

A Place For Everything

With proper planning, organize your tool shed and get ready for your most productive gardening season ever.

By P. Allen Smith

Photo Courtesy Hortus Ltd.

Details Make the Difference

Keeping your hats close at hand, like P. Allen Smith did here, near his bright, desk garden shop desk, it's the details that make the difference.

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When I told some of my friends that I was writing an article about organizing a tool shed, they had a good laugh.

They've been in my garage, after all! I'll admit, I'm more of a "grab and go" gardener, and at the end of the day, I often toss my tools and supplies in a heap inside the door.

But this year, I built a new garden shed, and that was the incentive I needed to reform my ways.

It was a fresh start and an opportunity to think through how I could store my gardening supplies so I'd be more inclined to keep things organized.

It's been a few months since I moved in, and I'm happy to report that so far, my plan is working. If my new system could change the habits of a pack rat like me, they might be helpful to you, too.

The Master Plan

I situated my new tool shed about mid-point in the garden to save steps, so I don't have to walk all the way to one end or the other to retrieve supplies.

The building is 10 feet deep and 14 feet wide with double doors in the front so it's easy to haul things in and out.

Instead of constructing the building on site, I saved some time by ordering a pre-cut, panelized and prefinished kit from Walpole Woodworkers.

The beauty of their system is that the components are delivered in large, flat boxes, so I didn't have to cut any lumber.

It took just a few days to assemble the shed with nails and screws in pre-marked areas. The shed was constructed with premium-grade pine siding, spruce interior framing and pressure-treated joists. After adding shutters and some wrought-iron hardware, it was ready to go.

Rather than follow my usual habit of immediately filling the building with all of my buckets, gardening tools, bagged soil and equipment, I decided to draw a floor plan.

With the old saying, "A place for everything and everything in its place," in mind, I thought about how I wanted to use various areas in the shed. I knew I needed workspace for activities like potting up containers and keeping records, but I realized that to do that, I would need plenty of storage space along the walls to keep the floor clear of clutter.

After I sketched a plan on paper, I went to work.

Building Layout

The building has two windows—one on each side wall—so I positioned a long, narrow table under one of the windows to take advantage of the natural light.

Along with a work surface, the table has two shelves, making it useful as both a desk and a storage unit.

When I want to sit down to do some paperwork, I just pull up a stool.

On the wall above the desk, I have a bulletin board that's convenient to post notes and a calendar. I like to keep records of what's been planted in the garden and track the plants' growth through the seasons.

Now I have a place where I can come in from the garden and do just that.

I also hung straw hats on the wall above my desk. If you're like me, you probably forget to put on a hat until you're outside. Now my hats are close at hand.

In the middle of the back wall, I placed a simple, homemade cabinet for storing smaller items. The cabinet frame and shelves are made from 1- by 10-inch pine boards, and the back is a 4- by 8-foot sheet of peg board. The hinged doors are a pair of old window shutters that I've had for a while. To help hang some of the hand tools inside, I drilled small holes through the tools' handles and threaded them with twine so I could attach them, heavy-side down, on hooks.

On the wall to the left of the tool cabinet, I hammered a few long nails into the studs and used them as hangers to hold heavy tools like my shovel, rakes and hoe.

Once they were in place, I took a marker and drew the outline of each tool directly on the wall. The outlines not only help me know where to hang the tools, but an empty outline also shows when one is missing.

Since I often leave tools behind in the garden, someone once suggested that I spray a band of bright fluorescent paint on the handles so they're easier to see in the grass or dirt. That's next on my to-do list.

To the right of the tool cabinet, I placed a storage unit that looks something like a large step ladder.

It has three shelves: The top one is narrow, about 6 inches deep; The middle shelf is 8 inches; The bottom one is 12 inches.

I like the graduated sizes, because I have a tendency to use top shelves as catch-alls and quickly fill them up with so many things that I can't access anything in the back. This narrow top shelf limits me from putting too many things on it. On the lower shelves, I store less-frequently used items in boxes and tubs.

On the wall opposite the desk, I made some instant floor-to-ceiling storage from a large shelving unit that I found at a flea market. If you're into saving money and recycling, buying used furniture is a great way to go.

The shelves are the perfect size for holding spray bottles, containers and lots of clear, plastic tubs. Since the tubs are see-through, it's easy to locate things I'm looking for.

They're convenient for storing miscellaneous smaller things that usually clutter up the shelves and also help keep items, like packets of seed, safe from mice.

With the gardening supplies stored along the walls, I had a large space in the center to set up a table for a standing work area.

It's a convenient place to do jobs like potting plants, starting seeds, working on tools or whatever else needs to be done. I like having access around all sides of the table, and anything I spill on the floor, I can just sweep out the door. That's my idea of easy housekeeping.

The roofline of the shed is peaked, providing a high, open area to dry bundles of flowers and herbs. To make hanging the bundles easy, I suspended homemade wire hooks from the ceiling. I can adjust the length of the hooks as needed so the bundles always hang above my head. The plants have the ideal drying conditions, out of direct sunlight and suspended in the warm air that naturally rises to the peak of the roof.

About the Author: P. Allen Smith is a professional garden designer, host of two national TV programs, a regular guest on the Today Show, and author of P. Allen Smith's Living in the Garden Home (Clarkson Potter, 2007) and other books in the Garden Home series. Learn more at www.pallensmith.com.

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