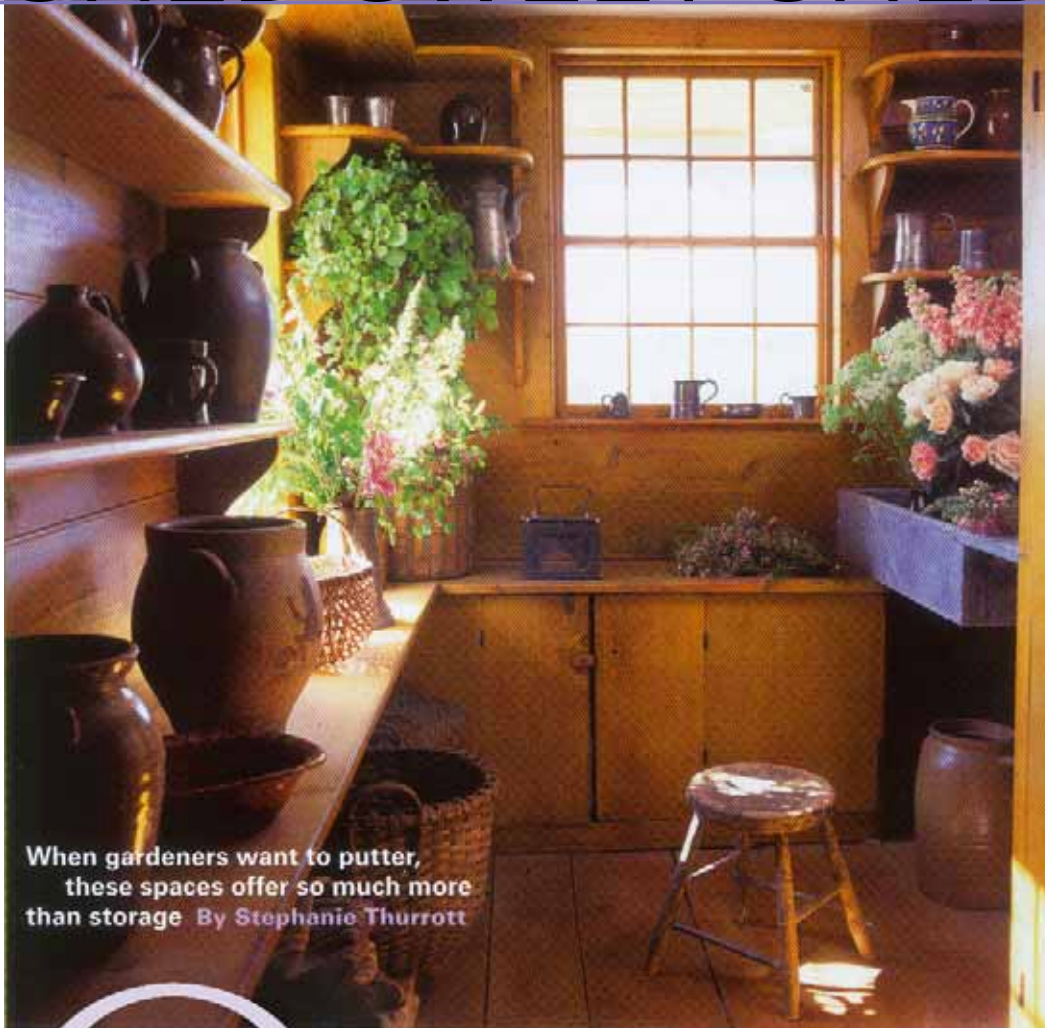


SHED SWEET SHED



When gardeners want to putter, these spaces offer so much more than storage By Stephanie Thurrott

One of Peggy Connors' favorite get-aways is in her own Duxbury yard. It's a shed. But not just any shed. Connors, a landscape designer, planned it herself, adding weathered cedar siding, a pitched cedar-shingle roof, double doors, wood countertops and an outdoor soapstone sink.

