

Creating a Store-room

Contributed by Mrs Fiddlesticks

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Introduction to building a store room

So you've grown all this stuff and have made all the goodies but you need somewhere to put it all. You need a storeroom. We've recently completed ours and thought we'd share the results. We're not lucky enough to live in an old house with built-in larder, the perfect cool storage space so we had to think differently to preserve our harvest. I'm sure you have somewhere that will do!

Find a Cool but Frost Free place for your store room

The most important thing is that it needs to be cool but frost free, so the shed at the bottom of the garden won't do, neither will the kitchen as it gets too warm and steamy in there. Traditionally it would have been sited on the north side of the house, but don't let that put you off, getting a cool spot in your house is still possible.

What about under the stairs (where the larder would probably have been sited anyway)? So clear out the vacuum, bin the old soggy shoes and get going!!

The spare bedroom that Auntie Annie only snores in once a year at Christmas would be cool if you left the heating off. Replacing the wardrobe with an open shelf unit (a curtain to hide the homebrew when she does arrive if you're worried) would be good and a fine place to store things.

Or as we did, what about the garage? Ours faces east so we thought that was an ideal location for a store-room. Our garage is like most - a mess of boxes from moving, garden furniture and unlikely to ever have room for a car in it. Isn't yours like that too? I needed space for harvested crops, plus space for chutneys, brews, preserving equipment that wouldn't fit in the kitchen and other paraphernalia. So we sorted the boxes, dumped the old toys and cleared out!

Racks for your store room

Once the space was cleared I then had to decide on how we were going to store all the goodies. Cost is obviously a factor, I'd seen wonderful wooden racks dedicated to apples for example but at a shocking price (you may be able to make something of course). It needs to be easy to keep clean and for the fruit and veg at least, air-circulation is important to prevent rot. You could make shelf units and fix to the wall, but we wanted flexibility, move-ability and the ability to store a variety of things, I bulk buy household stuff and pet food so wanted separate shelves for that too.

We went for plastic shelf units, after much thought. They were economical, lightweight, easy to assemble and keep wiped down yet could store a surprising amount of stuff. My theory being to get as many things off the floor as possible to make the store a pleasant room to move round in. While the shelf units are great for bottles, preserving pans and spare jam jars, they're not suitable for storage of fruit and veg. Air needs to circulate around each item to prevent rot and avoid disease spreading that could ruin all your hard work. So I chose a wire basket type drawer system, widely available, but normally used in the bottom of wardrobes. We've one unit at the moment, but its extendable, with a variety of drawer depths and units can be joined together or stacked on top.

Storing Vegetables

Other things like potatoes and onions need more specific storage not only because with an allotment the quantities involved means shelf space needed would be vast, but also because potatoes in particular need careful storage. For our potatoes we used the clean paper sacks that our chicken pellets come in. You may have a source of dry paper sacks or some seed companies sell sacks for the purpose. Potatoes need dry and dark storage. We spread our crop out on a flat dry surface for a few hours to make sure they were dry and free of mud before packing.

Onions can be stored in nets (we used the net bags our kindling wood came in) but again should be dry first so we left them in the empty mini greenhouse for a few weeks to make sure the skins were quite dry and papery.

Garlic stores beautifully in old tights or stockings (and our mini harvest of shallots is stored in the same way) unless of course you are a dab hand at the onion string thing.

Our store also includes space for a large chest freezer which holds the rest of the produce and other things we buy.

It goes without saying that you should only store perfect, blemish free produce, anything that isn't should be used up first or processed instead to avoid potential rot and disease spreading through your harvests. In all cases it's wise to periodically check things in store, remove any that have deteriorated and remember to eat things! - nothing lasts forever.
Concluding thoughts

The garage has now been re-named The Store and is a vital part of our lifestyle. (still haven't found a good home for the garden furniture though!)

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