



**12 MINIATURE
STRUCTURES
YOU CAN BUILD**

*Little
Free
Libraries
& Tiny
Sheds*

**PHILIP SCHMIDT &
LITTLE FREE LIBRARY**



:
Little
Free
Libraries
& Tiny
Sheds
:



DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO LYNN & WILSON LINDA

CELEBRATING HEALTHIER NEIGHBORHOODS
LittleFreeLibrary
www.littlefreelibrary.org

THE COUNTRY MOUSE
AND THE CITY MOUSE
The Fox and
The Crow
The Dog and
His Bone

KEN FOLLETT
JACK DAWGS
DR. SEUSS
ONE FISH
TWO FISH
RED FISH

OSCAR WILDE
THE DOG AND HIS BONE
THE FOX AND THE CROW
THE COUNTRY MOUSE AND THE CITY MOUSE

Dr. Seuss
One fish
two fish
red fish



Little Free Libraries & Tiny Sheds

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**MINIATURE STRUCTURES
YOU CAN BUILD**

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by Todd H. Bol, Founder
Little Free Library

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DEDICATION

In memory of Todd H. Bol, who built a global network of readers and stronger communities.

Foreword

Whoever said “from small things, great things grow” would have loved Little Free Libraries.

At the Little Free Library nonprofit organization, where I serve as founder and executive director, we have a simple but powerful mission: to inspire a love of reading, build community, and spark creativity by fostering neighborhood book exchanges around the world.

At a Little Free Library book-sharing station, folks of any age, background, or income bracket can stop and find a book to take home or donate a book for someone else to discover. At the same time, they can strike up a conversation with a stranger, get to know their neighbors, and feel more deeply connected to their community.

When it comes to literacy and community, there is certainly work to be done. In low-income neighborhoods in the United States, there is only one book for every three hundred children. And research shows that one-third of us have never met our neighbors.

In 2009, when I built the first Little Free Library, I wasn’t expecting to launch a global literacy and community movement. I built the first Little Free Library as a memorial to my mother, who was a lifelong reader and educator and whose memory I wanted to keep alive. But the reaction my neighbors had to the book-sharing box was beautiful: they stopped to talk, they lingered, they shared stories, they connected with each other—and of course they shared books too. I knew then that I wanted to inspire literacy and community through a Little Free Library Sharing Network.

In 2010, I was trying to find support for the Little Free Library concept. We had only sold three or four libraries in six months—pretty dismal results. As I was thinking about throwing in the towel, I heard a piece on National Public Radio about Martin Luther King Jr. When asked, “What would you do if you were going to die tomorrow?” he said he would plant a seed, because a seed can grow, change, and produce a better future.

That was the example I wanted to follow: to plant seeds of literacy and community. So we gave away thirty Little Free Libraries. Bit by bit, more libraries started to sprout, the media and public started to support us, and the movement started to grow.

Today, there are more than 75,000 Little Free Libraries around the world, in all fifty states and eighty-five countries, sharing tens of millions of books each year.

These small book-sharing boxes can have a big impact on a community.

We have heard time and time again that when someone starts a Little Free Library, they meet more neighbors in a week than they've met in the last ten years. We have also seen how access to books can change a life: from a person who is homeless finding a much-needed book to read, to a reluctant elementary-age reader who grows to love books because of a Little Free Library's magic.

But even now, we still have miles to go. We're helping bring more Little Free Libraries full of books to lower-income neighborhoods through our Impact Library Program. We're creating ways for police officers and families to connect via our Kids, Community & Cops Program. And we're connecting reading and community service through our Action Book Club. (Visit www.littlefreelibrary.org to join!)

We're delighted that you're reading this book and are interested in starting a Little Free Library in your neighborhood. Whether it is at your home, school, park, church, or business, your Little Free Library will stand as a signpost of kindness and connection in your community.

I've been asked many times what the secret is behind the success of the Little Free Library movement, and the answer is: It's you! The most important pieces of the Little Free Library puzzle are the people behind each Little Free Library.

