
The
Complete
Buyers' Guide
to
Storage Sheds



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Step 1: Getting Started

Know what the building is for.

This may seem obvious, but it is sometimes overlooked: What will go in your building? Portable buildings have been used in many ways (think music studio, backyard office, guard shack, hunting cabin, animal shelter, workshop, or personal retreat), but the most common usage is for storage. If this is your need, make a list of what you want to store there. Remember that if two people will be using the shed, both may have their own mental lists. Talking about those lists *before* the shed is delivered will save talking about the lists *after* the shed is delivered.

Common uses of storage sheds.

Storage sheds can be used for anything from animals to your old zoology textbook, but here are some common uses:

- lawn and garden: mowers, trimmers, tillers, sprayers, rakes, hoes, garden hoses
- animal shelters: dog kennel, chicken coop, run-in shed, turtle house (it really happened—one of our sheds was purchased specifically for a pet turtle)
- holiday items that are used only annually: Christmas tree, other decor
- closet clutter
- tools

Common Sense from Mark

“Don't focus primarily on price. Focus on function first--what you need it to do. Then quality. Then price. If you focus first on price, you may end up with something you're not happy with.”

Know the various storage areas.

As you itemize and think about where you store your things, consider four basic storage areas:

1. Items that are too large to lift: mowers, freezers, and other large items will simply take up floor space—there's no way around it.
2. Items that will hang from the wall. Shovels, rakes, and hoses will do best with wall space to hang from, rather than being on the floor or on a shelf.
3. Items that you can lift over your head. Lighter storage totes and boxes may be put on high shelves or onto a loft (which is an incredibly cheap way of adding square footage to your storage area).
4. Everything else. If you can lift it, but don't want a chiropractor visit afterward, low shelving will be the answer to medium-heavy items.

Step 2: Choose Your Site

Where should I place my shed?

A number of factors affect the best place for your shed.

1. **Accessibility.** Now that you've made your list (you *did* make your list??), consider where your shed will serve your best. If it houses your snow blower, you probably don't want to have to tromp across the back yard through the snow, and then blow clear a path all the way back to the house—all before you've started clearing your sidewalk and driveway.
2. **Aesthetics.** The threat of snow may be less of a concern to you than the beauty of your backyard. Some people want their building to blend into the surroundings, and be unnoticed. Others want the building as part of the outdoor décor, and want it to be seen. Either is fine, but it may affect where you place your shed (and even its design and color scheme, which we will consider later).
3. **Setback.** The distance between your structure and your property line is called setback. You probably don't want to create a scene with either your neighbor or the local building inspector, so be sure to leave enough room between your shed and your neighbor's yard. If there is any question, check with your HOA, or your local county/city offices.
4. **Longevity.** Your shed will last longer if it is in a spot that is not perpetually wet, or on the receiving end of your neighborhood watershed. Low tree branches can scrape the sides or roof in winds, creating a significant amount of wear on the shed's paint or roof. If you have a sprinkler system, remember that regular watering will not have the same effect on your shed as it does on your grass.
5. **Level.** Many creative steps can be taken to set a building on slopes (see photos), but the more level the ground is, the easier and cheaper it is to set a building.



a bunch of slope . . .



a bit of slope . . .

6. **Utilities.** A building should not sit on top of buried power lines or other utilities. You can get your utilities marked free of charge with a call to “Miss Utility” of Virginia—Just dial **811**.
7. **Access.** Finally, consider access for delivery. These buildings can be set by crane, but it's not the cheapest option. A more economical option, if you can't get a building into your backyard, is to have it built on-site, but be aware that not all builders offer that option.

After reading this Shed Buyers' Guide, your next step will be to talk with a design consultant. They will help you through the entire design process, step by step. If you're ready, [request a consultation now](#).

Step 3: Choose Your Size

Size is probably your most important decision when choosing your storage building.

Storage buildings are available in two foot increments (odd numbered sizes are available, if necessary) all the way from 6x8 to 28x40, so there is no reason not to get exactly the size you need. While the most common problem is not having enough space, we have seen situations where clients purchased buildings that were too large for their needs. Either dilemma is equally frustrating, and it's worth spending a little time up front to figure out exactly how much space you will need.

There are essentially three things to take into consideration when choosing your size: **Storage Space**, **Yard Space**, and **Permit Requirements**.

