

A
Good
Shed Is Not
Hard To
Find

Whether hand-built or ready-made, a great garden shed enhances any yard.

BY FIONA GILSENAN

A flimsy metal hut 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 a place to keep birdseed and lawnmowers. It can be the perfect spot to grow plants, make crafts, or simply find some peace and quiet away from the daily clamor.

"For better or worse, a building in your yard is going to be a focal point," says Portland, Ore., garden designer Sean Hogan. "So it should either blend in with its surroundings—or stand out from them in the way you want it to." Two elements dominate the building's

appearance: the roof style and the siding material. 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, siding, paint colors and decorative details.

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, 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 Dutch models—even a standard garage door will fit on a modest-size shed.

Unless you're looking to store your tractor collection, don't sweat the bureaucratic paperwork. Most municipalities call for a building permit only for structures larger than a certain size—usually 100 or 120 sq. ft. But if you must keep the tractors, your city building inspector isn't the enemy—the truth is, he'll probably only ask for a simple sketch of your shed and a site plan showing its proposed location. The permit fee is usually a percentage of the building's value; in most cases, the total amount will be under \$100. That will be money well spent, according to Rick Peters, author of *Sheds & Garages* (Sunset Books, 2004). "After all, the building inspector's job is to make sure you build a safe, noninfringing structure." And if you have a compelling reason for putting your shed in a particular spot—so that seedlings will receive enough south-facing light, for instance—it may be worth trying for a zoning variance.

DIY Or Ready-Made?

Once you're settled on the basics—say, a 100-sq.-ft. shed parked under the oak tree—ask yourself this important question: Exactly how much construction are you prepared to do? If your building skills or spare time are limited, go simple with a ready-made shed from a local supplier or home center. These can be delivered intact to your property—voila! tractor barn—or brought in sections and assembled on site, usually for a reasonable fee. The obvious advantage is that the construction is done for you; the disadvantage is that you are stuck with the manufacturer's choice of materials and design.



Storage shed with partial greenhouse roof.



Shed built as one-room retreat.

If you're willing to tackle *some* shed assembly but are not confident enough to build from scratch, mail-order companies offer complete kits in designs that range from Colonial gable sheds to reproduction log cabins, storybook cottages, even Swiss chalets. (Several such companies are listed below.) The least expensive of these come with pre-cut parts, hardware and a building plan. For a little more money, you'll get a kit that is partially assembled (or panelized) with installed siding, a preshingled roof, and prehung doors and windows. No matter what kind of kit you buy, the job of assembly will be easier if the manufacturer provides not only a plan with writ-

ten assembly instructions, but also a DVD or video of the process, and online or telephone support.

If your carpentry and framing skills are up to the task, a professionally designed plan probably offers the best value for the money. You get to choose the best-quality lumber and other materials you can afford, plus you can modify the design. One company, Summerwood, even offers an online design tool that lets you try out different windows, doors, siding and hardware. As with a kit, look for a manufacturer that offers complete material and cut lists, dimensioned drawings, permit drawings for the building inspector, and an assembly video or DVD.

On Solid Ground

No matter where your shed comes from, you'll need to put it on something other than bare ground. Most sheds—even in extremely cold climates—don't require a frostproof foundation but, once again, size is usually the determining factor. Location is a consideration too. In Anchorage, Alaska, the frost line is very deep, 5 ft., but local engineer Jeff Hurd says, "The average small garden shed might shift a little with frost heave, but it

will settle back into place come spring thaw." For a larger structure, however, building codes will call for a poured foundation or concrete footings that extend below the frost line.

