

Planning Guide For Shed Building

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Introduction

There are some important decisions to be made when planning for a shed, be it a garden shed, storage shed, pool shed or the like. One of the first questions to ponder is "what do I intend to use it for"? To some extent the answer to this question will impact all others. Begin your planning process by making a list of all the functions you would like your shed to serve and go from there.

A flimsy metal or poorly designed wooden shed bursting with rusty shovels, bent rakes and unused badminton sets doesn't do much to solve a storage problem. On the other hand, a well-designed, carefully built garden shed can be more than just a place to keep birdseed and lawnmowers. It can also be the perfect spot to grow plants, make crafts, or simply find some peace and quiet away from the daily clamor.

Size Does Matter

If you plan to use the shed mainly for storage, be realistic about the amount of junk you need to stash. It's a good exercise to sketch out on a piece of graph paper the dimensions of the main items you want to keep in there such as a wheelbarrow, lawn mower, bags of potting soil, bikes or outdoor furniture. Factor in enough clearance around each item so you can easily move things in and out. If you have large equipment, remember that you aren't restricted to a gable-end single door. You can install a door on any wall of most sheds, and choose from double, sliding or even a standard garage door that will fit on a modest-size shed.

There is often much deliberation over what the perfect size is for a shed. Clearly, the key is to ensure that your shed is large enough for its intended purposes, while remaining proportional to the setting. Think of what is going to go inside your shed and how much room is required for the contents. If you intend to combine your storage needs with your desire for an outdoor work space, make sure to allow for enough space for you and your stored items.

It is strongly recommended to build the largest size that you can afford, which still blends in with your landscape. Many people under-estimate the size of shed they need, realizing immediately that not everything they wanted to store in it will actually fit. Once the garden shed is there, you'll always find something extra to put inside it.

What's Your Style?

For better or worse, a storage building in your backyard is going to be somewhat of a focal point. It should either blend in with its surroundings, or stand out from them in the way you want it to. To blend in, you don't have to make your shed a miniature copy of your home, but you can complement details of your house with the right choice of roof style, siding, paint colors and decorative details. To stand out, choose a style that reflects your personal taste and don't worry about your shed matching your house, not every thing needs to match. And why not be a little eclectic! You can customize your shed to your heart's content, implementing your personal flair along the way.

Most shed styles are differentiated primarily by roof lines (i.e. gable, hip, lean-to, salt box, etc.) so this is an important consideration. Spend sufficient time looking at sheds and you will benefit from all the designs that others have come up with before you decide what is right for you. Take a drive around the neighborhood, look through catalogs or search the web to compare different shed styles and how they look and fit into the surrounding landscape and architecture.

How important is the look of the shed to your property? Remember that anything you erect will either add or subtract from your property value. With a broad range of styles available, you can design and build your shed for functionality without having to compromise on style and still add to the value of your house. A backyard shed means extra storage and everyone needs extra storage, so a well designed and built shed will always add value.

Choosing a Site for your Shed

1. Location

Is the shed going to play a prominent role in your day to day activities? If so, make sure that you choose a location that gives you good access and provides adequate lighting. From a practical standpoint, it is wise to locate a storage shed close to where it's going to be needed most. Kids in particular are much more likely to put bicycles and toys away if the access to the shed is convenient. On the other hand, if you are planning on building a potting shed, you may want to locate it next to your garden, in a spot that receives lots of natural light.

Other things to think of when choosing a location may be proximity to water (for a hose, sink, toilet, etc.), electricity (lighting, outlets, etc.), natural light, ventilation, land slope (grade) and zoning laws (see below). Furthermore, think about the pros and cons of your site in all seasons. The surrounding foliage (and weather) can be very different from one season to the next. All of these considerations may have some impact on where you decide to place your shed.

Aesthetics are also important when choosing a location. You may choose to highlight your structure by making it the center of attention (which is fine) or blend it in to your landscape and make it a secret hideaway. Your choice! You should also be mindful of the sheds' relation to other structures or areas (such as garages, pools, gardens, driveways, etc.) that you may have on your property. Achieving a balance is important.

