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# Ideas for repurposing a shed

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

A backyard shed is handy for storing outdoor items, such as gardening tools, bicycles, lawnmowers and more. There's a trend, however, of repurposing backyard sheds into more usable living or storage spaces.

If your shed needs new life or you're looking for more space, consider these remodels. You can do a basic update on a budget, or go all out and turn the shed into a brand new space.

## A Standard Remodel

Update a gardening shed with a fresh coat of paint and new fixtures, such as a custom handmade potting bench complete with a wash basin, customized storage for gardening tools and gear and window boxes with flowers.

## Man cave or she shed

If you can afford to put more money into the project, why not turn the shed into a space all your own? Convert the shed to a man cave or she-shed. Add a TV, sofa and mini fridge for an entertaining space. Add custom storage and a craft table to make a crafting space. Have a hobby? Wire the shed to run a pottery wheel, woodworking tools or more. Or make it a peaceful yoga space.

## A guest house

If you could use a space for guests, consider converting the shed into a bull-blown guest house. You'll likely need to add insulation and heating/cooling, electricity and furniture to convert the space to a living area. You could also add a TV and internet access. If your budget allows, you could even add plumbing.

## A home office

The COVID-19 pandemic sent many people scrambling to find space in their homes for a home office. With internet access, soundproofing, insulation and HVAC, your shed could become your new work-from-home space.

## Add a shed

If you don't currently have a shed, consider adding one. You can buy pre-made sheds or build your own, or consider a prefab model that can be customized for the intended use. No matter what you do, check into local ordinances regarding sheds. Sheds above a certain size may need to be permitted and inspected. If you live in a neighborhood with a homeowner's association sheds may not be permitted or may need to be approved by the HOA board and meet certain design standards.



CORALIMAGES – STOCK.ADOBE.COM

A small backyard shed adds space for summer projects.



CONTRIBUTED

Sue Debes repurposed barn siding to create this custom beamed ceiling in her office space.



CONTRIBUTED

Sue Debes of Garrett carved an office space on one side of this building for her "Upside of Downsizing" business and a roomy workspace on the other.

# Roof Sealed, Walls Wrapped, Crawl Space. What?

**BY ALEX VANZUILEN**

Four Seasons Design & Remodeling

Water, the homeowner's natural enemy. Ideally it stays in the pipes or is kept outside. Boots, underlayments, housewraps, tapes, foams, glues, special siding and roofing systems — the list of products for keeping water out and your home dry is an ever-growing industry. It makes sense; a leak in the home stands out like a sore thumb. Peeling paint, crumbling drywall, damaged flooring are all symptoms of a leak, but they are symptoms you can see. What about a leak that you cannot see, in a part of the home you do not use? What about your crawlspace?

In the US, 15% of homes are built on a crawlspace, that translates to some 27 million homes. In lieu of a basement or slab, the house is built upon short walls and footings to support its weight. This method of construction leaves a space between the floor and the ground which is usually just large enough to crawl around in, hence the name. Unfinished,

the crawlspace gives good access to interior systems that have been run through the floor (HVAC, plumbing, electric) and allows for construction in locations where a basement or slab is just not feasible or cost effective. These benefits are not without their own trade-offs however.

If not properly mitigated, moisture can collect within the crawlspace. Sheltered from direct sunlight, and poorly ventilated, moisture in the earth beneath your home will evaporate into the air within the crawlspace. This humidity, if not properly vented, can cause the warping of subflooring through the swelling of structural members and the cupping of hardwood flooring. Water alone is a detriment to the wooden substructure of any home, but the warm moist air and dark conditions also present the perfect environment for mold and mildew to flourish. That mold and mildew can exacerbate the rotting of floor joists threatening their integrity. Not to mention the health effects of having

a thriving colony of mold living under your very feet. Those same conditions can also be an open invitation for rodents, small animals, and all manner of creepy crawlies to set up shop in your crawlspace. These pests can cause problems ranging from poor air quality and nibbled wires to structural instability and foundation damage.

What can we do about it? In the past, if not just left as bare earth, a thin plastic vapor barrier was laid in the floor of the crawlspace with venting around the perimeter. While that method worked fine for some houses and helped to stop that source of moisture, it did nothing against the other sources of humidity from the ambient air and it did little if anything against pests. Newer solutions aim to solve this problem. Full encapsulation, or the process of sealing the crawlspace from the ground and foundation walls. A vapor barrier is installed on the floor and the walls of the crawlspace, pipe boots (similar to boots found on roofs) are installed around all barrier penetrations.

