

and step...

[illegible]

Time for a snooze...

Small is beautiful. But when your cottage feels like a can with too many sardines, you're not living small, you're living cramped. No wonder shut-eye space "is something I'm sure everybody who owns a cabin has thought about," says Dale Parkes, a B.C. cottager and a senior lecturer in architectural and engineering technology at Thompson Rivers University. When the guilt from handing guests the air mattress with the slow leak gnaws at your soul—and you lie awake wondering: Where can I put these extra people? And how? And what are the rules, anyway?—the good news is we've got answers. And if you really can't sleep, the building code is better than counting sheep.

5 questions about adding sleep space

Q: We have a small cottage without much room to expand beyond the footprint. Could we do a modest bump-out on an exterior wall, build a bed into the alcove, and make a sleeping nook?

A: "If a cottage is small, and lot coverage is almost maxed out, this might be an excellent option for cottagers looking to fit extra guests or children," says Damien Stokholm of Stokholm Building in Bracebridge, Ont.

The classic "bump-out" is a shallow addition, often with just enough room for a bay window or, in this case, a single bed. Dress it up with cushions, bookshelves, drawers, and perhaps drapes or a sliding barn door for privacy, and you've got a cozy retreat for reading or napping on a rainy day, and an extra place to crash when there's a crowd.

Small bump-outs can, in some cases, be cantilevered 60 cm out from the existing outer wall, with the extended joists suspending the floor above the ground, reducing the impact on tree roots or drainage pipes. As a bonus, you might be able to tuck the addition beneath the existing roofline, avoiding the complexity of extending the roof or creating a new roofline with two pitches, says Jamie Adam, a cottager and the president of reno company Pioneer Craftsmen.

For larger expansions, concrete piers are a cheaper, easier foundation. Either way, a bump-out addition can be an affordable option (possibly as inexpensive as \$10,000), but, of course, factors such as trim—panelling, cabinetry, windows—and how much your contractor charges could really jack up the price. The bump-out requires a building permit and municipal site approval, but it won't necessarily trigger a review of your septic system. This is a crucial distinction, because the number of bedrooms helps determine the capacity of your system. (In Ontario, for example, one bedroom translates into a daily base flow of 750 litres. Three bedrooms is 1,600 litres.) Add a bedroom, and you may have to upgrade your system. Add a window seat, and you'll probably be okay.

Just don't push your luck. Eric Kohlsmith, an inspector with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority, recalls

a two-bedroom cottage where the owners added a walk-out basement housing a "den." When the cottage later went up for sale, the listing featured four bedrooms, two in the basement. The listing triggered an inspection—uh-oh—and, Kohlsmith says, "the sellers had to upgrade the sewage system."

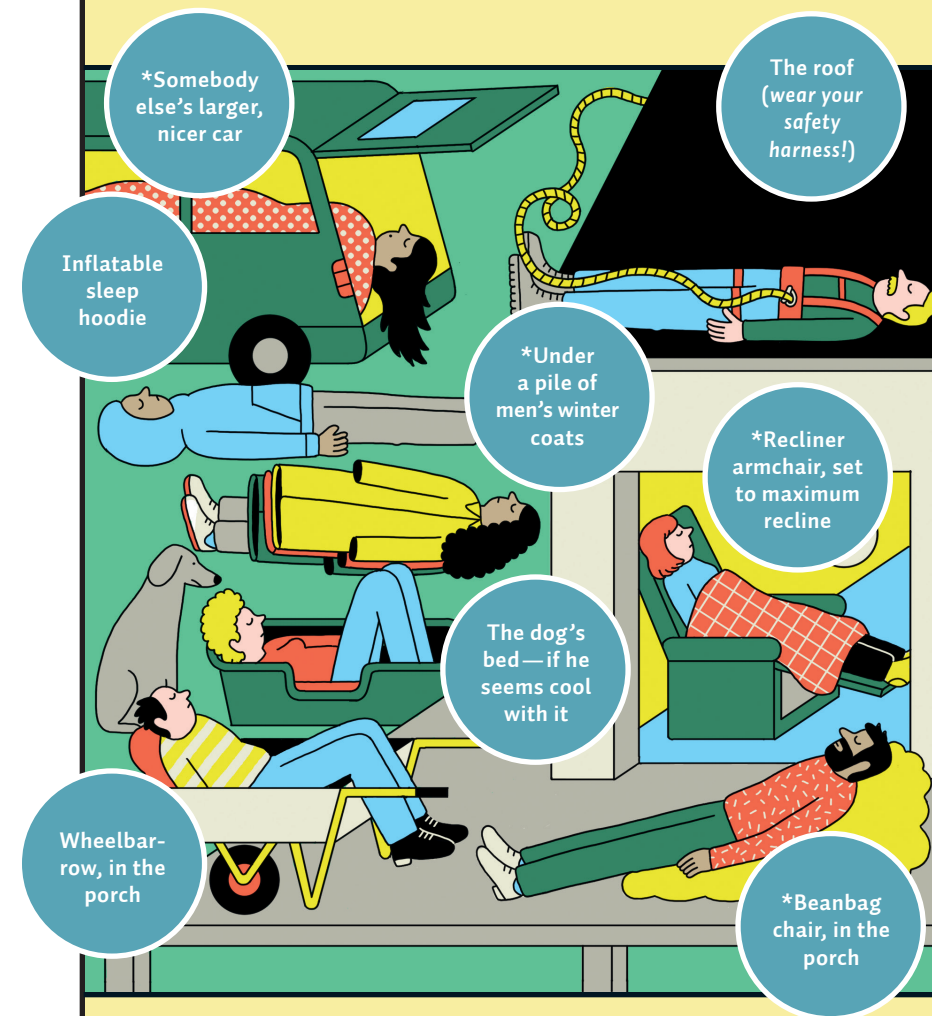
Q: We have a cottage with a vaulted ceiling. Can we add a loft and park the kids up there for sleepovers?