2. Grade

While choosing a site for your new shed, consider the grade of the location. Ideally your site should be level, with a slight pitch towards the rear, if possible. This will allow drainage of water without having to excavate around your structure. A somewhat level site is the best starting point for all shed construction - the greater the grade, the more work needs to be done.

Typically a grade of 6" or less over the dimension of the shed (especially for smaller units), can be compensated for by using cement blocks, stones, etc. A shed structure can be located where the ground slopes more steeply, but the ground will have to be excavated or the shed raised on pillars of some sort. In areas faced with frost upheaval, poor drainage or severe weather, it is recommended (and sometimes required) that more thought should be put into the grade and foundation.

DIY Or Hire A Contractor?

Once you're settled on the basics, say a 10x12 barn style shed, with electricity located under the oak tree, you must then decide on whether you are going to take on the project of building it yourself or if you are going to hire someone to do it for you. Ask yourself these important questions: Exactly how much construction am I prepared to do (all, some or none)? How much time do I have for the project?

If your building skills or spare time are limited, you may want to hire a contractor. Look in the phone book and ask around to find a contractor or handyman to hire. Be sure to get three or four bids for comparison. Another option is to get your friends and/or neighbors involved, preferably someone with some basic construction skills. Offer up a "shed building party" or better yet, trade projects with someone - your neighbor helps you build the shed and you help your neighbor with a project that falls into your skills category.

If your carpentry skills and time on hand are up to the task, then go for it! In the process you will save money and have the bragging rights to say "I built that!". Not only that, but you choose the quality of lumber and other materials you can afford, you ensure the shed is built to your satisfaction, plus you can modify the design if you desire. Most homeowners do tackle the project themselves with great success and enjoy it; a form of therapy or family bonding if you will! Get your friends and neighbors involved, basically anyone who's going to be spending time in your backyard is fair game.

No matter if you build the shed yourself or hire someone, a good set of professionally designed how-to plans

will offer the best value for the money in the long run. A good set of plans takes most, if not all, of the guesswork out of planning, designing, getting a permit (if needed), buying supplies, and building your shed step-by-step.

Whether you are an accomplished "do-it-yourselfer", or are ready to make your debut, make sure that you have both the time and the energy required for the task at hand. Building a shed is not a one day project!

Building Permit and Zoning

Decisions made on the size, location, and style of your shed are not entirely in your hands. Be sure to check with your local municipality to ensure that you are meeting any zoning and permit requirements. If you do need a permit, your city building inspector isn't the enemy! The truth is, he'll probably only ask for a simple sketch of your site plan showing the sheds proposed location. You may also need a set of plans showing the style, dimensions and layout of the structure. This may sound expensive, but actually a good set of professionally drawn shed plans can be purchased for about \$10 - \$20.

What is a Building Permit?

A "building permit" is a certificate that may have to be obtained from the appropriate municipality by the property owner or contractor before a structure can be erected. It must be posted in a conspicuous place until the job is completed and passed as satisfactory by a municipal building inspector.

Will I Need One?

Building permits are not always required for structures built on your property. Generally, if your structure is under 100 sq. ft. you will usually not be required to get a permit, however, there may still be some restrictions such as a "two or three foot set back from a property line" to contend with. Be sure to check with your local by-law office for the regulations and specifications in your area.

How Do I Apply for a Building Permit?

You can obtain a permit application from your municipal by-law office. Speak to a staff member if you have questions about the list of requirements you must fulfill in order to receive a building permit. You will likely need to submit a fee, drawings (elevation and material details) and floor plans with your application.

Tools Needed

You won't need a trailer load of exotic power tools to get started; a circular saw, a tape measure, a level, and a couple of hammers will get you pretty far. Of course, the more power you have available, the faster the work. If you have to build your shed without the aid of electricity, hand sawing can get pretty tedious real fast. Battery-power (or a generator) will surely speed up the process. Building a shed is easier and usually better done when the proper tools are used. Certain construction conditions may necessitate special tools, but the following list will suffice for most shed projects:

Measuring and Layout Tools: Tape Measure (25', 50'), Builder's Line (Fluorescent Nylon String), Chalk line, Plumb Bob, Framing Square, Combination Square, Level (2', 4', 6')

