



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
**COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION**

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Garden Sheds

Community and School Gardens

*David Berle and Robert Westerfield
University of Georgia Horticulturists*

Many community and school gardens begin with a mini-grant or donation to purchase supplies and materials. It can be difficult for novice gardeners to know what to buy when they are not familiar with purchasing gardening supplies for a larger garden. The biggest purchase decision is that of a shed or storage building.

Most importantly, storage space for a community or school garden needs to be dry and secure. Tools and supplies need to be kept out of the weather, and for convenience they need to be stored close to the garden. Lighting is useful if the space will be accessed after hours, or if there is not enough natural light to see clearly. Ventilation is important if gasoline engines or smelly fertilizers will be stored. Special cabinets should be used for gasoline and pesticides, which also require ventilated space.

The first inclination when funds become available is to purchase a pre-manufactured storage building. These can be useful for storing tools and equipment; however, it is a big expense and the needs of a garden often change over time and the original shed can become inadequate. Some models available are quite sturdy, but some of the cheaper models will not hold up with community use. In many cases, a tool locker is sufficient for the first year or two of a garden, though these cannot hold larger items like a wheelbarrow. Initially, there may be space in a nearby building that can provide storage temporarily and save several hundred dollars. After the garden has been in use for a year or so, the idea of purchasing or building a storage shed can be revisited.

Storage Sheds

When installing a storage shed, there are two basic choices – custom-built or pre-manufactured. Both have advantages and disadvantages. A custom-built shed can be built to specific needs and will probably fit the look and feel of the garden site better than a pre-manufactured shed. The cost of a custom shed can be higher than for a pre-manufactured shed, depending on materials used and who does the construction. If recycled materials are available, this is a great way to save money and they can give the shed a rustic look instantly. Pre-manufactured sheds come in all shapes, sizes and styles; the fancier the shed, the greater the cost. The biggest advantage is that you simply pick it out and it arrives on the site ready to use.

If building codes are followed, the exact material used to build the shed is not as important as proper painting or sealing to protect the sides and a good roofing material to prevent leaks. Whether purchasing a manufactured shed or building one from scratch, consider these important shed features:

- Strong door hinges for extensive use
- Windows or a skylight for natural lighting
- Ability to hang shelves or tool racks on the walls
- A way to secure it with a combination lock that can be changed as needed

- Movability to accommodate a changing garden layout
- Vented to prevent overheating and odor buildup
- Treated wood floors to resist rotting
- Strong floor joists (2" x 6" floor joists are stronger than 2" x 4" joists)

Local Building Codes

Almost every town, city and county in Georgia has some type of building code that affects storage buildings. Some require a building permit even to install a portable shed. There are setback regulations that determine the distance a building can be from property lines, or even where on the property a shed can be placed. Some regulations limit the number of external buildings and count the shed as one. In some locations, the building style or materials may be regulated. It is important to check with your local planning office to be sure the guidelines are properly followed; otherwise, the shed may have to be removed or torn down. There can even be tax ramifications for installing or constructing new buildings on a site.

Siting a Shed

A tool shed should be easy to get to by both a vehicle delivering materials and a person working in the garden. It should be placed in a well-drained area, ideally with a little shade. It should open up facing the garden. If the garden is fenced, the shed should be within the fenced area. It could even form the corner of a fence. It would be best to have the shed close to the ground – but not touching -- for easy access with rolling tools. A ramp works better than steps.

Alternatives

Alternatives to a shed include a tool locker, one end of a greenhouse (if available) or a simple roof overhang. The advantage to these alternatives is that they are cheaper than a shed, but each has its drawbacks. A tool locker can be easily moved (maybe too easily) and is fairly inexpensive, but does not hold large tools. If a greenhouse or hoop house is on the site, one end of the structure can make a great place to store tools, though tools take up space and security may not be quite as good. Building a simple roof extension off an existing building is fast, cheap and will be very easy to move in and out of. Some companies even sell freestanding roof structures that are great for storing tillers and lawnmowers; however, security may be a problem.