

Shed-Buying Guide

We help you choose a new shed or improve the one you've already got



Some sheds are a lot more practical and durable than others. Buying a decent one needn't cost a fortune - it's simply a case of knowing what to look for.

Bleeding edge



Top: decent -quality feather edge. Cheap sheds are usually made from thinner, more warp-prone boards than these. Above: tongue and groove shiplap.

Around 90 per cent of the sheds sold in the UK are made from wood. The cheapest models usually have overlap or feather-edge walls, meaning they're made from overlapping boards nailed together. Thin boards cut from unseasoned timber that hasn't been kiln-dried can soon warp and split, making gaps appear. This is less likely to happen if you spend a little more and buy a shed with interlocking tongue and groove boards. These are often described as shiplap, which refers to the shape of the boards and doesn't necessarily mean that they interlock, so it is worth checking.

A wooden shed can cost as little as £99 - one manufacturer told us that such sheds represent around 80 per cent of the market. The downside is that a £99 shed is unlikely to keep out the rain for long and will only measure around 6ft x 4ft. Wooden sheds are usually

still sold in imperial sizes so we've used these throughout.

Dozens of companies make sheds, so it pays to visit several different outlets to see a selection of makes and styles. DIY superstores usually have plenty available to order but only a few models on show. And these are often displayed high above ground level where you can't get a good look at them. Garden centres tend not to sell sheds, but larger ones often have a garden-building retailer attached to them. Then there are stand-alone outlets specializing in sheds and summer houses. Timber and builders' merchants are worth a try too. Check the small ads of your local paper and look in Yellow Pages under Buildings - Sectional and under Sheds & Garden Buildings to find a range of suppliers with assembled models on show at ground level.

Metal and Plastic Sheds



The majority of sheds sold in the UK are made from wood, but there are other options. Metal sheds are apparently the biggest sellers in the US. They won't rot or burn down, but aren't exactly pretty and can be tricky to assemble. Condensation tends to drip from the roof of these, limiting what you can store inside. Some have sliding doors (right) which won't blow shut when you're struggling to bring in bulky items. They cost from about £260 for a 6ft x 8ft model.



Plastic sheds are relatively maintenance free, and usually fit together easily. Taking them apart when moving house should also be straightforward. Keter's tardis-like Jumbo XL (right) measures 6ft 7in x 4ft 9in. It has good headroom and a sloping threshold which makes it easier to wheel equipment in and out. It costs around £250 including the floor and four shelf brackets. Stockists include B&Q.

Security



If buying a shed with security in mind, look for closely spaced uprights, around 30cm apart (above), and a well-braced door to resist hammer attack. If there's a window, ensure it is either boarded up, covered with a grille, or not big enough for someone to crawl through. The shed pictured, made by Shedlands, is 6ft x 8ft and costs about £450, including delivery. B&Q offers a similar model.

A not-very-determined burglar could soon break into most sheds. The contents might easily be worth hundreds of pounds. Does your home buildings and contents insurance cover your shed? Neighbourhood Watch and the Crime Reduction Officer at your local police station should be able to give shed security advice tailored to you. Consider the following burglar deterrents:

- Link your shed into your house alarm system or buy a separate battery-operated alarm - some only cost about a tenner.
- Use one-way (vandal-proof) screws to attach door and window hinges.
- Fit a decent lock. This will keep out inquisitive children too. Most locks can be unscrewed easily from the outside of the shed, cut with a bolt cropper or fail to prevent the door being forced. I'd recommend the Abus Diskus Maximum 8 26C - 70 (£22) pictured right with the Abus Diskus Maximum 8 140C - 120 hasp and staple (£13). For stockists, contact CK Tools ☎01758 704704 www.ck-tools.com

Choosing a Shed

Which wood?

Sheds are made from softwoods - usually pine (sometimes referred to as redwood or red deal) or spruce (white deal). A few are larch or Douglas fir, and in theory these should be slightly more resistant to rot. Most rot-resistant of all are cedar sheds, but these are almost twice the price of pine ones.

