [The Chicago Green Box](#) delivers boxes pre-assembled and sanitized, you skip the sold-out-cardboard scramble on May 1 entirely. There is no tape to buy, no boxes to build, and nothing to break down when you are exhausted at the finish line.

They also move faster. Each box measures 27 inches long by 17 inches deep by 12 inches high, holds up to 100 pounds, and stacks uniformly. Uniform stacking matters

when a building gives you a four-hour move-in window and one freight elevator: standardized boxes fill an elevator and a truck efficiently, so you make fewer trips. The handles make hallway and stairwell carries easier, and the water-resistant plastic shrugs off a rainy May morning that would turn cardboard to mush.

Then there is the dual payoff that defines every Chicago Green Box move: you save money and you cut waste. The EPA reports that containerboard and related paper products make up a large share of landfill material, and a peak-day citywide move generates a staggering amount of single-use cardboard. Renting a reusable box that runs up to 400 round trips before it is recycled keeps that waste out of the landfill. Learn more about [why plastic moving boxes beat cardboard](#).

If your move is bigger than you can handle solo, our sister company [The Professionals Moving Specialists](#) offers full-service moving across Chicagoland and can coordinate directly with a green box rental.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do so many people in Chicago move on May 1?

Chicago's May 1 moving day is a holdover from an old lease system that funneled almost all rental turnover onto a single date. Landlords still find it easier to turn over every unit at once, so most 12-month leases start on May 1, with October 1 as the secondary date.

When should I book movers for a May 1 move in Chicago?

Book at least four to six weeks in advance. On peak weekends, reputable Chicago moving crews and rental trucks sell out more than a month ahead, and prices rise as availability shrinks. Earlier is always safer.

Is it cheaper to move on a day other than May 1?

Yes. Moving a few days before or after the peak date, or choosing a weekday, usually lowers mover rates and improves truck availability. If your lease dates allow any flexibility, an off-peak move can save meaningful money.

How many green boxes do I need for a Chicago apartment move?

As a rule of thumb, a studio needs about 20 boxes, a one-bedroom needs 30 to 40, and a two-bedroom needs 40 to 60. See our [how many moving boxes do I need](#) resource for a room-by-room estimate.

Ready for Your Peak-Day Move?

Chicago's May 1 and October 1 moving days will always be busy, but they do not have to be chaotic. Book your movers and truck early, apply for your parking permit on time,

and let reusable boxes take the cardboard scramble off your plate. You will move faster, spend less, and send nothing to the landfill.

[Reserve your green moving boxes today](#) and beat the rush. Save money and the planet, one move at a time.

Sources: [RentConfident](#), [City of Chicago CDOT Permits](#), [U.S. EPA Containerboard Data](#)