Storage Space

This is the first one, and perhaps the most important. Since you now know what large items you will be storing for the entire life of this building, a simple approach is to lay them out on the ground (unless it's your loaded chest freezer), outline the building with a garden hose or extension cord, and measure your dimensions. Just remember to allow room for the smaller items, as well as access and movement within the building! Don't forget—shelving and items hanging from walls take up space, as well. (Hint: small items that are light enough to lift over your head can go in the loft, an optional feature on many buildings that maximizes otherwise wasted space.)

If you just need “AS MUCH SPACE AS POSSIBLE!!!” then just proceed directly to the next item regarding size.

Yard Space

While this is not a problem for everyone, most people do have limited yard space. However, having the building overpower the yard is not a common problem except with the very smallest of yards. The more common considerations have to do with whether or not it will fit “between those two trees and the swing set” or some other similar issue. Again, make sure it will fit where you want it to go!

Building Permits

This is the consideration that ends up making the size decision for many people. In the state of Virginia, 256 is a magic number that affects you in two ways.

1. A building permit is typically required for any building over 256 square feet.
(Note: most localities still require you to verify the placement of the building with the zoning office prior to installation. This is usually called a “Zoning Permit” or something similar, and is not as involved and costly as a typical “building permit.”)
2. Above 256 square feet, a permanent foundation is typically required. While this is not a “deal-killer” necessarily, it does add another dimension, some extra costs, and an additional inspection to the process.

Because of the magic 256, the largest buildings that can be set up without a building permit or permanent foundation (in most locations) is 12x20 or 14x18. These can be easily installed with only blocks or a gravel base.

Size by the Yard Stick

For those who enjoy every gritty detail, there are a few other things you should note concerning the actual size of your building.

1. Buildings are identified by their “nominal size,” but will often in actuality vary from that size. Thus, when you grab your tape to measure a “12x20,” you will find that it is a little less than 12 ft. by 20 ft. Generally, however, the nominal size will tell you the approximate footprint of the building.
2. The “nominal size” is determined by the *outside* dimensions of the building. So be sure to give yourself some margin if you are figuring your *inside* storage space needs down to the inch.

Common Sense from Jerrel

“Make sure that your floor joists and 4x4 skids are pressure treated.”

Common shed dimensions

Note approximate square feet in the green boxes.

		Length														
		8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36
Width	6	48														
	8	64	80	96	112	128										
	10		100	120	140	160	180	200								
	12			144	168	192	216	240	264	288	312	336	360	384	408	432
	14						252	280	308	336	364	392	420	448	476	504

Step 4: Choose Your Style

Many people think of this step as being a purely aesthetic decision, but the design/style of the building does have a large impact on the usability of the interior space. The style of a building has to do with two main things: wall height and roof profile.

Wall Height

Wall height varies in exactly two directions: up and down. Taller walls mean more headroom, more possibilities for overhead storage, and more possibilities for shelf space and workbenches. Shorter wall buildings, such as the classic little red barn, are typically less expensive to purchase and offer better value per square foot of floor space. The short wall barn typically only permits windows and doors in the end of the building, for obvious reasons.

Common Sense from Jerrel

Make sure the stud spacing [walls] and rafter spacing [roof] is 16" on-center, like you would expect in your house.

Roof Profiles

Roof profiles vary significantly, and the roof design is a great way to personalize your building. However, most storage building roofs can fit into one of two main categories: A-frame and gambrel.

A-frame roofs

This is the more popular roof style, often referred to as the “Cottage” style. Most houses are constructed with A-frame roofs, and it offers good value in terms of wall height and layout possibilities. It offers many personalization options, including dormers, overhangs, hip roofs, and even the pitch of the roof.



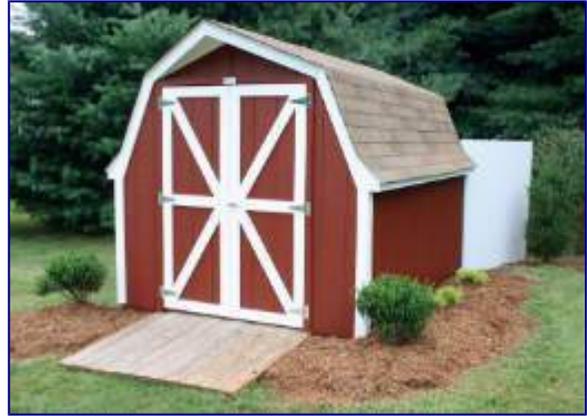
Dormer style with A-frame roof



Carriage House style with A-frame roof

Gambrel roofs:

The classic barn-style storage building is a good example of a gambrel roof, or “barn roof.” Often constructed as half of a regular octagon, the barn roof can have slight variations in the pitch, length and angles of its various parts and still be a “barn” roof. There are many advantages that are unique to barn roofs, and some drawbacks as well. One of the primary advantages of the barn roof is the ability to have headroom and overhead storage without needing excessive wall height. In the classic barn style, this roof profile keeps costs lower because of the shorter walls, while allowing adequate headroom. For barns with taller walls, expect to pay a fair bit more than a cottage of similar wall height.