Size

If you have space, opt for a shed measuring at least 6ft x 8ft. This size has double the floor area of a 6ft x 4ft, and room for a work bench along one side. Expect to pay at least £200-£300 for a typical shiplap model made from pine. If the shed is to go in a very confined space, make sure you know its precise dimensions. The size quoted by the supplier may not be very accurate or include the roof overhang.

Style

Pent-roofed sheds - those with a single slope - suit being put against a vertical surface such

as a wall or fence. Elsewhere, an apex roof will probably look better - provided it won't be viewed side-on. An apex roof is less likely to sag over time than a pent one, as it is supported by shorter timbers.

Access

Ensure those who will be using the shed can get in without tripping over the doorway threshold or banging their head. Also check the doorway is wide enough. Single doors range from about 3ft wide to only 2ft 2in. The wider the opening, the wider the items you'll be able to bring inside. If a shed you like has poor access, check whether higher eaves and/or a wider or double door are available as optional extras.

Choosing a Shed : II

Other options

Suppliers will often customize a shed to suit you. For example, you'll probably be able to choose whether the door is hung on the left or right side of the doorway. With pent sheds and high-eaved apex ones you may also have the choice of the door being at the side or front. With most models, you can specify which side you'd like the window fitted. Basic sheds usually come with one fixed window as standard, but you may be able to opt for an opening one instead. This is almost essential if you intend to grow plants in the shed. Expect to pay around £25 and ensure it's hinged at the top and opens outwards to keep out the rain. Additional windows may also be a possibility.

Is it good value?

Try to find at least two or three models that you like - preferably from different outlets. Then, work out a total price including VAT, delivery and any extras such as an opening window and assembly. To compare the price of similar models that differ in size, work out the cost per square foot of floor area.

Planning permission

Sheds don't usually need planning permission unless you live in a listed building or a conservation area. If you do - or are in any doubt - check with your local authority's planning office, as there may be restrictions on shed size and how closely one can be positioned to the house and boundaries.

How Sturdy?

With time, a flimsy shed is likely to have a sagging roof, distorted sides and a door that won't shut properly. Check for sturdiness by standing inside it, jumping in the centre of the floor and pushing against the centre of the side and roof panels. You should feel firm resistance rather than flexing. Also, check that the timbers supporting the roof have no large, dark-edged knots, as these are prone to fall out.



Checking for sturdiness

- If you plan to spend much time inside the shed, check it has plenty of headroom (above) - otherwise you could feel claustrophobic. It will need big windows too if you want to raise plants in it. Potting sheds like this (above) have angled glass which lets in more light. Its stable door allows plenty of ventilation while keeping out pets and small children. This type of door is an optional extra on many standard sheds, costing around £50.
- The shed pictured, made by BS Sectional Buildings, has a generous roof overhang and a weather bar over the door. An 8ft x 6ft version costs £344 including delivery.
- The outside corners should have vertical strips of wood or fillets to stop water penetrating the ends of the boards.

Other Considerations

Putting in a power supply

Lighting and power sockets are useful additions to a shed. A safe way of installing them, if you're not a qualified electrician, is to use the Easy-Safe System of outdoor cabling. This comes fitted with a waterproof socket in 4m-30m lengths, costing from £117 to £152. It's available from Outdoor Electrics ☎0800 389 9446 www.outdoorelectrics.co.uk.

Will it keep out the rain?