The Little Free Library Sharing Network empowers individuals to become community heroes who use their libraries in many ways. Some stewards place an emphasis on children's books, to keep kids reading all year long. Some host a seed exchange inside the sharing box so neighbors can trade flower and vegetable seeds. Still others host Little Free Pantries that offer nonperishable food and toiletry items for neighbors in need. Each library comes to reflect what the community needs most.

We're thrilled to welcome you to the Little Free Library Sharing Network, and we invite you to explore how a Little Free Library can benefit your community. With Little Free Libraries, we are coming together, we are connecting, and we are reading. And these small seeds of literacy and community keep growing and growing.

TODD H. BOL

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: Todd Bol passed away in October 2018 shortly after writing this foreword and being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He was heartened by the growing network of Little Free Library stewards around the world working to build stronger, more-connected communities.



Pictured above is Todd Bol's very first Little Free Library.

Introduction

LET'S GET SMALL

In recent years, “tiny” has become something of a buzzword among home enthusiasts, from the sawdust-in-their-hair DIY folks to the dreamy-eyed crowd that pores over glossy magazines and schedules their evenings around twenty-four-hour cable networks that explore every nook and cranny of home ownership. The appeal should come as little surprise: tiny homes promote sustainability, offer possible solutions to a growing paucity of affordable housing, suggest a pathway to simplifying cluttered modern lives, and (let’s face it) are just cool.

But aside from these popular and cozy habitable homes, what about the *really* tiny structures we also see with increasing frequency, those that are sprouting up on urban lawns and along rural roadsides, in schoolyards and public parks, from coast to coast? Many, if not most, of these structures serve as lending libraries, a movement begun by Todd H. Bol, founder of the Little Free Library organization (see Foreword). Their designs are limited only by the imaginations and resources of their owners. These libraries can take the form of simple-yet-sturdy plywood boxes, or they can be complex mimetic endeavors suggesting everything from seventeenth-century farmhouses with scale-sized clapboard siding to midcentury teardrop campers.

Somewhere along the way, though, civic-minded individuals adapted the Little Free Library concept. Now, in addition to housing paperbacks and CDs, we can find tiny structures that serve as seed libraries in community gardens or as pantries for those in need. Others provide handy backyard tool storage for gardeners and urban farmers (see pages 69–73 and 129–135). Like all good ideas, the concept has been adapted and thus grown beyond its original intention. What began as an effort to foster community togetherness through sharing books has spurred the rise of tiny (usually) pole-mounted structures serving numerous ends.



Inside this book you will find instructions for twelve tiny structures, including a garden box and garden shed (above). While the other ten plans are ostensibly libraries (including one that recreates Bol's first-ever Little Free Library), how you use the finished structures is up to you. Elsewhere in the book are instructions and advice for everything you need to know about building, mounting, maintaining, and even registering your Little Free Library, and then spreading the word about your new sharing box.

This book is your entrée to the growing world of little libraries and tiny sheds. Whether you intend to build a structure to create a gathering place on your block or just to save yourself a trip from your garden to your garage, we hope you'll find it useful and instructional.

So sit back and let's get started. Little libraries and tiny sheds may be small in stature, but they're big on possibilities.

—COOL SPRINGS PRESS



Planning & Design



Now that you're getting serious about having a little structure of your very own, what do you want yours to be? What shape will it have? How big will it be? Where will it go? And most importantly, what will it do? These and other essential planning questions will help you get from the drawing board to a useful, lovable, tiny building with as little trouble as possible. And there's no reason to rush through the process—dreaming and planning are half the fun.

The first question to address is “What will your structure do?” Is it intended for sharing with neighbors, donating useful items, or simply storing stuff you'd like to keep at hand? Maybe it does more than one thing, or maybe the initial use will evolve into other uses. (Just because it's tiny doesn't mean it's not versatile.) The primary purpose, or purposes, of the structure will say a lot about what it should look like, where it should live, and how it should be built.

Where your structure lives is an important consideration that may involve decision makers outside your household—namely, those at city hall or your homeowners association (HOA). While restrictions are not very common, some cities and HOAs have rules about (or against) little structures intended for public sharing, and some may impose requirements on anything you put in your front yard. It's best to check with the powers that be before taking your project to the drawing board.