Our shed design pro's are knowledgeable and friendly. [Request a consultation now.](#)

Step 5: Plan Your Layout

The placement of doors and windows in your new storage building has a large impact on how (and how well) you will use your space.

A common and easy mistake is not allowing enough access to the building from the outside. Picture this: it's Saturday morning, and you just walked out to the shed to get your fishing rod before heading off to the lake. You walk in the (only) double door on the end of your shed, trip over the riding mower, and then realize that your fishing tackle is all the way in the back of the building...behind the Christmas tree, the tiller, the string trimmer, the chainsaw, and the stack of boxes left over from the last time you moved. You trudge back to the house and turn on the TV.

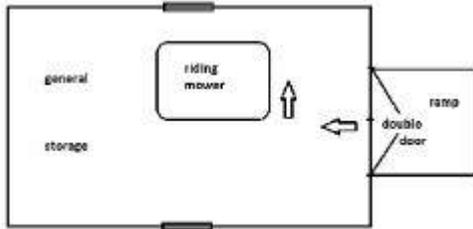
This scenario is avoidable with some proper planning. Strategically placed doors can eliminate a lot of frustration. For example, if you added a single door in the side of your building, you could completely skip the tripping over the riding mower, tiller, and string trimmer, and with a bit of luck get right to your rod.

Placement of doors is also affected by the layout of your yard near the building. If you plan for your building to be leveled on blocks, and you have three feet of slope from one end to the other, you obviously don't want your primary access point to be on the end that is three feet in the air. So consider: when you are standing in your yard, from what direction do you want to access your building? In short, place your doors for easy access to your shed from the outside, and easy access to your stuff from the inside.

Windows are often placed on the side of the building that will be the most visible. However, you may want to also consider such things as amount of shade and direction of sunlight when determining your window placement.

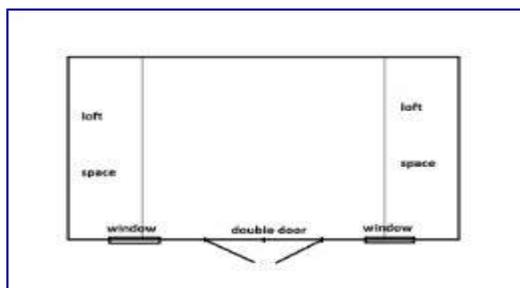
Following are a few general examples of how the floor plan of your building could be designed:

One double door in the end:



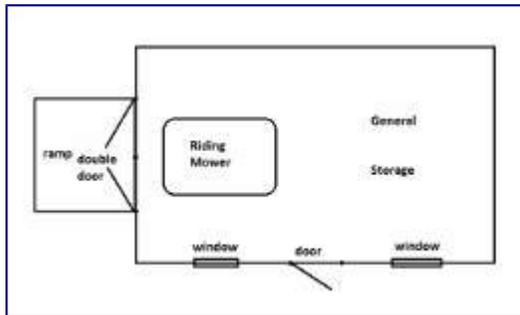
For some types of storage, this works well, and in some styles, (e.g., the 4' wall barn) this is the only way to place the door. However, there are some drawbacks...as you can see in the diagram. The entrance is far enough away from the bulk of the building that you will waste a lot of storage space in paths, if you want to be able to access the the back. Particularly if you have a riding mower, you lose a lot of space by having to pull it inside far enough to get it away from the door opening.

One double door on the side:



This is a popular layout of doors and windows. Not only is it a well-balanced, aesthetically pleasing arrangement, but the placement of the double doors provides the best access to all parts of the shed.