Wooden sheds often leak and rot because of rain running down the walls. To minimize such problems, the roof should overhang the sides by at least 5cm and the front and back by at least 7.5cm. Measure from the inside edge of the roof, not the outside. If, as is likely, the overhangs are less than this, the following features can help to compensate - DIY if necessary:

- Rain is less likely to run inside the top and bottom of a door if it has a strip of wood (weather bar) over it to deflect the water. Ideally, there should be a weather bar at the bottom of the door too.
- Windows are prone to rot at the bottom unless they have sloping sills with a drip groove beneath. It's cheap and easy to make window sills and door weather bars using what timber merchants call chamfered architrave. It only costs around 70p per metre. If you have a router, cut a groove along the underside to stop water running back. Alternatively, glue a length of wood 6mm x 6mm to the underside. Nail on sills and attach weather bars with screws from the inside of the shed.
- When standing in a closed shed, the only place you should see daylight is through windows. Fill any other gaps with frame sealant (mastic).
- Less water will run down the sides if you fit guttering and a downpipe into a water

- butt and/or soakaway.
- Wooden roofs soon rot and leak unless covered effectively with roofing felt. Inferior felt is likely to need replacing after only three or four years, but decent-quality felt can last over a decade. When buying a shed, ensure the felt supplied weighs at least 20kg per 10m roll and has mineral chips on its upper surface. If it doesn't, buy some separately from a builders' merchant - 20kg felt will only cost around £20. Better still, but very heavy to handle, is 38kg felt. If re-covering a roof, remove or drive in any protruding nails but don't bother taking off the old felt.

Erecting Your Shed

Many shed suppliers will erect them for around £50. However, this option usually only applies to wooden sheds and excludes ground clearance and site levelling.

Putting a shed up yourself should be fairly straightforward, although ill-fitting components and poor instructions may hinder progress. Allow a full day to erect a wooden shed, once you've prepared the site, and enlist a helper to support the side panels while you're fixing them together. Metal sheds can be more time-consuming as they come in so many pieces, but a plastic shed may only take a couple of hours to assemble.

Step-by-step - a wooden shed



1

Treat the floor joists liberally with wood preservative. Leave overnight and treat again the next day. Ensure you use a preservative that specifies it protects against rot - water-based treatments don't.

2

Level the area where the shed is to go, tamping soil down firmly with a sledge hammer or fence post.

3

Measure the length and width of the shed floor - don't assume they're as per the specified

shed size.

4

Lay a base of these dimensions using paving slabs on soft sand (for levelling purposes). Try to avoid making the base larger than the floor, or it could get wet when it rains. The idea of making a base is to protect the shed bottom from damp. Instead of laying paving, you could stand the shed on pressure-treated bearers or fence posts laid at right angles to the floor joists.

5

Put the floor into position and, with a helper, lift the back and one side wall into place, aligning the corner carefully.

Erect Your Shed : II



6

For sturdiness' sake, fix the two panels together using screws rather than nails - ideally, use two 75mm 10-14 gauge coach screws with washers. Work from inside the shed - otherwise a burglar could easily unscrew them. Attach the other side and then the front panel likewise.

7

Cover the roof panels lengthwise with roofing felt, allowing an overhang at each end - this will be held down by barge boards.

First, fix a length of felt to the top edge of the panel using large-headed, rust-proof clout nails spaced 10cm-15cm apart. The shed probably won't come with sufficient nails for this spacing but if they're put any further apart, wind may get under the felt and rip it off. To avoid expletives, press the nails into the felt with your thumb before hammering them in. Put a row of nails along the middle of this strip too - otherwise the sun tends to make the

felt bubble up.

Nail the bottom length of felt so that it covers the edge of the roof at the eaves and tucks under the top strip by at least 5cm. Cut out a V at the corners so it can be folded neatly around the eaves.

8

Put the roof in place and nail the bottom rail of the wall panels to the floor joists.

9

Working from the outside, attach the roof to each wall with rust-proof spring nails driven into the uprights. Then attach a narrow strip of roofing felt along the ridge, allowing an overhang at each end.

10

Nail on the barge boards, cutting and folding overhanging felt as necessary. Attach the all-important finials - their pointed shape apparently deters the devil from sitting on the roof! Lastly, nail on the strips of wood (fillets) that protect the corners from damp.