Inside, plenty of natural light and shelves allow Connors to pot and label plants, with pruning shears, garden gloves, spades and a

ROOM TO GROW

Lynda Sutton's rustic potter's shed/solar greenhouse was built by her husband using many found materials, such as an old door and recycled bricks. "I have a big table there, and that's where I start all my seeds," she says. There's also a nearby cutting garden.

PLAYING HOUSE

Small, modular sheds, **BELOW**, can complement a house; Sutton's Jamestown, Rhode Island, shed, **RIGHT**, uses the same weathered wood as her nearby barn; Joseph Iantosca's shed in Cohasset, **BOTTOM**, has double-hung windows and fiber-cement clapboard siding.



pitchfork within easy reach on pegboard hangers. A cement floor washes clean with water from an outdoor spigot. The only thing this getaway lacks is a greenhouse for overwintering plants—but then, says Connors, “I’d never leave the shed all winter if I had a greenhouse there.”

She wouldn’t have to, either. Indoor heating is just one way to turn a lowly storage shed into a backyard retreat. And you don’t need Connors’ design skills to have a getaway of your own. Prefab and custom sheds add both utility—a place to store bicycles, lawnmowers, snowblowers and tools with room to spare and beauty to your yard.

“Attractive sheds are a nice complement to the home,” says Ricardo Gonzalez, store manager for Walpole Woodworkers in Walpole. His company offers pre-assembled modular sheds that can be customized with saltbox-style roofs, cupolas, weather vanes, shutters, arched doorways, even window boxes. “They’re designed to be viewed, not hidden.” They’re also designed for use.

Roberta Hershon had taken over most of her Dedham home’s garage as a gardening command post before she put up her shed. By the time she was ready to build, she could easily envision what

WOOD VERSUS VINYL

Sheds can come in wood or vinyl. (You may also find utility sheds made of metal.) Here are some of the pros and cons of each.

WOOD

Pros: Generally less expensive, can be painted any color

Cons: Requires repainting, can rot

VINYL

Pros: Low maintenance, just wash if needed

Cons: Often more expensive, comes in limited colors



THE ESSENTIAL GARDENER

Once you have your shed, it's time to stock it. These are the tools local gardeners say they can't live without:

SHOVELS Short perennial shovels, as well as longhandled diggers.

RAKES Small, narrow rakes for tight spots; comfortable long-handled rakes for yard cleanup.

CONTAINERS Various sizes for soil, fertilizer and birdseed. Make sure birdseed containers lock securely to keep out mice and squirrels.

PRUNERS You'll need several sizes. "I don't go anywhere without my pruners," says Kelly Wingo, a landscape designer in Needham. Many gardeners recommend Felco and Fiskars.

SMALL SAW A curved garden saw can get into tight places.

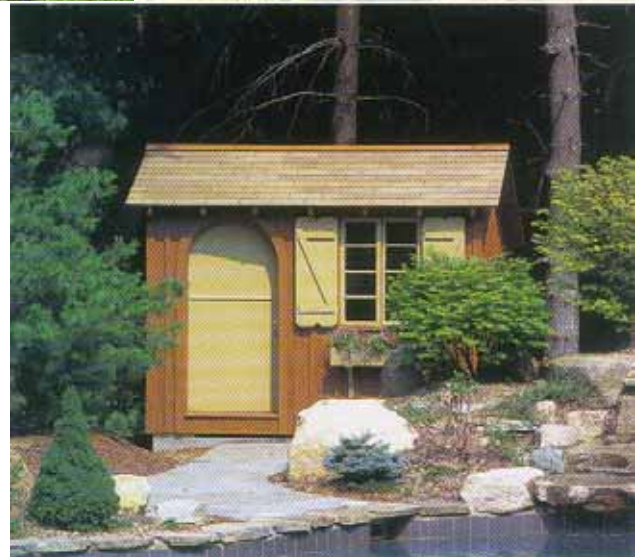
COMPOST BIN Feed your garden with the rich remains of leaves, clippings and kitchen scraps. —S. T.

she needed and how much space it was going to take up. She added shelving, hooks for pails, aprons, baskets and hoses, and a system for hanging rakes and shovels.