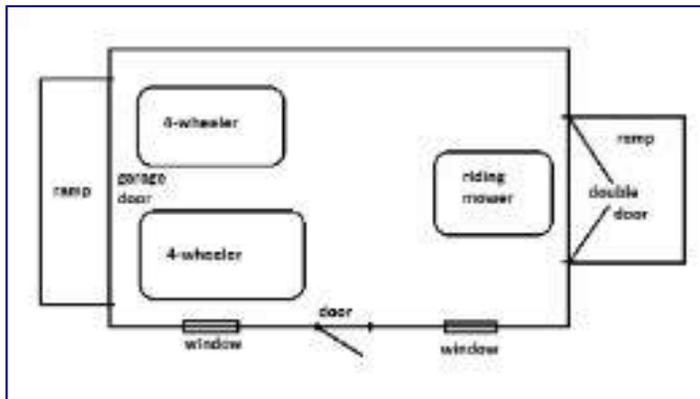
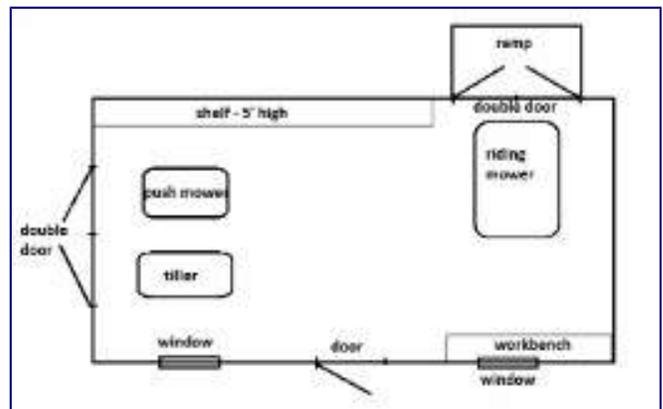
One double door and one single door:



For most mid-size storage buildings, some form of this layout will give you the best use of your space. It allows you to park large items (riding mowers, four-wheelers, etc.) just inside the double door, without sacrificing your access to the “general storage” area. This permits you to use your space to the fullest, without wasting half of the building in needless pathways to get to your stuff.

Custom layouts:

Here are two examples of creative layouts for specific purposes. With builders who are able to custom-design buildings, and can lead you through a design process, the options are endless!



Common Sense from Steve

"Think long-term when making the purchase because you're buying more than a shed. You're investing in your home, your property, and the long-term questions really matter."

Step 6: Choose Your Materials

Your choice of materials affect both the look and longevity of your building.

This is the step where you make most of the aesthetic decisions about your new building. But the materials you choose also affect the longevity of the building—how well it stands up to wind and weather (we've actually seen a cheap shed wrap itself around a pole in a storm), as well as how much maintenance it will need. You have a wide variety of options here, and we will begin with . . .

The Prominence Factor

Some people really don't care much what the building looks like, so long as it keeps their stuff dry and secure. Everyone else needs to ask an artist's question: Should this building be in the foreground, or in the background? If you want to integrate the building quietly into the landscape, you are looking for a building that blends in. You will probably want to choose a simple shape and muted colors. If you want the building to “pop”—to stand up and be noticed—you may choose to match or complement your house with similar shape, siding, and roof; or, you may choose to contrast your home with a cute stand-alone “garden shed.”

Siding

The first decision is what type of siding you want. You have many siding options, but the majority of the buildings we sell have either painted wood siding or vinyl siding. Here is a brief overview of the pros and cons of each.

Common Sense from Loren

“If you're looking for cheap, ask yourself, will going cheaper today possibly end up costing me more in five years?”

Painted Wood Siding

Wooden siding is the classic material for a backyard storage building. Siding quality has improved over the years, and holds up much better than older Masonite siding products. LP SmartSide is a common wood siding used for sheds. It comes in 3/8 and 7/16 thickness. That doesn't sound like much difference, but the 3/8 is significantly less strong than 7/16. Some builders use LP SmartSide siding with SilverTech, which has a foil radiant barrier that reduces heat from the sun, and makes the interior of the building cooler in the summer.



Advantages of painted wood siding include:

- **Cost:** it's less expensive to manufacture than any other siding alternative
- **Aesthetics:** It has a pleasing and traditional appearance. It is also possible to be a little more creative with exterior design features such as trim.
- **Flexibility:** If you decide 5 years down the road that you no longer want a green building, your dream color is only a coat of paint away.
- **Resilience:** Wood siding is more resistant to breaking, denting, and cracking than vinyl siding. When it does get scuffed or marred, it is fixable with only some caulk and paint.

Disadvantages of painted wood siding include:

- **Maintenance:** You really need to paint it every 5-10 years, or it will begin to look shabby and eventually rot.

