



I know quite a lot about
garden rooms, and I'd like
to share it with you...

Woody's Tips

I know quite a lot about garden rooms...!

I started designing and building garden rooms in the late 1990's, an accident cut my career short, so I started sharing my knowledge by creating The Garden Room Guide, the site now has more than 1500 pages and is the leading source of information for garden room buyers.

In this guide I have put together some of my key tips that I offer buyers when they ask me “what should I look out for?”

I hope it helps you in your buying process!



Woody, August 2013

Don't rush in, do your research

A garden room is a significant purchase, both financially and in respect of the impact it will have on your life and garden, so take your time and research all your options. You've made a great start by visiting The Garden Room Guide the largest and most frequently updated source of information on all aspects of buying a garden room. Spend some time on the site looking at the range of different styles of garden room on the market, find out about construction options, pricing points and get a feel for the different services offered by the suppliers.

With The Garden Room Guide as your starting point we suggest you then:

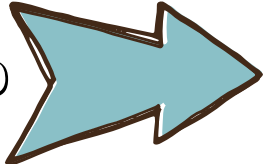
Visit supplier websites - always a good place to see the styles of garden room a supplier offers and examples of recent builds. Some supplier websites are very in-depth and provide lots of valuable information, others are quite basic, judge for yourself!

Request brochures - supplier brochures often offer a little more information in return for your contact details, many suppliers now offer digital downloads so you can retrieve information quickly.

Visit shows - shows such as Grand Designs Live and the RHS Chelsea & Hampton Court Flower Shows are popular with garden room suppliers, and as a buyer its a good chance to see a garden room up close, as most suppliers take a full size building to the shows, so this enables you to go inside and scrutinise the quality. Its also a chance to have an informal chat with the supplier, you may even come in for a special show offer!

Visit a build - a few suppliers have show sites where you can see examples of their work, others have arrangements with past clients, to allow new clients to see their garden room, this could be the most valuable research you could do.

Site visit - a key part of buying a garden room in our opinion, this is a chance to discuss your project in depth with the supplier. Most suppliers offer free site visits these days, but it is good practice to only request visits from suppliers who are on your short list.

Next Tip 

Define early on what you want a garden room for

What's your main intended use?

Are you thinking of a garden room as a place to work, a place to rest, a place to get fit, or a place to play music? It is important to define your primary use for the garden room early on, as your intended use will have an effect on the size, style and construction of the garden room, for instance if you plan to use the room as an office, you may want to ensure windows at desk height, if you are thinking of a home gym then you want to make sure the floor structure will take the weight of the equipment, and if you are planning to play music in your garden room then you may want to consider some soundproofing features.

May you use the room for something else in the future?

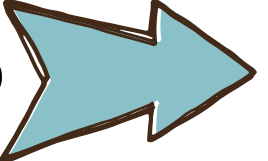
In a sense we are now going to contradict ourselves! Whilst it's important to identify what you are going to use the room for now, as we have suggested above, it's also a good idea to think about its long term useability. Will you always want the space as a home office or gym, if you sell the house what would new owners use the space for? Think about including design features that will stand the test of time rather than look dated in a decade, create a space that could be used for something else - if you are using the space as an office today, will built in office furniture limit the room's future uses? Think about the size of room you're building is it going to be too small or too big for other potential uses.

Do you plan to sleep in your garden room, even only occasionally?

A garden room for use as a guest bedroom, a space for teenage children or elderly relatives to live independently is becoming a popular search on The Garden Room Guide, and they certainly make great, cost effective spaces for such uses, but you should remember that if you plan to sleep in a garden room, even only occasionally then you need to buy / build a garden room that complies with Building Regulations - not all garden rooms do!

Don't be put off by the thought of needing to comply with Building Regulations, many suppliers do build all their garden rooms to Building Regulation standards, and a quality supplier will make any adaptations to their design required to comply, and liaise with the Building Control department for you throughout the build.

The rules laid out in the Building Regulations are for your safety at the end of the day, for instance Building Regulations set out rules regarding fire safety and for a building constructed from mainly wood this is a significant issue.

Next Tip 

Set a budget early on

Set a realistic budget and try to stick to it!

Like any big ticket purchase - a house, holiday or car, garden rooms come with big price ranges, at the cheaper end of the market you will get all the basic features on a small footprint, and at the top end you will get the best of everything, a room packed with designer features and a big space, good value lies somewhere in between.

Its very tempting when buying a garden room to add on extras for instance you may choose to replace the standard doors with designer bi-folds, and this is a good choice, but if you upgrade on every aspect of the design the initial quoted price will soon rise quite considerably, so to avoid disappointment set a budget you're comfortable with and try and stick to it!

Don't go too cheap

Be wary of garden rooms of any size that cost less than £5,000, the price is very appealing I know but as with many things you get what you pay for! Insulation, weather tightness, security and longevity all cost money and a cheap garden room might seem a good buy today but will cost you more in the long run.

But how much should I budget for a good garden room?

