

Forget the man cave - sheds aren't just for blokes anymore! We take a look at the growing trend of women reclaiming sheds as their own and explore how a shed could be good for your head

Say hello to the SHE SHED

By Katharine Wootton

Whenever life gets a bit much for Anne Hindle, there's a special place she loves to retreat to. Just a couple of steps away from her house, her garden shed is a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of everyday life where she can enjoy a cup of tea, admire the garden birds

and just enjoy her own company. Decked out like a mini vintage tea shop, decorated with hand-crafted trinkets and objects bought from charity shops, it's a place where she can totally be herself.

Anne is one of a rapidly growing number of women who have claimed the garden shed as a space of their own. Long considered the traditional place of the man, where they



could tinker with tools or get out from under our feet, now it's time for us ladies to have a share in the joy of a great shed. There's even a name for this growing phenomenon - the she shed - and there have been books written and thousands of social media posts shared on the subject. What's more, it's a trend that's expected to boom this year as the coronavirus lockdown has forced us to see our homes and gardens in a different light. As once unused spaces have become makeshift exercise studios, school rooms and offices during

'Women really create their own little worlds in their sheds'

the pandemic, it's expected more and more women could turn to the shed to carve out a little extra space for themselves.

While sheds are typically just a place to keep the mower and gardening tools, what's most interesting about the blossoming number of women's sheds is the novel and creative ways in which they are used. From reading rooms to sewing dens, yoga studios to meditation zones, crafting grottoes to a place to write or paint, the shed has become a blank canvas women can turn into whatever they need.

Gill Heriz is a shed lover who has

interviewed many women for her book, *A Woman's Shed*.

"I noticed women really create their own little worlds in their sheds, a bit like when as children we made dens," she says. "The shed is a place to make things,

to dream or just be. Unlike perhaps in the rest of the house, here you have the brain space to be creative and as you're kind of outdoors but indoors, at home but not at home, you don't have the same rules to follow."

Did you know? Roald Dahl, Virginia Woolf and Philip Pullman all did their writing in sheds

After all, it's not often we get a place we can totally call our own as adults. Childhood bedrooms were perhaps the last place we could stamp with our identity, putting up posters on the wall and sticking 'do not enter' signs on the door. But as grown-ups, our rooms are often shared with partners, children or grandchildren. No wonder then, that having a space of our own could do us some good.

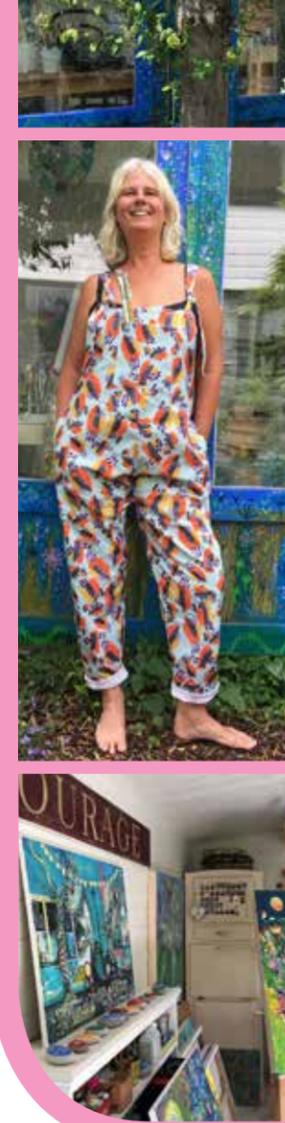
"Sheds provide a repose from everyday living, the good and the bad,"

'My shed is an art studio'

Mary Price calls herself the Artist in the Shed (visit artistintheshed.com and [instagram.com/artistintheshed](https://www.instagram.com/artistintheshed/)), having started painting in her garden shed eight years ago. "It's just an ordinary off-the-peg shed but I've made it into my little art studio," she says.

"It's a comfortable space where I can hide away, put on music, look out at nature and paint without worrying about distractions or clearing all my artwork away at the end of it like I'd have to do in the house. It's great to get away from distractions and have somewhere I can totally immerse myself in whatever I am working on."

As well as making the inside bright to provide good light for her painting, Mary also decorated the shed (winner of Shed of the Year 2019 Studio/Workshop) outside with her own artwork. "While the shed might have traditionally been seen as the man's preserve, I think anyone can benefit from having a space to call their own and enjoy a sense of escape," she says. "My shed is just invaluable and a joy. I don't know what I'd do without it!"



Anne's 'vintage tea room' shed, left, has a chill out place too, above

says Erika Kotite and Sabrina Contreras, who give advice and inspiration to women

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setting up sheds on sheshedliving.com Erika and Sabrina say: "They rejuvenate and recharge you to get back to daily life and give you a happy place that is completely about you."

