

## Introduction

Building a shed or putting up a shelf may pose a DIY challenge, but these are tasks that can be solved by following some simple instructions or calling a tradesman. Building a treehouse is a totally different challenge, one that embraces individual creativity and imagination to create a dream space for the family.

That dream can be turned into a reality by following some simple steps, designed to build confidence, knowledge and ideas. These will equip you with the skills to move beyond the 'stage one' simple deck (or pallet in a tree) and embark upon unique projects. Garden treehouses, school outdoor classrooms, playgrounds, commercial enterprises, such as hotels, resorts and woodland education projects – the sky's the limit. All treehouses reach back to the same childhood memories and passion. Learning the possibilities, opportunities and how to make these happen in achievable steps will enable you to ask the right questions, understand the craft, and become an expert.

The fundamental instinct of parents and grandparents to provide their children with something that stands for the family values and encourages a sense of adventure can be powerful motivation. This book is a great first step to actually fulfilling these dreams.

*You don't need a tree to build a treehouse.*

I know this sounds a little odd, and might even be your first excuse for not starting your own project, but it's true! A treehouse is not primarily about the tree itself, but the emotions it connects with. It conjures passions and feelings of make-believe, adventure, fantasy and fun – this is where the word takes us. For kids, it's a place of learning to imagine; for grown-ups, it's where they can discover how to feel like kids again; for grandparents, it's about showing us all what childhood play is really about.

Don't get me wrong, a tree or group of trees is an awesome location for a treehouse and their branches and natural architecture can be a real inspiration.

But more importantly, what you will be creating is a space for creativity - many successful treehouses do this really well without a tree.

On the subject of misunderstandings, a treehouse doesn't have to be a 'house' either. Again, this is another common reason cited why not to start the project. Creating a standing 'house' is a daunting thought, for sure. Remember that what you build will be successful if it encourages a world of imagination. How often have we seen kids play with a cardboard box for hours, because in their imagination it *is* a house? Or with a blanket in the garden on a summer's afternoon, because in their imagination it *is* a house? A child's imagination is a great talent, one which, as grown-ups, we lose and need to re-learn as parents.

I'm probably out of my depth here as a man, but I've heard that accessories count for a lot in fashion; it's not *all* about the dress. The right shoes, handbag and scarf can really 'make' an outfit. Well, I think the same principle applies here. A rope ladder entrance, a secret position behind a branch, or even a camouflage net 'wall' can trigger the imagination and make the treehouse a success.

*It's not just for the kids.*

Something I've discovered whilst creating treehouses for families everywhere is a misconception that treehouses are only for kids. Sure, children are often the starting point or motivation, but it doesn't end there.

I remember one particular treehouse that I returned to a couple of years after finishing. The parents were telling stories of just how wonderful the treehouse was, and how just last weekend it had featured in a big party. Naturally, I assumed they meant children's birthday party, so I asked whether the kids all had a great time. Their reply initially surprised me: the kids had all been packed off to Nanny's for the weekend, while the parents held a black-tie dinner which ended with their guests having an amazing time in the garden treehouse.

I didn't ask too many more questions, but how awesome! These adults had rediscovered their inner-child and enjoyed feelings of play, silliness, imagination and adventure. A bit like kicking through a pile of leaves, walking through a puddle, or shouting 'Weeee!' as you whizz down a slide. I believe that being child-

like is part of our natural instinctive selves. Does anyone else feel most relaxed and grounded when engaging in childish activities? Childhood is a real imaginative high-point, and we spend much of our adult years trying to reconnect with this. A treehouse takes us straight there, all the way back to all those happy feelings.

I meet many grandparents with equal passion to begin a project, often with the garden, time and savings to make something that teaches grandchildren all the old-fashioned, wholesome and traditional family values they were brought up with. In the last 20 years or so, a whole generation has taken a different focus from the values of their grandparents - it has happened quickly, right under the noses of today's parents.

The truth is that treehouses are whole family spaces, somewhere that we can all share, regardless of age, gender or level of fitness. A treehouse is a place where we can all meet, play and let go.

The appeal of treehouses is fundamental, and building one is hugely satisfying because it delights everyone involved. As a project it allows you to think the unimaginable, play with ideas and discover new talents. Shapes, sizes, locations, heights, are all up for discussion, as are extravagance, simplicity, innovation and tradition. Materials can be junk, prepared timber, woodland artefacts or leftovers from other projects. Your build-imagination can be aroused in construction as much as the play-imagination of the little spacemen, fairies, soldiers and ninjas who inhabit your handy-work.

The demand for treehouses as wedding venues, outdoor classrooms and awesome places to stay shows that these spaces will forever engage the passion of those who are in touch with childhood wonder, imagination, and magic.