Power Tools: Circular Saw, Cordless Drill (Optional), Corded Drill, Saber Saw/Jig Saw, Miter Saw (Optional), Power Augur (Optional)

Hand Tools: Hammer, Nail Set, Hand Saw, Pry Bar (Crow Bar), Caulking Gun, Adjustable Wrench, Socket Wrenches

General Equipment: Shovel, Wheelbarrow, Ladders, Tool Belt, Extension Cords, Post Hole Digger (if needed)

For safety, the following are recommended: Gloves, Safety Glasses or Goggles, Dust mask, Leather Work Gloves

Finishing Touches

1. Interior

It's also important from the beginning of your decision making process to think about the interior design of your shed. If you're going to be using your shed for storage, consider the placement of doors and windows. These two shed features are not always thought as "interior planning considerations", but keep in mind that valuable storage space is lost where doors and windows are placed.

If you are storing large items like a lawn mower or wheelbarrow, you don't want to be constantly moving them around in order to get to smaller items like shovels and rakes. Obviously hooks, shelving, cabinets, peg-board, tool racks, bins and other creative ideas are useful in helping to keep things organized and off the floor.

Depending on the size and use, other options could be insulation, electrical outlets, lighting, vent fans, water (sink), floor covering, workbench, potting bench, etc. For larger sheds, partitions often work well to divide space and help separate bikes from strollers from gardening supplies. You may even want to install A.C. and heat, but don't bother in an un-insulated building unless you enjoy spending money!

2. Exterior

After you have an idea what you want on the inside, it's time to put some thought on the shed's exterior. The most obvious is the color scheme and whether you will paint, stain or use a pre-colored siding material. Your options might include plywood, T1-11, vinyl, aluminum, clapboard and even brick or stone. Part of the color scheme also includes the color and type of roofing material such as asphalt, cedar shakes or metal. As mentioned earlier, the shed can either match your house or be completely different.

Don't forget the doors and windows. At least one single door is necessary, but will you need a double, sliding, Dutch or roll-up door? Make sure that the entrance is at least 36in. wide, for easy access and if you are planning to store wheel barrels and lawn mowers, consider adding a ramp. Windows provide plenty of natural light and/or ventilation, but they also use up interior wall storage space. If you decide against windows, it is common to run electricity to the shed.

Other exterior options to consider are decorative shutters, window planter boxes, cupolas, gable end or ridge vents, gutters, skylights, entrance overhang, exterior lighting, etc.

3. Surrounding Landscape

It's also smart to think about how you may want to cultivate the landscape in your shed's immediate surroundings. Shrubs, flowers, window boxes or trellised vines can be a nice complement to a shed and will help the shed fit its surroundings, making your new building look right at home in the outdoors. Many people will also choose to lay flagstone or other pavers to create a pathway to their shed.

A little garden decor will also help to create a tranquil space. Strategically placed, things like trellises, pergolas, cupolas, lights, wind chimes, birdhouses and even your favorite piece of weathered furniture can go a long way to creating that outdoor sanctuary you desire.

Misc. Notes and Thoughts

1 - If you have a pool, in-ground or above-ground, consider a second smaller shed to store "pool stuff". You will be surprised at the amount of supplies and equipment that are acquired when owning a pool! Things like floats, chemicals, covers, tools (sweepers, nets, brushes, hoses, etc.), pump, deck furniture, umbrellas, towels and the list goes on. You may even consider sectioning off your pool cabana for a changing room for guests.

2 - Be considerate to your neighbors! Don't put up something that belongs in a junkyard beside your neighbor's manicured backyard. Most municipalities require that storage sheds be 2 ft from the fence or property line, so be sure to check ahead of time to avoid any aggravation. Talk to your neighbors about your intentions – 99% of

the time they will appreciate your concern and be very supportive of your project.

3 - You'll need to put your shed on something other than bare ground. Most sheds don't require a foundation but, size and geographic location are usually determining factors. The average small garden shed can usually be built on a cement slab, a skid foundation (usually 4x4 or 6x6 treated timbers laid on gravel) or either pre-cast concrete piers or concrete blocks, also set on gravel. For a larger structure, however, most building codes will call for a poured foundation or concrete footings that extend below the frost line.