For some people, the biggest question may be the *how*: how will you turn your vision into reality? There are many options. You can buy a finished little building, and even an assembled post mount, ready to install. At the other end of the spectrum, you might design a totally custom project and build it all from scratch. Somewhere in the



A structure mounted lower than its companion box creates a special place for young visitors in Limerick, Ireland.

middle, a lot of tiny-structure builders choose to upcycle a found or salvaged item, creating something that's both unique and resource-efficient.

In this chapter, you'll learn about all these options and considerations, as well as some tips and ideas for decorating and outfitting your structure to make it truly yours. Want to make it kid-friendly? Or maybe dog-friendly? How about lighting it up with a built-in night-light?

WHAT WILL YOUR STRUCTURE DO?

Planning starts here because a structure's purpose is the primary guide behind most aspects of its design. You might approach this by asking a related question: what do you want to share or store? The items housed in your building dictate its size and sometimes its shape and interior layout.

For example, if you want to share books, you'll need plenty of space for standard-size books, and perhaps some extra room for a shelf or two (see *Sizing for Books* on page 13). If you'd like your structure to promote sharing of other items—like seeds or tools or dog toys—you might include special shelves or compartments designed for these items.

Multiple shelves not only increase storage space but also make items more accessible to both kids and adults. One fun way to serve the littlest kids is to include a separate mini structure that mounts below the main structure. The same idea can be used to create a self-serve compartment for dogs.

A simple method to determine how much space you might need as well as how to lay out the interior of your structure is to gather some representative items and measure them—together and individually. If you want the flexibility to store tall items when necessary, you can plan for adjustable shelves that can be moved or removed as needed.

IDEAS FOR ALL TYPES OF TINY STRUCTURES

Sharing books is just one way to use tiny structures. They're also great for exchanging other things, for donating goods, or even for personal storage in nonpublic locations. Here are a few ideas for different uses (the ideas are free for the taking, so don't hesitate to borrow, share, give away, or build on any of them):

- Gardeners' exchange—tools, seeds, homegrown foods, growing tips
- Tool booth—go-to yard and garden tools (see page 129)
- Homeowners' depot—home repair and remodeling tools, DIY books, building materials, hardware
- CD swap—music, movies, video games
- Kitchen pantry—kitchen tools, recipes, cookbooks, dry goods, food magazines
- Clothes and equipment closet—hand-me-down clothes for babies, kids, or adults; outgrown cleats and helmets; unused balls, bats, and racquets
- Board game library—for finding or sharing family favorites
- Give box—food, clothing, and other essentials for the needy

SIZING FOR BOOKS

Books come in all shapes and sizes (thankfully), but most are no taller than 12" and no wider than 11". Standard bookshelves tend to be around 12" tall and 11" to 12" deep. Large coffee-table books and art books are notable exceptions but seldom are wider than 12", allowing them to fit on a shelf when laid flat.

When planning a structure for sharing books, make sure the usable interior space is at least 12" high, 12" deep, and 12" wide. That's a pretty small lending library, so you might go bigger than that. If you go high enough, you can accommodate a second shelf, even if it's a short shelf area (great for small paperbacks and children's board books) above a standard 12"-high shelf, or a compartment below.



Make sure your library has plenty of usable interior space—including a second shelf, if possible, and even compartments for smaller paperback series.

DESIGNING FOR VISITORS

Structures intended for community lending or sharing present some special considerations. Since the object is to attract lots of visitors for an active and lively exchange, the structure should be both inviting and user-friendly. It should also be designed to handle all those visitors and their *handling* of the structure.

Mounting: *Make sure your structure is secure and, in most cases, off the ground.* Whether it's parked next to the sidewalk in front of your house or on community property or in another public place, structures designed for sharing tend to work best when mounted on a post, fence, tree, or other handy permanent support. Structures off the ground get noticed and are easy to work around with snow shovels and the like. They're also securely anchored to the ground so they can't be tipped over (and are less likely to wander off in the night).

Visibility: *Make sure visitors can see your structure.* Choose a location that will be noticeable to passersby, and think about design features that are inviting. For example, a see-through door provides an instant glimpse of what's inside, which can be much more meaningful than a sign. When visitors are exploring the contents up close, a brightly painted interior eliminates shadows and dark corners in the back of the structure.