Then all the pieces are taped and sealed together to form what is essentially a water and air proof bag within the crawlspace. This connects the crawlspace to the floor above while sealing the floor joists off from moisture coming from below.

No two crawlspaces are the same, what works to solve the moisture issues in one may not have any bearing on those same issues in another. Some people do not even know that they have a crawlspace to check, let alone one with moisture issues. With the myriad of information and products available, there is no need to be caught off guard. The best thing you can do is to look and take stock of things. Use good judgement and consult a contractor or crawlspace specialist if you suspect a problem or are not sure. What may be a small problem now; could become a major repair in time. Water will not wait for you to find it before it causes damage.

To quote Ben Franklin, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."



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# Spring cleaning is a chance for a fresh start

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

After a long winter spent cooped up at home, spring is a natural time to declutter, clean and organize your home. Here is a checklist of spring cleaning jobs to remember. You can go it alone, or consider hiring a local cleaning service to help you really make your home shine. MarthaStewart.com recommends replenishing your cleaning supplies before you get started. That way you'll have all the tools you need for the job.

### • Basic cleaning.

Sweep, mop, vacuum, clean toilets, the works. This is the time to tackle deep-cleaning jobs you've been putting off. Sanitize the hard-to-reach area behind the toilet. Scrub off caked-on soap scum and grime on the bathroom faucet. Really get in there and finish the job.

### • Once-in-a-while jobs.

This is the time to clean the oven, open all the windows and clean the tracks, glass and screens. Degrease the kitchen cabinet doors and hinges. Give the refrigerator a deep clean, including the door seals and glass. Defrost the freezer, if needed. Deep clean the kitchen sink disposal. Polish any silver. Dust the blinds

and wash or vacuum the curtains. Shampoo rugs. Clean washing machine seals. Dust and wipe down baseboards and crown molding. Clean and sanitize remote controls. Check or replace smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries. Replace air filters. Dust and clean light fixtures and ceiling fans. Vacuum refrigerator coils. Flip mattresses. Wash comforters and other large bedding, or take them to the cleaners. Reseal grout. Polish or wax wooden furniture. Wax flooring.

### • Seasonal maintenance.

Clean gutters. Clean and repair outdoor furniture. Pressure wash the deck or patio. Clean any debris from the roof. Consider having your air conditioning unit cleaned and serviced.

### • Declutter.

Spring is a great time to go through adults' and kids' closets to see which clothes no longer fit or have holes/stains. Make a donation pile and organize the remaining clothes in drawers and closets. Do the same with toys and books. Toss any food that's been hanging around in the refrigerator a bit too long. Inventory the deep freeze so you can use up foods that have been lurking there.



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MarthaStewart.com recommends replenishing your cleaning supplies before you get started. That way you'll have all the tools you need for the job.



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Photo: Larry Strong

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# Choosing the right contractor for your repairs

BY JEFF DEAHL

**Q** — I have a summer cottage on Lake James and every spring when we open the cottage there are several small items that need addressed and we are not handy to do them ourselves. How is the best way to get these items fixed with a local contractor? We struggle to find a contractor. What is the best way to get a return phone call?

*Rose on Lake James*

**A** — Rose, that is an age-old question and one that is not easy to answer. Generally, the best answer is to start early by making phone calls and be patient on receiving return calls. Sometimes when we receive these calls, we are already behind on returning new job calls so it will take a couple days before you get a return call. Also, if you do not get a timely call back, call them back in a few days to let them



JEFF DEAHL

know you are serious and not just kicking tires and getting quotes.

It is about making a relationship with a local contractor and doing what you can to facilitate the work that needs done. We always prioritize customers that we have worked for in the past because we have experience with them.

And yes, there are past customers that we will not go back out to their homes either; they short paid the last time or were unrealistic with expectations and believe me we do everything to make happy customers. Most construction companies are currently working on a project and have another one to start once

this one is done; so you may not get a return call, and some contractors are just not set up to do service type work.

It does take some work on your part by making a good list of things that you want taken care of starting with the highest priority. It requires you to go to the lumber company and make selections and decisions. We have people that we do spring work for every year, they send us a list of what needs addressed and what their timeline is, and we work it in when we have free time available. Sometimes we do not get to everything on their list the first time and these items get taken care of the next time. Also, a problem can be when we get calls from homeowners wanting an estimate for the work that they want done. Most service work is done on a cost-plus basis, another words, time, and materials.

