

Come into the garden

Garden sheds aren't just the domain of grandads and allotment holders. Discover how investing in a simple wooden shed – or glorious garden room – can reward you with massive lifestyle benefits, and improve the look of your garden plot too

Words **Katherine Sorrell**



Photograph by Damien Lovegrove

There's one simple, surefire way to tell whether you've reached middle age. We all know the ones about your kids' music having no proper tune, teachers looking impossibly youthful and reclining armchairs suddenly gaining a mysterious allure. But there's an even better one. Sheds.

When you were young you probably never gave sheds a second thought. Now, however, you can't get them out of your head. If you have one, you wish it were bigger, more attractive, better organized inside. If you don't have one, you long for one in the way you once longed for ballet lessons, a chopper bike or a second glance from Jamie Hesketh in the fourth year.

Don't get me wrong; I know sheds aren't a panacea for all ills. But they come jolly close. When you run out of storage space in the house, sheds can be used to keep those things that you otherwise despair of finding space for: wet suits, inflatable dolphins, parasols and other bulky beach kit; ski and snowboarding stuff; rackets and balls of all kinds; bikes, scooters and skateboards; several hundred half-used tins of paint – you get the idea. That's not even to mention the shed's primary purpose, which is, of course, for gardening gear. The more green-fingered will use a potting shed as a miniature nursery, pricking out and potting on to their heart's content. But even the blackest-thumbed of us needs somewhere to keep the mower and the strimmer, plus all those spades, rakes and forks, pots and watering cans, hoses and secateurs.

If you're slightly more ambitious, you can use a shed as a real extension of the house. They're great hobby places, whether painting or pottery, model-making or miniature railways. As a DIY workshop they're ideal. And they can be brilliant for business, too. Did you know that Ikea was started in a shed? Even if you don't want to dominate the world with flat-pack furniture, you could certainly set up a small office in a shed. There are plenty of websites devoted to this idea. Go to <http://shedworking.blogspot.com> for humour as well as inspiration.



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1 David and Sarah Trotter of Squirrel Design are strong believers in the benefits of having your own special space, whether it's for the children to be creative and adventurous in, or for you to relax or work in. They create imaginative tree houses and garden retreats to customers' specifications, priced from about £10,000. ☎ 01454 238967 or www.squirreldesign.co.uk

2 With ladders and swing bars, a viewing platform and a hidey hole beneath, this rugged castle is practically a mini adventure playground. At £1,495, installation is included. From Great Little Trading Co, ☎ 0870 850 6000 or visit www.gltc.co.uk.

3 The Summer Cottage from The Early Learning Centre costs £350, plus an extra £60 for the lie-on fabric 'room' shown here. With two stories, a slide and some pretty flower pots and gingham curtains, it's pretty much all anyone needs from a playhouse though you will have to assemble it yourself. ☎ 08705 352352 or go to www.elc.co.uk

4 Blue Forest makes bespoke tree houses for kids, grown-ups and commercial ventures. Their prices start at around £12,000 and are tailored to your exact requirements. For more information ☎ 01892 750090 or visit www.blueforest.com



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