The science backs up the benefits, too. Research shows having a place where we can spend time on our own, such as a shed, can vastly improve our relationships as it gives us space to get perspective on how other people feel. And the silence we can find has long been shown to reduce stress, focus our minds and even encourage the growth of new brain cells to help with learning and memory.

For Anne, back in her vintage tea shed, she certainly feels all those benefits. Her shed story started when she was watching Shed of the Year on TV and mentioned to her husband that she'd love one of her own. Handily, her husband found a shed gathering dust in the rafters of the DIY store he worked for and after a quick power wash, it was erected in the garden. Anne then got to work transforming it, indulging her love

for all things vintage by making an Aladdin's cave of retro treasures from the bedding box she covered in vinyls to the hundreds of vintage teacups hung around the walls.

Inside, Anne often finds herself doing craft projects such as making bird feeders from teacups, or scrapbooking. Sometimes, though, she just likes to sit in there and be quiet. "As I care for my elderly parents and my son who has additional needs, life can be pretty busy. I also suffer from anxiety so to be able to go into my shed full of pretty things, I immediately feel uplifted and can forget about my problems for a while."

Anne says she has found her shed to be a bit of a lifeline during the current coronavirus lockdown. "It certainly has helped my mental health," she says.

An escape from the world, a boost to our mood and a chance to be creative. Sounds lovely. Perhaps then it truly is time to shake off the stereotype of sheds for men and look at the ways we could all transform our existing spaces, or build our own and help the phenomenon of the She Shed flourish and grow.



'She Sheds rejuvenate and recharge you and give you a happy place'



Anne was awarded Budget Shed of the Year 2019 by Cuprinol



Good to know!
You don't need planning permission for a shed if it's under 4m high and used for domestic purposes. If you're unsure, seek advice from a builder or local planner. Check with your insurance company if you need to add a shed to your buildings policy

Make your own shed retreat

Where to start

If you don't yet have a shed or outdoor building you could transform, you can buy pre-packaged sheds from most DIY outlets, garden centres and online sites. Before you buy, think carefully about what you want to use the shed for. Different sheds are better suited to different purposes, for example, some come with lots of storage compartments – good for keeping art tools or sewing gear – while others offer big windows for light and views. Think too about

whether you want a wood, metal or plastic one and consider where the shed will go. You'll need to pick a patch that is:

- ✓ On level and secure ground
- ✓ Big enough for the size of shed you have in mind
- ✓ As dry as possible (so unlikely to be affected by flooding)
- ✓ Away from overhanging trees
- ✓ Accessible from all sides for easy maintenance

Once your shed arrives, you'll need to set it up with a secure base (many pre-packaged sheds come with this included) and add security such as a lock.

Keep it warm

If you're converting an existing shed, start by giving it a good old clear-out. Then look for any damp patches, flimsy panels and loose floorboards. Get these fixed and

replaced (with boards and nails from DIY stores) and fill in any gaps in windows with foam filler or draught-proofing strips.

Make it pretty

Whether you're converting an existing shed or starting afresh, this is your chance to personalise it just for you. Decide if you want it to stand out in the garden using bright, bold colours, or blend in with the surroundings with forest-like tones. Marianne Shillingford, Creative Director of Dulux, recommends using a different colour of paint on the inside of your shed to the outside. "Like the lining of a beautiful jacket, it'll make a

lovely surprise when you open the door." Remember pastel colours are a way of adding warmth, homeliness and fun

while clean, fresh colours can give the impression of airy spaciousness. Whatever colour you go for, give it a couple of coats in paint dedicated for shed use.

As for making it a home from home, Marianne recommends bringing in an outdoor rug plus blinds or curtains, "so you can shut the world out whenever you want to."

Depending on its size and what you want to use the shed for, you might add an armchair or bring the outdoors in with some flowers from the garden.



SHED ESSENTIALS WE LOVE!

Fairy lights can make your shed even more of a magical den, or give you something lovely to look at from the house by draping them round the outside of the shed.

■ 20 LED Bee Micro Fairy Lights, lights4fun.co.uk

£7.99

Storage tins are a good way to keep your shed uncluttered and you can use them for anything, from storing seeds and garden tools to keeping sewing stuff or painting kit tidied away.

■ We like this V&A Leicester Storage Tin, store.wildandwolf.co.uk

£25

Bunting instantly adds a homely touch inside your shed.

■ Try this cute summer meadow bunting, rexlondon.com

£4.95 rrp

The retro radio – shut the shed door, turn up your favourite songs and just unwind.

■ Roberts Revival Mini DAB radio, (available from John Lewis, Argos and www.robertsradio.com)

£116.99

SHOP FROM HOME!



■ Need some inspiration?

Try Pinterest.com or order a copy of Gill Heriz's book A Woman's Shed, out now, (rrp £19.99) or She Sheds DIY guide (£12.99) and She Sheds (rrp £16.99) both by Erika Kotite