Service work usually averages above \$55 an hour for a well-tooled carpenter or handyman so be prepared and if your expectations are \$30 an hour because of your perception of value your search will be limited to friends and family. Sometimes people do not have a clear handle of what they want to have done or have a grand plan for a remodel combined in their list. Larger remodels require planning and selections; it is not easy to bid these projects and requires time and energy. If you are looking only to get minor painting or repairs done you can also go to a local lumber company or paint store and get names and numbers for a handyman that shops there and you can possibly find someone that does not have anything to do next week; but beware you are taking a chance hiring that way.

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# Planting summer-blooming bulbs

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Bulbs Spring is the time to plant summer-blooming bulbs, such as dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, calladiums and elephant ears. Bulbs should be stored in a cool, dry place until all danger of frost has passed. Then it's time to plant.

## When to plant

Exactly when you plant will depend on what planting zone you live in. According to GardenDesign.com, in colder climates such as USDA Zones 4 to 7, summer-flowering bulbs should be planted in mid to late spring (May to June), and in Zones 8 to 10, in early to mid-spring (late March to May). **HOW TO PLANT** The best resource for knowing how deep to plant your bulbs is the packaging they came in. In general, dig a hole that's 2-3 times as deep as the bulb is tall. The pointy side of the bulb should face up. The roots should face down. Give the bulbs a good watering. Continue watering whenever the soil is dry. Keep in mind that over-watering can cause the bulb to rot.

## Mind your soil

Most bulbs need rich soil, so mix some compost into your soil for the best results,

especially if your soil is heavy clay or has poor drainage. Loamy or slightly sandy soil is ideal.

## Prevent weeds

The best way to prevent weeds is to add 2-3 inches of mulch on top of your flowerbeds. Bulbs can easily grow up through the mulch. Weeds will have a harder time. Weed barrier fabric is not ideal to use when planting bulbs, because it can prevent moisture from reaching the roots of the developing bulb. If you must use weed barrier fabric, cut slits in the fabric at the site of each bulb.

## Plant for visual effect

Consider when your flowers will bloom to provide blooms all season long. Different plants bloom at different times during the season. Others, such as such as seedum, daylilies, hosta or bleeding heart, will bloom repeatedly until late fall or provide consistent, rich foliage. Mix up your plantings so that your flowerbeds provide visual interest all season long. Consult Longfield Gardens' Bloom Time Chart for Spring and Summer Bulbs at: [bit.ly/2KTQuQm](https://bit.ly/2KTQuQm) to help you plan your flowerbeds.



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Spring is the time to plant summer-blooming bulbs, such as dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, calladiums and elephant ears.

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# Downsizing service helps clear the clutter

BY SUE CARPENTER

scarpenter@kpcmedia.com

During the past year, many of us have found ourselves working from home or without jobs due to COVID-19. During the downtime, more than a few of us have cast an eye on our household clutter that accumulated while we were away.

"Some people just cleaned out their closets and were over it," said Sue Debes, owner of the Upside of Downsizing who specializes in making sense of decluttering, organizing and moving.

"They found out how hard the work is," she said.

Others are too busy or not physically able to sort through years of accumulated possessions. Each situation is different, said Debes.

She really likes helping the older people who might not have children or they don't live close by. Often clients need to move furniture to and from nursing homes and assisted living in a matter of a couple days. The stuff has to go and perhaps their children don't have time to come back to deal with the household items, especially during the pandemic.

Debes said sometimes the situation is a man who is grieving the death of his wife and can't go in and touch her stuff. Or a widow who doesn't know where to begin to clear out a garage.

Couples sometime disagree what is trash and what is treasure — how many casserole dishes do you really need or power tools you no longer use?

It's easier for Debes to help downsize for them as she is not emotionally attached to the items.

"It's more a helping thing than a money thing for me," Debes said of her service. She charges by the hour and meets with clients on site to talk over expectations, but does not go into hoarder situations. Options are to have a garage or estate sale at the home, put items on more than a dozen online garage sale sites, or simply decide what needs to be put in the trash bin.

"I don't get a whole lot of furniture, they take that with them," she said. "What I try to do is make these people money. Most do pretty well." She loads up unsold items in her Chevy Blazer to sell from her office workshop for customers. She takes a small percentage of the sale. Prices are based on

eBay, Etsy and local marketplace sites.