If you use our price tool on The Garden Room Guide you'll get an idea of the cost of different size and garden room features, which will help you set your budget. A budget of around £6,000 will buy you a 2.5m x 2.5m fully insulated garden room, if you are looking for something a bit bigger, up your budget to around £10,000. For a contemporary design with several popular design features set aside about £15,000. Budgets of around £20,000 will buy you a good size room with designer features like bi-fold doors and a plastered interior. We could go on, the more you spend the more space and features you will get, budgets of around £45,000 will buy you a self contained annexe with bedroom, shower room and kitchen area.

Bespoke design is going to cost you more than an off the shelf model

If you want a garden room designed specifically for your needs and tastes, then bespoke is the way to go, but you do need to have a bigger budget than you would for a standard design, you're not looking at thousands more, but because you tend to include more high spec design elements in a bespoke build you will invariably spend more. Most bespoke garden room designers will have a square foot or square meter price for the basic framework which will give you a starting point for setting your budget.

Go turnkey to avoid hidden extras

Many garden room companies now offer turnkey prices for their projects, this term means that everything is included in the price and all you have to do is turn the key and move your furniture in. This is a great option and offers you the customer peace of mind that there are no unexpected costs down the line, you should read the quote from the supplier though, to see where they stand on elements of the build such as Planning Permission fees, Building Regulation fees, groundworks and the connection of the garden rooms electrics to the mains supply, also take a close look at what happens and who is liable in the event of a problem arising during the build.

Beware of hidden costs

If you haven't agreed a turnkey price with your supplier as discussed above, you need to be aware of costs that can arise on top of the price you might see quoted on the internet, it is particularly important to bear these extra costs in mind when comparing suppliers, as one suppliers price may seem higher but include these costs than another lower one. Some common extra costs are:

Fees - if you need Planning Permission or Building Regulation approval you will normally have to cover the fees yourself, most suppliers will offer complimentary drawings, but not all, some may make a charge for their drawings.

Delivery - Several suppliers charge a delivery, they charge per mile from their workshops to your site, you are often looking at around £2 per mile which can obviously add up.

Foundations - most suppliers now include the foundation system in their prices, but not all and depending on the size of your building this could add a £1,000 or so to your project price, and you'll have to find someone to install it for you.

Decoration - some of the more budget models aren't decorated internally, they are just a bare board so you'll have to paint them yourself, if that's the finish you want.

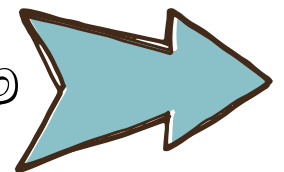
Flooring - we have seen on some of the more budget models that the floor is left as just bare chipboard or osb and the customer is left to lay carpet or laminate which again could add a few hundred pounds to the build cost - depending on the size of your building.

Plumbing - its popular to include toilets / shower rooms and kitchen areas to garden rooms and whilst many suppliers fit the sanitary-ware and the kitchen units, some don't connect this up to your mains supply or sewage system - they ask you to engage a local plumber, this could add several hundreds or more to your project cost.

Electrics - most garden rooms come pre wired but a common extra cost is the price of hooking the electrics up to the mains supply, this needs to be done by a qualified electrician to comply with Building Regulations, the cost will depend on how far from the mains your garden room is sited, but you should budget £500 -£1000

Warranty - several suppliers offer insurance backed warranties on their projects, this is a good service as your garden room will be protected even if your supplier is no longer in business, some suppliers include the insurance premium in their price, others don't.

Next Tip



Sheds, summerhouses & log cabins aren't garden rooms

It's quite popular to call garden rooms posh sheds or summerhouses, but actually a garden room, sheds & summerhouses are quite different buildings, built quite differently and used in very different ways. A shed or summerhouse is a basic garden building designed as a basic shelter, a shed will protect your tools from the elements and a summerhouse is a nice place to spend your time on the warmest days of the year. A garden room on the other-hand owes its origins to modern housebuilding and is built just like a one room house! Because of the quality of a garden room's construction it can be comfortably used everyday of the year.

You should be clear on the difference

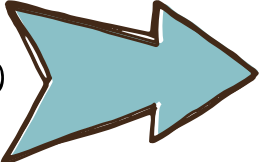
It is important that you understand this distinction between these types of buildings, particularly when comparing different designs. Log cabins can throw you a little, obviously in some countries people live in log cabins very successfully but you should be aware that the log cabins sold in the UK are very different to quality garden rooms. The main distinction is the level of insulation, a garden room has insulation in the floor, walls and roof, but with a log cabin you'll often find that only the floor and roof are insulated because there is no void in the walls for insulation, so although timber is a good insulator you are losing a huge amount of heat through the walls.

Garden rooms do cost more

On comparison a garden room will set you back considerably more than a shed, summerhouse or log cabin, this is due to the costs of materials and the labour it takes to build them. As we have mentioned a garden room is built like a one room house, using the same materials and building techniques as used in modern housebuilding - this costs quite a lot, compare the specification of a quality garden room wall which might be built up with five layers of material creating a section 150mm thick with that of a log cabin which has a single leaf of timber 44mm thick and you will clearly see the difference.