Vinyl Siding

Most of the homes constructed over the last 30 years or so have come with vinyl siding on at least some, if not all of the exterior. This inexpensive, maintenance free material has also become a favorite storage building siding as well.



Advantages of vinyl siding include:

- **Maintenance:** Other than a pressure washing every couple of years, you really shouldn't have to do anything to your storage building.
- **Match the house:** Most houses have vinyl siding, and most homeowners can find something close enough from our selection of stock colors.
- **Cost:** while it costs a little more than painted wood siding, it is still much less expensive than other alternatives like HardiePlank or cedar (see below).
- **Aesthetics:** It just looks nice.

Disadvantages of vinyl siding include:

- **Fixed color:** You can never change the color of the building without replacing the siding completely.
- **Cost:** It costs a little bit more than a comparable painted wood building.
- **Fragility:** Vinyl siding is more susceptible to flying stones, BB's, and other projectiles.

There are many other types of siding available on storage buildings. Here are a few of them:

HardiePlank: A fiber-based based horizontal lap siding. This is durable, but expensive.

T1-11: T1-11 is a relatively inexpensive “natural wood” option that is stained. It comes as either plywood or OSB. It looks nice, but will require frequent maintenance. If it is not maintained properly, it is highly susceptible to moisture. Be aware that the treated T1-11 may shrink after installation, leaving gaps in the side of your building.

Pine Board & Batten: Vertical pine board siding with 2” wide battens covering the splices.

Cedar lap: A 4 ½” dutch Lap siding, this works well to complement a wood-sided or log house. Cedar is well-known for its weather-resistant properties.

LP SmartSide horizontal lap: This is similar in appearance to HardiPlank, but a little bit less costly.



Board & Batten



Cedar Lap

Roofing

The roofing material you use is vital for both the looks and longevity of the building. You have options of shingles or metal roofing. But be sure to look *underneath* what you see from the outside—not all that matters is visible from your yard.

The Two “Underneath's”

1. The **sheathing** is what lies beneath and secures the shingles or metal roofing. Though not important for the longevity of your roof, a radiant barrier sheathing will reflect the sun's radiant heat and keep you (and your candle collection) up to 30° cooler in the summer.
2. **Tarpaper** is standard for additional protection between the sheathing and the shingles, just like your house. Be aware that not all builders will use tar paper, but put shingles directly on the sheathing.

Shingles

Shingles come in different styles and thicknesses. Architectural, or 3-D shingles, are stronger and more durable than the older, flat “3-tab” shingles. Some manufacturers offer high-quality architectural shingles as a standard feature. Not everyone does, so be sure to ask the cost of an upgrade if you are looking for the more durable shingle.

Metal

No building material is permanent, but if you are looking for a roof that is closer to permanent, you may wish to consider metal roofing. Metal roofing (except for the flimsy box-store metal sheds) will outlast shingles by at least 20 years. Check the thickness of the metal. You shouldn't use anything thinner than 29-gauge. (Oddly, the higher the number the thinner the metal, so look for 29 or lower.)

Common Sense from Mark

“Before you leave the house to talk to your sales rep, look at your roof color. See if you have shutters and note their color.”



A dormer cottage with architectural shingles



A horse barn with a steel roof

Lots of folks find it helpful to actually see some real, “live” sheds. We've got tons (literally!) of sheds in all styles and colors at our [shed retail locations](#). You can get a guided tour with a professional design consultant, who will help you think through what you need. You get no pressure: if you find you're not ready to buy for another 6 months – that's just fine!

To get in touch with a design pro, [request a consultation now](#).

Step 7: Maximize Your Space

This is the step where you really get to have fun with your new building, and plan where all your stuff is going to go.

If you are getting the shed strictly to park the mower and no other reason, you can order your ramp and then skip this step. If you are hoping to fit in any other stuff, you need to keep reading.

Shelves and Lofts

Shelves and lofts can be lifesavers if they are properly planned. Most of these storage options fall between \$3 and \$6 per square foot, making them the least expensive “floor space” in your whole building.

However, if you get your shelves too close together, in the wrong place, or too high, they will just be frustrating. We suggest that shelves be placed at least 18-24” apart, and leave enough space under the bottom shelf to allow for a stack of 5-gallon buckets, a cooler, or some other large item. Another great option is to put a single shelf along one wall at a height of about 5 feet. This lets you use the wall space underneath for garden tools (and a host of other things), while still leaving you enough room between the shelf and the ceiling for some pretty large items.