(Continued on page 129)

SHED SHOPPING

Kits

Cedarshed Industries
Langley, British Columbia, Canada V1M 2X7
800-830-8033
www.cedarshed.com

Handy Home Products
6400 E. 11 Mile Rd.
Warren, MI 48091
800-221-1849
www.handyhome.com

The Yard Works
15919 Hwy. 99
Lynnwood, WA 98037
800-369-8333
www.theyardworks.net

Plans

Better Barns
126 Main St. S.
Bethlehem, CT 06750

888-266-1960
www.betterbarns.com
Spirit Elements
6672 Gunpark Dr., Suite 200
Boulder, CO 80301
800-511-1440
www.spiritelements.com
Summerwood Products
733 Progress Ave.
Toronto, Ontario

Canada M1H 2W7
866-519-4634
www.summerwood.com

Hardware And Storage

Lee Valley Tools
P.O. Box 1780
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
800-871-8158
www.leevalley.com

English Potting Shed

Follow these plans to build this distinctive garden shed.

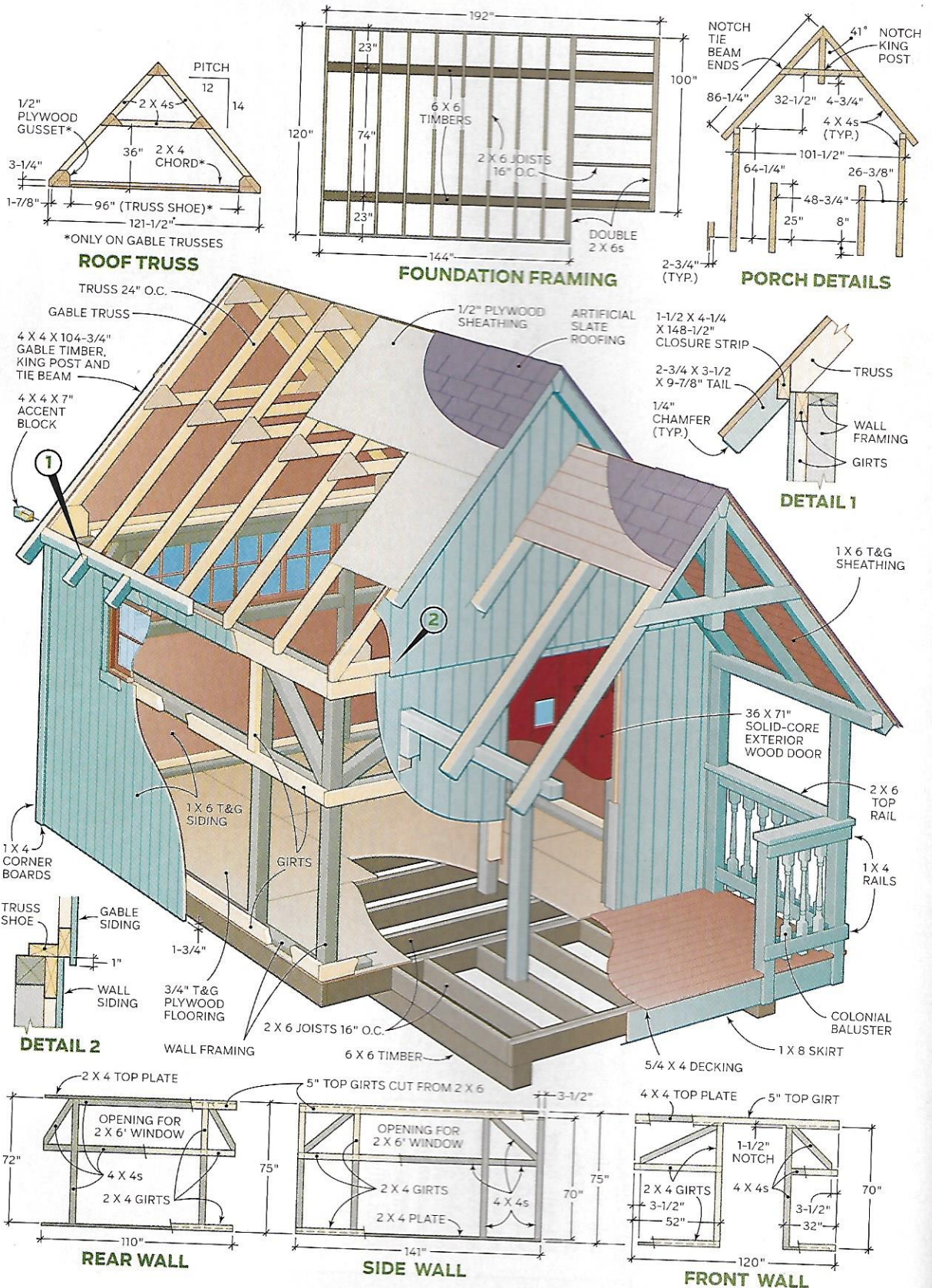


ILLUSTRATION BY EUGENE THOMPSON

SHED PROJECT

(Continued from page 102)