"They are happy and I am happy," she said.

She also has a list of items past customers are looking for to contact right away.

Debes knows what sells at auctions — her uncles were all auctioneers. A family member suggested she go in the downsizing business after helping clean out their home in an efficient manner a few years ago.

She has also helped homeowners in

the process of selling homes with a quick deadline to be moved out in a matter of days. Others might be downsizing or just need someone to make sense of clearing the clutter in the garage.

The pandemic put a stall on her services over the past year, but she uses social distancing to continue to sell items from her garage with little to no physical contact.

People can contact Debes for more information at 260-312-0006 or check her Facebook page at: upside of downsizing.



SUE CARPENTER/SCARPENTER@KPCMEDIA.COM

Downsizing specialist Sue Debes works from her home office filled with thousands of patriotic items.

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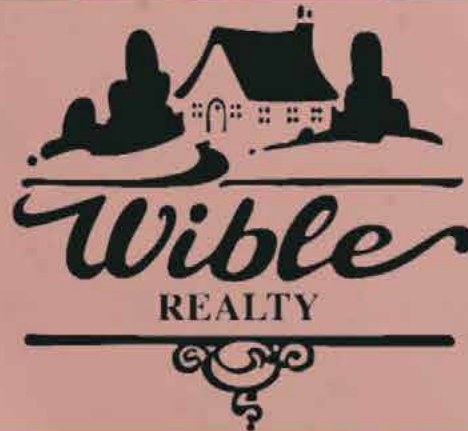


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# Spring pruning basics

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Many perennial plants need a spring pruning. Their foliage may provide protection during the winter, but by spring, it's time to prune in order to encourage new growth. This means pruning is an essential part of your spring gardening plans.

Here are some pruning basics to get you started.

## WHEN TO PRUNE

According to the Old Farmers Almanac, the timing of pruning a tree or shrub depends mostly on when it blooms and whether it blooms on old or new growth. In general, plants that flower after midsummer should be pruned in the spring, while those that bloom in winter, spring and early summer should be pruned soon after flowering. Burger Farm and Garden Center reminds gardeners that while an ill-timed pruning may lead to fewer flowers and fruits, it is rarely fatal to the plant.

## WHAT TO PRUNE

Fruit trees such as apple, cherry, peach and plum, and vines such as trumpet vine and wisteria, should be pruned in early spring. Spring-flowering shrubs such as lilacs and

rhododendrons need to be pruned as soon as their early-spring blooms have faded. This will help ensure a good bloom next year. According to TheSpruce.com, Black-eyed Susan, gayfeather, purple coneflower and globe thistle seed heads are great food for birds, so leave them be until early spring, while coral bells, delphiniums, hostas, turtle-heads and mums need the protection of their foliage during winter. Don't cut them back until spring.

## PRUNING TOOLS

It's important to keep your pruning tools sharp. While a plant can easily recover from a clean cut, a botched cut can weaken the plant and make the plant susceptible to disease. Sharpen shears and clippers, and oil moving parts to keep them working smoothly.

## HOW TO PRUNE

Some plants need more aggressive pruning than others. Consult the Old Farmers Almanac or your local extension service for particulars on how much to prune a particular shrub or plant.

In general, when pruning a tree, begin with removing any dead or dying branches,



EVA\_VOLPATO

**Trees should be pruned from the outermost growth to give it a pleasing shape, and promote the growth of shorter, thicker branches.**

as well as any "suckers" — sprouts emerging from the base of the trunk. Make clean cuts flush to the branch, with no part of the growth remaining. Also remove "watersprouts," which are small, straight vertical shoots growing on the main branches.

Thin out the tree by removing branches that grow downward, toward the center of the

tree or that cross paths with another branch, as well as any limbs along the trunk that are bigger in diameter than the trunk.

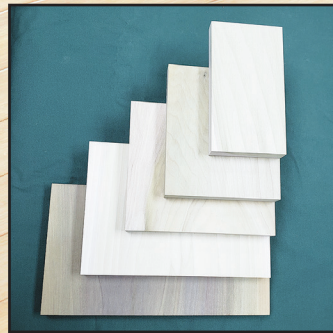
Then focus on evening out the branches and removing competing branches. Finally, prune the tree from the outermost growth to give it a pleasing shape, and promote the growth of shorter, thicker branches.

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# Learn the right ways to clean lawn and patio furniture



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture.