Fitting guttering and a downpipe to a water butt will help keep the shed dry and be a useful source of water. Space gutter brackets no more than 1m apart, sloping them in the direction you want the water to go. Raise the butt on something high enough to enable you to stand a watering can under the tap. Fit piping to prevent the shed becoming wet should the water butt overflow.

Shed Cases

Growing room

Pauline Cussel was just beginning to have more time for gardening when she bought her 6ft x 8ft pent-roofed shed in 1997. At £400, it was quite an investment, but she wanted a model with plenty of windows and space for staging so it could double up as a greenhouse. It had to look reasonably attractive too as it would be very much on show in Pauline's small garden. Luckily, the only place it could go just gets the morning sun, so the cuttings and seedlings inside never overheat. Despite fitting two extra shelves in the window, it was soon clear Pauline needed a greenhouse too. She now has one, but the shed is still packed with plants - much to the consternation of her husband who manages to knock some flying every time he attempts to retrieve DIY materials from 'his' side. So is a bigger shed the answer? 'It would take up too much of the garden,' says Pauline. 'Anyway, even if we bought one 50ft long it would probably still be too small!'

Doorway difficulties

Peter Hart bought his 8ft x 6ft shed about ten years ago for £150. It has lasted well for a cheap shed - it even still has its original roofing felt. Guttering has helped keep the sides dry, although Peter's main reason for installing this was to conserve water and prevent rain running on to his neighbour's garage wall. However, the door is starting to rot at the bottom - probably because, like many sheds, the roof doesn't have a very generous overhang at the front. Installing a couple of weather bars to deflect the rain should help to stop this (see Other considerations). The only other real problem with the shed is that it is raised on bricks, so there is quite a step up into it. This makes wheeling his mower in and out awkward. Using a shed-door ramp has helped to some extent but it could do with being a bit higher. Ramps like the one shown cost about £10. Stockists include B&Q and Homebase.

Our Survey

A survey of people last autumn revealed that:

- 23 per cent don't have a shed. Half own one and 28 per cent own more than one.
- 84 per cent of shed owners have a wooden one.
- 8ft x 6ft is the most popular shed size followed by 6ft x 4ft. 25 per cent would buy a larger one next time.
- 39 per cent had no complaints about their shed. Around a quarter reckoned they hadn't enough shelves or hooks - easily resolved. Other criticisms were rotting wood (16 per cent), door not shutting properly and roof leaking (both 13 per cent). One in ten felt their doorway threshold was a trip hazard.
- Most have modified their shed in some way. 65 per cent have put up shelves or a tool rack, and around half have either painted or treated their shed with wood stain and fitted a lock or padlock. An adventurous 30 per cent have installed lighting and 8 per cent put in a burglar alarm.
- 20 per cent use their shed as a workshop. Only 7 per cent raise plants in it.
- 35 per cent admit there's junk in their shed that they ought to throw out.

Contacts

The following is a selection of the larger companies supplying sheds nationwide. When requesting a brochure, ask where you can see assembled models. Look at what local manufacturers are offering too - particularly if you'd like something out of the ordinary.

BS Sectional Buildings (deal)

☎0115 932 3280

Forest Garden (pine, Douglas fir and larch)

☎01299 254710

www.forestgarden.co.uk

Keter (plastic)

☎0121 422 6633

www.outstanding-keter.com

MPB Garden Buildings (deal and cedar)

☎01299 266000

Rowlinson (pine and metal)

☎01270 506900

www.rowgar.co.uk

Shedlands (GB) (redwood)

☎01709 703848

Shires (pine and cedar)

☎01945 465295

Store More (metal and plastic)

☎0161 430 3347

www.4storemore.com

Trimetals (metal)

☎01258 459441
www.trimetals.co.uk

Walton Garden Buildings inc. County brand (pine and cedar)
☎0870 164 4002
www.waltons.co.uk

Yardmaster (metal) ☎028 7962 8270
www.yardmaster.co.uk