

ON THE HOUSE



Pets: Building a Dog House

By James Carey and Morris Carey

Every year, when the star Sirius (called the Dog Star) appears in the night sky, it signals the official start of the "dog days of summer." Forty of the hottest, stickiest days of the year are from July 3rd to August 15th.

While we humans scurry indoors for relief from the heat during this time, remember that pets would like to do so as well. If you have a pooch that could use a little protection from the elements - including rain and cold, as well as sweltering heat - you may want to consider giving Fido or Fifi a true home of his/her own. If so, here is our plan for constructing a Chateau Bow-Wow (aka dog house).

Just as with any visible construction project - the more pre-planning and pre-approval - the better. Be sure to check local codes and rules before you begin.

With that said, we make these recommendations: First carefully plan the location - taking into consideration things like natural shading (to reduce heat) and water runoff (to prevent flooding) - and make a drawing to work from. This blueprint of sorts should also include the number and position of framing members. As rough as it may be, this sketch will serve as a helpful planning tool and shopping list at the hardware store.

Pre-Construction Pointers

Pre-construction pointers: (1) style the dog house to mirror your home's basic look and design, and (2) overbuy quantities of the materials you think you'll need by at least 10 percent. If you don't, inevitably you'll be making return trips mid-project.

How Big?

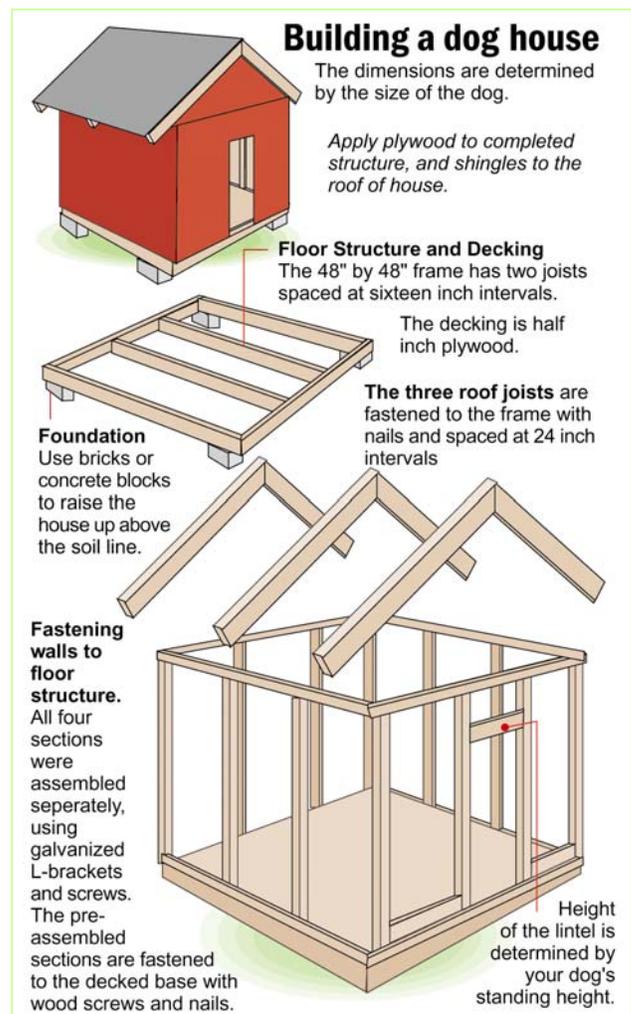
A good and typical size for a dog house is 4-foot by 4-foot. It also makes dividing standard lumber and panels into equal pieces (without waste) real easy. Obviously, a real tiny dog or massive hound may require scaling up or down - but 4x4 will suit most just fine.

Build the Foundation

For all framing, pressure treated lumber should be used to resist moisture damage and insects. The 48-inch square floor structure needs two cross support joists at 16-inch intervals. It should be both level and elevated above ground at least 2 inches on bricks or concrete blocks and can be erected over a same-size concrete pad if you so wish. The actual decking should be of 1/2-inch plywood.

Continued... see reverse

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Assembling the Walls

For the four walls, 2x2 framing can be used without problems - again pressured treated. Overall height and the entrance opening should be scaled to your specific pooch, allowing plenty of clearance for comfort.

All four walls should be assembled separately using galvanized L-brackets, construction screws and/or nails. (At this point and from now on, the help of a second person makes assembly much easier to manage.) Fasten the four pre-assembled wall sections to the plywood-covered floor frame with screws (preferred) and/or nails. Tie the four wall frames to each other with more brackets, screws and nails.

Checklist

Materials:

- Treated lumber
Floor: 2x4 or 2x6
Walls: 2x2 or 2x4
- Plywood paneling:
Floor: 1/2-inch
Walls and Roof: 3/8-inch
- Shingles or roofing material, cement, nails
- Galvanized L-brackets, construction screws and/or nails
- Trim and molding lumber
- Bricks or concrete blocks (and concrete mix, if desired)
- Caulking, primer and paint

Tools:

- Tape measure
- Saws (both power and hand)
- Hammer
- Screwdriver
- Level
- Caulking gun
- Painting equipment

Building the Roof

The roof is the most difficult. We suggest designing the pitch and gable "look" to more or less parallel that of your home (the "big" house, as it were). Make one roof joist "V" and use it as a template for the remaining two. Include some roof overhang (2- to 4-inches per side) for water runoff and carefully measure and mark the "notches" where roof joists cross and rest atop the wall framing.

After the three joists are constructed - which is all you should need versus four used in the floor (to support your dog's weight) - they should be tied together with a cross-member "spine" running below the peak to maintain equal spacing and notches attached to the wall framing with screws and/or nails.

Covering the Walls and Roof

Once the framework is complete, cover the four sidewalls and roof sections with 3/8-inch plywood. Always measure carefully before cutting your panels and - for the two tricky "triangle" end gable roof cuts - save yourself a big measuring and planning headache by simply making a paper or cardboard template with a perfect fit first. Then transfer its shape to your wood.

If your pooch says, "Arf" - it's a sign of approval. If they say, "Roof," they're probably reminding you to use shingles or roofing that matches that of your home. Remember, lighter colors also draw less solar heat gain (for your home and theirs). You can learn basic roof application techniques by asking a few questions at your building supply store.

Amenities

As for amenities, finishing touches can be as Spartan or lavish as you wish. We suggest adding wood trim around the entrance and painting the dog house to match that of your own. Inside, a few strategically-placed drain holes are a good idea – both for inclement weather and occasional "accidents."

Ventilation

Good ventilation up near the roof is a *must* as well. If joints are tight – create a way for rising heat to escape freely. We've even seen small operative windows, artificial turf carpeting and even a "porch" light. It's your call!

Fido is the Roman word for "loyal friend." During the "Dog days of summer," a dog house is their friend (and protector too!)

Morris and James Carey are nationally recognized experts on home building and renovation. They share their nearly half-century of experience as award-winning licensed contractors with millions of people nationwide through weekly radio programming and a syndicated newspaper column both titled "On The House." Visit their web site at www.onthehouse.com for more home improvement tips and information.