Depending on your needs, you may want a potting bench (Hershon prefers the less messy method of outdoor potting); storage bins for fertilizer, potting soil, manure and birdseed; shelving for small hand tools, gardening books, twine, gloves and the always-growing collection of pots; and grow lights for seedlings. You also should decide whether you'll need running water (watering cans can get heavy) or double doors if you plan to store large items, such as a wheelbarrow or rototiller.

Jamestown, Rhode Island, gardener Lynda Sutton keeps all of her gardening tools in her shed, starts her seeds and cultivates a cutting garden there. "My husband built it for me for my 50th birthday, says Sutton. "We wanted it to be solar and very primitive looking to go with the rest of the garden."

The rustic style of Sutton's shed matches her home. "We have an 1873 farmhouse that we completely gutted and restored," she says. For a unified look, her husband used the same wood on the shed from a barn they had on the site. "We had gotten it from a sawmill in southern Rhode Island," says Sutton. "It's finished on one side and raw on the other." Many found materials



CLUB SHED

John Mitchell of Acton built his yellow shed for reading, writing and enjoying tea time, TOP LEFT; Sal Fiumara outfitted his Truro shed with a window box and antique shutters, TOP RIGHT; a simple garden shed may also double as a storage unit for seasonal gear, ABOVE.

were used for the shed. “It started with the door that was a present from my son,” she says. “We happened to get the windows from my husband’s uncle. He had those at his farm.”

The floor of this narrow shed is also made from leftovers. “Brown University had torn down a building,” she says. “Someone in Warwick had bought all of that brick, which I then bought from him. Because the shed’s not terribly huge, it stays fairly warm. That was another reason for the brick—the brick keeps the heat.”

While prefab models offer plenty of choices in shelving, storage, windows, doors and design features, if you have any out-of-the-ordinary gardening wishes—stained-glass windows, say, or a cupola—you might consider custom-building your dream shed. The price may not be much higher than that of a comparable off-the-shelf shed, depending on the cost of the materials and the labor involved to install them.

Peter Casey, a Longmeadow carpenter, builds sheds, often with custom windows and glass doorknobs. “People are taking more of an interest in design,” he says, from different storage options (bins versus wall hooks) to where doors and windows will be positioned. He builds each shed himself, a process that takes several days.

The first consideration for any shed is size. A 10-by-12-foot shed works for many people, says Casey, but keep scale in mind. A large shed will overwhelm a smaller home, while a huge house will dwarf a tiny shed. “I could have used a bigger shed, but I didn’t want it to look like a cabin,” says Hershon, who settled for a 12-by-12-foot shed. Pre-designed sheds come in sizes from 6 by 8 feet to 15 by 40 feet.

When placing your shed, you’ll need to weigh some potentially competing considerations. Do you want it close to the garden, or is a sunny southern exposure important? If you’re planning on adding water lines and electricity, you’ll need to factor in the distance from the house and possible underground hazards.

Start by calling your local building inspector. Most towns limit size, require permits and regulate how close to a lot line you can place a shed. If you are near a pond or the ocean, conservation issues may also arise. “People can get three-quarters of the way through the planning process before they find out they can’t have what they want,” says Jamie McGrath, owner of Pine Harbor Wood Products in Hyannis. “We do a site inspection up front to prevent that.”

When your shed is standing, accessorize it. “Try containers, vines and paint,” says Needham landscape designer Kelly Wingo. The best garden or potting sheds are integrated into the landscape; they complement the architecture of the house (many use the same shutters, trim or siding) and serve as a focal point for the garden. Thoughtful landscaping and landscaping can keep a shed from free-floating in your yard.

Inside her shed, Hershon stashes a good-sized supply of paper towels and added a mirror and clock. But many gardeners who finally have a space of their own might just leave out the timepiece, content to lose track of time for a while. ■