

Greetings from Luke & Bonnie!

Hello Rustic Garden Enthusiasts. We realize that some of you have been browsing the website for ideas on how to build your own Rustic Garden Structure. If you are looking to “borrow” some of our ideas, not only is that okay with us, but the following will give you some valuable tips!

We know that our product is out of price range for some folks; plus there are some very creative weekend “do it yourselfers” out there. We encourage you to get out there and give it a try. And if you get stuck, shoot us an email. We’ll respond as quickly as we can.

TIP #1–CHOOSE THE RIGHT MATERIALS

It’s perfectly alright to use found materials that you have in your own yard. Cleared brush, fallen tree limbs, whatever. When we’re prepping for a project, we gather Eastern Red Cedar trees which are prevalent pretty much everywhere in the east. We use Red Cedar because it’s naturally resistant to termites. It lasts forever. If you have access, use cedar. Another tip: If you’re not sure what to use in your area, find an old farmer. Why? Before there were pressure treated posts, farmers used whatever proper materials they had for fence posts. And a farmer’s not going to use something that will rot within a couple of years. Your structure is only going to last as long as the materials you use. And that may be okay with you. After all, you can always build another one. If you decide to go into the woods and cut materials using a chain saw, use extreme caution. Our rule of thumb: one is *never* allowed to go into the woods alone. This is the most dangerous part of the construction process and we cannot stress safety enough. Wear safety goggles. Rest when you get tired. Do not work alone. And if you don’t feel comfortable using a chain saw, cut the trees down by hand. Our fore fathers did it; so can you.

TIP #2–TOOLS

What are the essential tools? The only power tool that you must have is a drill. Every joint of your structure should be held together with a galvanized deck screw. No nails! Furthermore, each joint should be pre-drilled and counter sunk. So you need a drill.

In addition, here are some other goodies:

1. A pre-drill, counter sinker mechanism. Go to your local hardware store and browse. This is a tool that fits over the driver bit on your drill and performs two functions. A small drill bit (ours is a 7/64") fits into a shank that drills an additional larger hole (about the size of a screw head). So in one step you pre-drill the hole for your screw and a slight counter sunk hole for the screw head. Then you slide the mechanism off, revealing the driver bit, and drive in your screw. There are several models out there, so ask around at your local hardware store.

2. Saws. We use a compound miter saw. We realize this is not in the arsenal of most weekend enthusiasts. You can make every cut you need with a handsaw and a miter box if you want to go the cheap route. A miter box is a wooden, plastic or metal box with just side walls that allows you to slide a saw through pre-cut slots on the sides at a variety of angles. It’ll take longer and your muscles will feel it at the end of the day. Do not use a circular saw to make your cuts. On small materials a circular saw tends to kick back. It’s just dangerous. *Always wear safety goggles.*

3. Of course you'll need a tape measure. You may want to consider a hand planer to help take off knots and burrs. Buy a Sharpie brand marker. We've found it works best for marking your materials. You may find a level to be of use. Saw horses will save your back at the end of the day as well. Loppers come in handy when cutting branches and trimming up knots and burrs.

4. Screws. We use a galvanized deck screw. Our favorite brand is Deck Mate, available at Home Depot. It comes in a cedar color, so it's virtually invisible once attached. And the head is a Philips-Square drive. It takes a special driver, but these screws very rarely strip or break because of the special head. They are kind of expensive (around \$18 for a 5 lb box) but well worth it.

5. Lumber. If your project is a bench, chair or table, make sure you use lumber that will withstand the elements. Most lumber stores sell Western Cedar. It holds up fine, is lightweight and is pretty. We actually purchase our lumber from a local saw mill that cuts only local Eastern Red Cedar. Of course each board has to be planed and sanded, so there is a great deal of extra effort. You may choose to weather treat your boards as well. There are a variety of choices, like Thompson's deck sealer, siding stain with a cedar tint and so forth. Just make sure what you use is rated for outdoor use.

TIP #3-CONSTRUCTION

We can't go into much detail here, because we don't know what you are intending to build! Whether it's an arbor, a bench, or a trellis panel, you may find you'll have an easier time if you build on saw horses. For example, when we build an arbor, we first construct the two side panels on a saw horse. They are each put together in a horizontal position. We then stand up each panel and brace them off. Then we'll construct the top section in place. This minimizes the chance of something falling on you or having to fight gravity as you work. It's the same thing with a bench. Work on saw horses so that you are not squatting at ground level while building. Refer to and print different photos from our website for inspiration on your project. The following are some typical sizes and angles we use:

Benches: 16" tall, 18" deep and 48" wide (makes best use of 6" X 8' boards). Backrests are usually at 15 degree angle and 18" to 24" higher than the seat.

Arbors: Usually around 7' tall and anywhere from 4' to 6' wide, using 3" to 5" diameter posts.

TIP #4-PLACEMENT & CARE

How you place your structure can mean the difference between it lasting a couple of years and lasting a lifetime. The reason is simple. Generally, the first thing to rot is whatever makes contact with the earth. As the material dries it becomes a sponge for ground water and it soaks it right up. Here's a few ways dramatically extend the life of your rustic structure.

Pavers: Place your bench, arbor, table or trellis panel on brick pavers. You can dig down so that they are right at ground level. This keeps the bottom of the posts from making direct contact with the soil

Concrete: For larger arbors, build the structure so that you can sink it in the ground however much you feel will suffice (anywhere from 12" to 24"). Place a few inches of gravel in the bottom of the hole, place your arbor, then pour concrete in the hole up to ground level. You can even buy a "no mix" concrete that you just dump in the hole and then add water. Just make sure the placement is going to be final, as you'll basically have to destroy the arbor if you ever need it moved.

Tar: We've recently found that certain types of tar (found in the roofing section of your hardware store) works as a great way to seal the bottoms of the posts. Make sure it's a type that will apply to wood (some are made just for metal or asphalt shingles). Wearing gloves, slather this gooey stuff on the bottom of the posts and let it dry before placement.

Care and Maintenance: After some time has passed you may find that bugs are enjoying your rustic structure. Even Eastern Red Cedar attracts the Powder Post Beetle, who lay their eggs under the bark and "tunnel" through the wood. They don't cause much damage, but the woodpeckers do. Once the birds have discovered the bugs, they'll do whatever they can to destroy the wood. We occasionally treat the wood with an insecticide to keep these boogers away. To repel water, you can purchase some Thompson's Deck Sealer, put it in a hand spray bottle and spitz down the structure from time to time, which will basically scotch guard it for you. As the structure ages it will shrink slightly. Because you have used deck screws, you can always tighten loose joints with your drill.

TIP #5-BRAGG!

Take pictures of your work! Show your friends and neighbors and get inspired to recycle yard waste into something creative and useful

Peace be with you and good luck!