Sturdy shelves will not sag over time.

Loft options in storage buildings have really broadened over the past few years. You can still get the traditional “couple of 2X4’s and some plywood” loft to store 3 boxes and the Christmas tree. But lofts have also expanded to include a full second-story floor with a stairway or “pull-down” attic steps.



Lofts give great square footage for the dollar.

Workbenches and Pegboards

Storage buildings can make great little workshops. Whether you intend to turn the whole thing into a wood-working shop, or you just want a place in the corner to tinker with the mower, a workbench with a pegboard is a great investment.



tools not included . . .

Ramps

One of the most common “wish-I-would-a-got” items is a ramp. Because of the framing required in the floor system, the floor level of your new building will be a minimum of 8” from ground level, even if the ground is perfectly level. If you plan on driving anything into your building, you need a ramp.



Less challenging for your mower, more comfortable for you.



A challenge for your rider mower

Step 8: Choose Your Payment Plan

How Do I Pay For My Shed? Many options are available to pay for your shed, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

Financing

You have a number of options if you need financing. Many reputable shed companies can finance in-house, but expect a higher interest rate for the service. The more you are able to pay on your shed, the lower an interest rate you may be able to get. Your local bank may be willing to finance through a home equity line, or by simply issuing you a personal loan. The disadvantage to you is that if you are unable to make payments, your building will be repossessed.

Credit Card

Most people have plastic. Need we say more?

A professional consultation takes as long as you want it to. (Don't you wish your doctor would do that for you?!?) Our design pros can give you a brief overview, or take you through a thorough design process that will take you step by step into a building, custom-designed for . . . **you! And it costs you nothing extra!** A custom-designed building costs the same as the inventory you will find at our retail lots.

They will help you through the entire design process, step by step.

Ready to roll? [Request a free consultation now.](#)

Rent To Own

Many companies now offer a rent-to-own option. When financial institutions do a “hard inquiry,” your credit score may actually drop by a few points. The advantage of RTO is that there should be no credit check for this, which means that your credit score will not drop and a credit inquiry will never show up on your credit report. Another advantage of RTO is that unlike financing, you are under no obligation and under no threat of default. Should you choose to discontinue payments at any time, your rental contract will simply cease, and the shed company will pick up the shed for you.

Cash

Of course, you can cash off your building. If you pay the entire amount up-front when you sign the contract, you may qualify for a discount. On larger purchases, this could give you a discount of \$100 or more.

Comparison Table

The table below will give you a side-by-side comparison of the various payment options you have.

Payment Comparison. Below is a chart that indicates the advantages of different payment options. Be aware that customer situations and company policies vary; the following chart gives information that is generally true in the industry. Always ask your sales rep if you have questions.

	Financing	Credit Card	RTO	Cash
no debt obligation or threat of default			X	X
no interest				X
no impact on credit rating		?	X	X
all sizes of buildings available	X	X		X
payment may be spread out over time	X	X	X	

What's the next step? The next step is to request a visit with our design pros. Like a lot of people, you've probably got some questions about a design consultation. We'll answer some of those below.

- 1. I'm busy. How long does a design consultation take?** A design consultation goes at your speed. If you want a quick one, you can get an overview in 10-20 minutes. If you're ready to buy, it may take maybe 30-45 minutes.
- 2. I'd like to see some sheds, but I don't want pressure to buy.** We get lots of people who want to look, but aren't ready to buy until 6 months later. That's great, too!
- 3. I don't know where to go?** You've got lots of options. [Find the retail store nearest you.](#)
- 4. You have so many options! How do I decide?** You're right—the options can be overwhelming. We want to be sure you get what's exactly right for you. And of course, that's why we offer a [free design consultation.](#)
- 5. Where does the design consultation happen?** Great question! That's your choice. You can call us (888)337-1190. Or, we can call you. You can visit us at [one of our locations.](#) Or we can even come to your house. (That's a great option if you want to be sure the shed matches your backyard design and decor.)

When you request a free design consultation, you will have the full attention of a professional shed designer. They will listen to you carefully, and find out what you need. They'll show you a few sheds. If you see one you love, they'll help you figure out a great payment option. Or, they would love to help you design a building just for you, from scratch. It's like eating Grandma's cooking. **And building from scratch comes at no extra cost!**

Hopefully that answers any questions you have and we hope to see you soon!

[Request your free consultation](#) with a shed design pro!