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Once the days begin to grow a little bit longer and the numbers on the thermometer creep a tad higher, outdoor entertaining season is right around the corner. Homeowners may be anxious to once again return to the comforts of their backyards. However, their patio furniture may not be ready for lounging just yet.

Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture made of metal, glass, wood, and plastic. Before homeowners know it, their backyards will be ready for outdoor entertaining season.

## Proper storage

Storing outdoor furniture during the colder months of the year is a great way to protect items from the elements. This may involve careful shrink-wrapping and keeping items outdoors, or by moving furniture indoors to a shed or garage. Cleaning the furniture one last time before storing it also can be handy.

## Remove stuck-on debris

Inspect furniture and be prepared to remove any stuck-on debris, such as bird droppings, sticky food residue or even cobwebs and insect nests. Be sure to use a cleaning tool that is safe for the material you are cleaning. Test an inconspicuous area of the furniture first to ensure your tools don't damage the furniture. For example, many scrub brushes can scratch glass or aluminum.

## Make a thorough cleanser

Clean stains off of furniture with a versatile cleanser. A mild cleanser can be made by mixing 1/2 cup baking soda with 1 gallon of warm water, according to the experts at Better Homes & Gardens. Regular dishwashing detergent also can be mixed with water, as it has a mild bleaching agent. This cleanser can be used on plastic resin furniture or metal furniture, which are popular patio furniture materials.

## Patio fabrics

Check the cleaning instructions of outdoor fabrics, as there might be specific instructions on the tags. In some cases, fabric may be removed and washed in a washing machine on a gentle setting. A solution of dish soap and warm water also is a gentle way to clean outdoor fabrics. Once items are clean, HGTV advises applying a water-repellent fabric protector to minimize staining and maintenance.

## Strip or sand

Wood furniture may need specialized care. If stains cannot be removed with a mild cleanser, then hard woods like teak can be surface-sanded to restore items' original look.

Pressure washers can often do more harm than good to patio furniture, so it's best to look for an alternative way to clean them. Usually a bit of elbow grease and a cleanser is all that's needed. Give the cleaning product time to work. Wipe down and dry the furniture thoroughly to prevent the growth of mildew.



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# Protect your siding

**BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA**

Your home's siding protects the structure of your home, but what protects your siding? The warranty.

Whether you're shopping for new siding or interested in maintaining the value of your current siding, it's important to understand how siding warranties work. That way you'll know what will be covered and what will not, and you can maintain your siding accordingly.

**Labor or materials.**

Your siding manufacturer will likely provide a warranty on the siding itself. The installer might warranty the installation job, to be sure it's installed in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. Your installer should be able to explain the warranty options for both. In general, warranties that last longer or provide more protection will be more expensive. Consider how much the protection is worth to you. Would you have room in your budget to replace siding in a situation in which the materials and labor would not be covered? It might be worth spending a little more upfront to prevent

major expenses later.

**Coverage limits.**

What's covered by the warranty will also vary among manufacturer, product grade and material. A warranty may include protection from insects, hail, rot, delamination, excessive fading, peeling, cracking, rusting, corroding and more. Warranties will differ based on the material. Wood siding is much more susceptible to damage from things like water and insects, whereas composite siding is much more durable, with the ability to resist severe weather and repel insects.

**Term.**

The term of the loan is another important consideration. Many manufacturers offer a limited lifetime warranty. If the warranty covers only a set period, such as 50 years, check whether the warranty is pro-rated. This means that the older the siding is at the time of a claim, the less the manufacturer will pay. If you are remodeling a home to sell or intend to sell in the near future, consider whether the warranty can be transferred to new owners. This feature could increase the value of the home. Be sure to let the new owners know



IRIANA SHIYAN

**Whether you're shopping for new siding or interested in maintaining the value of your current siding, it's important to understand how siding warranties work.**

how to take advantage of the transfer. There is usually a time limit in which the transfer must be completed, such as 30 or 45 days after the sale of the home. Some features of the warranty may not transfer, and the term may be reduced after the transfer.

**Routine maintenance.**

The siding manufacturer will likely require that you keep the siding maintained

to a certain standard. For example, you may be required to use a soft-bristled brush as opposed to a pressure-washer. The manufacturer will offer recommended products to clean the siding and warn against using strong chemical cleaners. Damage caused by issues such as mold left on the surface of the siding may not be covered. The warranty may also prohibit you from painting, varnishing or otherwise refinishing your siding.

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