A shed or summerhouse might look tired and need a replacement roof covering in ten years time, but a garden room is designed to last

for decades, materials such as the popular EPDM roof covering have life expectancy's of 40 plus years. Because of the thermal properties of a quality garden room, they are also more cost effective to run, if you were to work in a shed or log cabin all year round you would end up spending considerably more on running costs such as heating and cooling, so you see the higher initial outlay will be offset over the lifespan of the building.

Next Tip 

Key features your garden room should include

Whatever decision you make on size, style and price point you choose for your garden room there are some key elements which are essential that it includes, ensuring your room has these elements will mean you will have a room that is comfortable to use all year round and will last you for decades.

A suitable foundation - a garden room is only as good as the foundation it sits on, many suppliers now use pad systems which spread the weight evenly and can be installed without extensive site excavation, other suppliers opt for a traditional concrete slab on which to sit the building - sitting a garden room on the lawn with no foundation system or on top of an old paved area is not going to be enough.

Insulation - insulation is really important if you want to create a comfortable room all year round. The better insulated the garden room you buy, the more comfortable it will be and the cheaper it will be to run. Buy the best insulated garden room you can afford, when comparing suppliers levels of insulation the thicker the insulation doesn't mean the better, rather you should compare the u-value of the wall (and floor and roof) build-up - please note that the lower the value the better performing the wall.

It is also important that your garden room features insulation in the floor, walls and roof, some log cabin style buildings don't have insulation in the walls, because there is no cavity to put it in, so although they have insulation in the floor and roof all the heat is pouring out of the walls.

Double glazing - double glazing and insulation should go hand in hand, ones not much use without the other! Most suppliers now offer double glazing as standard, but there are a few who quote only single glazing, so keep your eyes peeled. If your budget allows, it is worth upgrading from standard double glazing to units that are argon filled and have performance coatings such as Pilkington K.

Durable cladding - make sure you choose a garden room with durable cladding and finish, unless you're up for a lot of maintenance. Most suppliers specify durable cladding or specially treated claddings such as cedar, larch and thermowood. Be wary of specifications that say clad with spruce as this is not durable and will require a lot of upkeep. Also be aware with cheaper garden rooms they may come

without a preservative finish which can take you unawares and rather than be moving your furniture in you'll have to set too and paint the exterior!

A quality roof covering - like the need for durable cladding you also need a good quality roof covering, EPDM has revolutionised the roof covering for garden rooms and with a life span of several decades its a great option, laid in one piece it reduces the risk of leaks! Felt 'shed like' roofs are considered to be very old hat today.

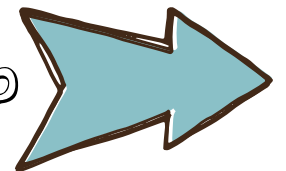
Security features - you will be storing quality items in your garden room whether that's a sofa or all your computer equipment so you want to create a secure space. Because quality garden rooms use house quality doors and windows they feature sturdy insurance approved locks but check with your supplier - you want to see 5 lever insurance approved locks on the specification at the very least, multi-point locks would be an appealing feature to me.

Light and power - to make the room truly useable you will need it kitted out with power points and lights, most garden rooms are well specified in this regard - but watch out on budget models which sometimes only have one double socket - that's never going to be enough! Most suppliers channel all the cabling into the framework of the garden room, but its worth checking as a few still use surface mounted electrics with the cables in plastic channelling on the surface of the wall, which isn't the most streamlined of finishes.

Heating - however well insulated your garden room, you will still need a heat source for the coldest days of the year. Not all garden rooms come with a heating source as standard, but most suppliers will add them as an optional extra or you can buy one and plug it in yourself.

After care - the vast majority of garden rooms are well built and have few, if any problems once built, but its a good idea to choose a supplier that offers some guarantee on the building, you should ask if its just the various materials that are guaranteed or the whole building.

Next Tip



How tailor-made do you want to go?

Will a standard design fit your needs or do you need something more tailored to your site, intended use, or tastes?

It used to be that you either brought a standard design and layout of garden room or a bespoke design whereby every element of the design and build is specified by you, but recently a third route has become popular - we'll call it the customisable standard route!

Standard Design

Often the most competitively priced option, standard designs normally come in several fixed sizes and feature many of the most popular design options. They are normally the quickest option to buy as many standard designs are available - off the shelf.

Customisable Standard Design

Because of the modular building system employed by many garden room suppliers you can now mix and match sections in any order you like, this offers a great deal of flexibility. Because the basis of this building system is modular you have all the benefits i.e. price benefits of a standard range, with many of the benefits of bespoke design i.e. the flexibility to create your own design in regards to positioning and style of doors and windows etc.

Bespoke Design

With bespoke design you start with a clean sheet of paper, and your supplier will work with you to decide on the design, the features you want to include and how it is built. This is the most expensive option, but not that much more expensive and you will end up with a unique garden room. Bespoke design is certainly an option if you have a difficult site.

Disclaimer

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