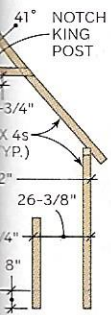
A more common underpinning is a skid foundation (usually 6 x 6 treated timbers laid on gravel) or either pre-cast concrete piers or concrete blocks, also set on gravel. Some experts recommend installing a vapor barrier under the floor, but that's not necessary in an unheated shed, according to home inspector Don Norman of St. Louis, Mo. "If the homeowner decides to insulate and heat the shed," he adds, "a vapor retarder [for the floor, walls and ceiling] would then be recommended."

Finishing touches on your shed can include creative shelving and storage (companies such as Lee Valley offer plenty of clever options), insulation and finished flooring. Running a line off your house's electric panel (which calls for an electrical permit) will give you juice for light, fans and heat—but don't bother heating an uninsulated building unless you enjoy spending money. Finally, a little landscaping such as window boxes or trellised vines will help the shed fit its surroundings, making your new building look right at home in the outdoors.

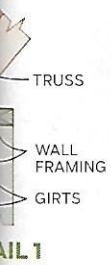
Our Shed

The beautiful English Potting Shed shown on the opening pages came from a plan by Better Barns. This 10 x 12-ft. structure has a small covered porch at the entrance, which gives the shed its distinctive, country cottage appearance. The walls and porch roof are framed with beefy 4 x 4s, making the shed look like a traditional post-and-beam building both inside and out. Materials for this project average about \$4000 to \$5000; hiring someone to build it for you would raise that total over \$10,000.

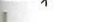
PM



DETAILS



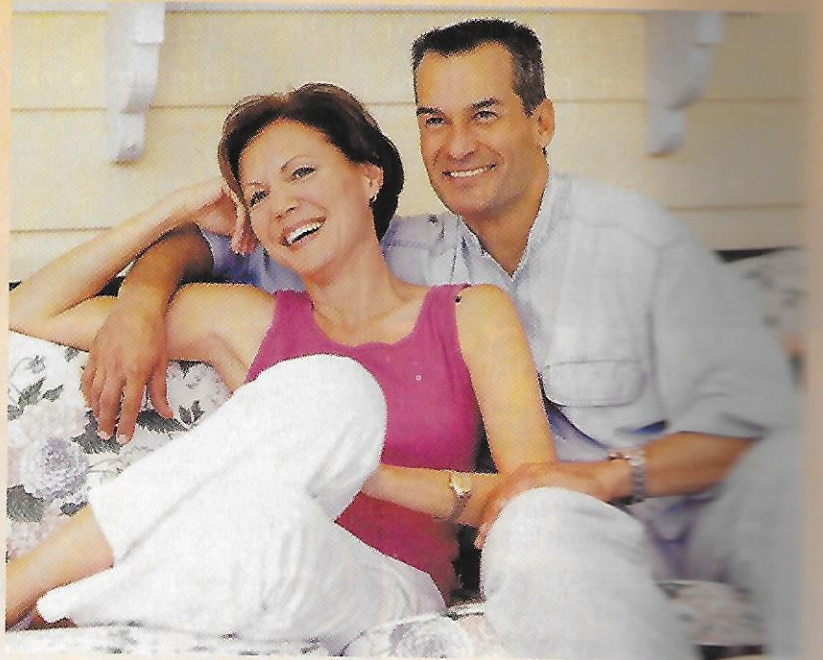
RAIL 1



HOMPSON

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