Accessibility: *Make sure visitors can get to your structure.* Accessibility is related to mounting (where and how high you install your structure) and to visibility (making it noticeable), but it also incorporates usability factors: Is it a nice place to stop and browse the collection? Can everyone get to it easily? Can it be seen at night? See page 23 for some easy ways to add lighting.

Signage: *Let visitors know what your structure is about.* Don't assume everyone will understand how to use your exchange, or even that they're familiar with Little Free Libraries. Include a sign (or lettering) with basic instructions for using the exchange. A few popular examples:

- "Take a Book, Share a Book"
- "Give What You Can, Take What You Need"
- "Need Something? Take Something. Have Something? Leave Something."
- "Take One, Leave One"
- "Help Another, Help Yourself"
- "Free (fill in the blank)"

You can also include notes suggesting a theme for your exchange:

- "Seed Exchange"
- "Books about Animals"
- "Field Guides"



Visibility and accessibility are critical when placing your library. And what's more visible and accessible than a low garden wall outside a London rowhouse?

Door Features: *Design your door for the masses.* Provide means for keeping the door closed, whether it's a turn-button latch, an antique gate handle, or a magnetic catch. If you find that your door is left open even though it has a latch, consider installing self-closing hinges. Other essential door features include acrylic glazing instead of glass (for safety; see Glazing on page 28) and a design that keeps out rain and snow (see Mother Nature on page 29).

Amenities: *Consider user experience.* Successful exchanges not only attract new visitors; they also turn first-time visitors into regulars. Here are a few ideas for built-in features that will keep 'em coming back (also see Tips for a Lively Collection on page 154):

- Seating area(s)
- Dog-leash hook
- Low shelf or mini structure for tiny visitors (of all species)
- Compartment for bookmarks, community fliers, comment or request cards, and so on
- Tethered bike tools
- Lights (see Lighting on page 23)

LOCATION, PERMISSION & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Finding the best location, getting permission, and addressing concerns about public use (and related problems such as vandalism) are primary considerations for structures intended for community sharing. If you're building a structure for private use in your backyard, you might not need a go-ahead from anyone besides other household members. Just be aware that if your city considers your structure to be an "accessory building," it may be subject to setback rules and other zoning restrictions. Setbacks prohibit permanent structures within a given distance from your property line. For



Place your structure out of the way of pedestrians, cyclists, lawn mowers, and snow plows. Give them space!

example, a city may not allow structures within 5 feet of a property line at the sides or rear of a lot, or within 20 or more feet from the front curb or street.

CHOOSING A LOCATION

If your structure is set up for neighborhood or community exchange, you want others to feel as though the structure belongs to them, not just you. After all, it's your gift to the neighborhood. Make sure it's easy to find, easy to see from the street or sidewalk, and easy to reach. It also helps if you can see the structure from a nearby window in your house.

The little building is its own best advertising, especially if people driving by can see it and stop without blocking traffic. If possible, try to have it within reach of streetlights or give it its own lighting.

If you install your structure in front of your home, place it on your property near the sidewalk, not on the boulevard between the sidewalk and the street.

To install your structure on public property, be sure to get the proper permission. You may need to check with park boards, school administrators, business owners, or other decision makers.

GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

Many people wonder why governments have so many policies, rules, and regulations, or why it seems that they make it so hard to do something nice. The same might be said of HOAs. Regardless of the name or type of authority, they're all governing bodies that have similar concerns, such as:

- Liability and safety
- Right of way—both legal and actual—for snowplows, bicyclists, walkers, and cars and other vehicles
- Physical maintenance in case of damage or normal wear and tear
- Appropriateness for the general public (children and adults)

In addition, a parks administrator or streets engineer might ask who will be responsible for both the structure and its contents over the long term. If an organization or individual is the key contact, for example, what should the government agency do when that person is no longer willing or able to be the caretaker of the structure?

In short, government officials want to minimize the administrative burden while trying to satisfy various public wishes. And the bigger the city, the more rigorous the zoning laws can be. Small-town governments tend to have more flexibility.