A: If your cottage has the right bones, a loft "is a really inexpensive way to create floor space," says Marshall Black of *Lake Docks and Decks* on the Cottage Life channel. The best fit is a vaulted or cathedral ceiling with sturdy rafters strong enough to double as floor joists, good ventilation, and enough headspace to make the area practical.

Black recently installed a 16-by-12-foot loft in an old log cottage, using heavy log rafter ties to support a new plywood floor. The new floor probably cost about \$2,000, he says, while additional finishes—including a glass railing, a pine ceiling for the dining room beneath, pot lights, a chandelier, a custom-made ladder, and a ridge vent for much-needed ventilation—added roughly another \$8,000. >>

Desperate times, desperate strategies

So, there are no more free tents, spare roll-away cots, or unused air mattresses. You're not out of options yet!



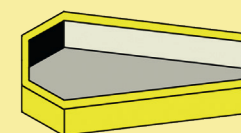
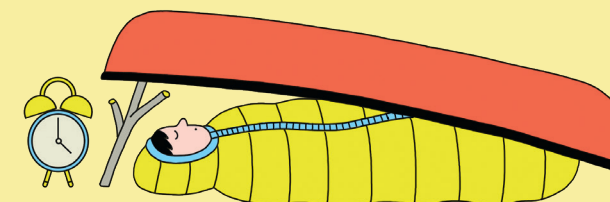
The tinnie
(wear your lifejacket!)

***THE BATHTUB**
***THE HAMMOCK**
***FLOATY POP**
***BUNCH OF PILLOWS**
***YOUR CAR**



***Under a tarp strung between two trees**

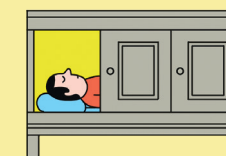
Beneath an overturned canoe



Empty coffin



Full coffin, with a short corpse inside (note: not a vampire)



Creepy medieval-style box bed



Laundry hamper (note: not the upright kind—that's ridiculous)

What do the pros do to add sleep space?

By pros, we mean you, Cottage Life readers!

@loridmoffat

A pop-up tent on the dock. A little damp, but beautiful.

@ruth.heaven

We once slept on our lawn furniture in the basement so our guests could have the good bed.

@ninjamedic

We have a queen Murphy bed in our laundry room that folds out of the way during the day.

@gtraceyst

We keep a futon in one of the bedrooms. When we require additional sleeping arrangements, we temporarily relocate the futon to the sitting area. The early risers get the futon.

@countrydesignhome

Inflatable Coleman queen-sized cot with a thick mattress pad. Does the trick!

@mickeycrowder

We have a cabinet bed that looks like a big dresser in my sewing room. It converts to a queen bed.

@anirishfournier

An old double-seater outhouse. Quiet and out of the way.

@stristani

The “dormitory” of air mattresses in our basement.

@benmelting

Beach recliners.

@kathian drew

We once had a baby sleeping in a drawer. We left it open, of course.

Dale Parkes adds that since this kind of work places extra weight on the structure, you’ll typically require a building permit, and you’re best to get an engineer’s inspection to ensure the existing structure is robust enough to bear the weight. If the rafters need beefing up, additional floor joists or rafter ties can be “sistered” onto the existing ones.

The building code also comes into play, depending on the nature of the loft. Codes vary across Canada, but generally, if the loft is a bedroom, you’ll need a minimum ceiling height (usually around two metres), smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and a way or ways to get out. B.C., for example, requires every bedroom to have an outside window that can be used as a fire escape (unless the cottage has a sprinkler system). You’ll also need a full staircase. This last point is tricky, because “you could instantly lose 40 square feet of floor space downstairs, and that’s enough space to put a bed in,” Stokholm says.

Some cottagers circumvent loft bedroom requirements by taking advantage of the code’s more lenient rules for “storage” areas—installing a ship’s ladder, for example, and then tossing a mattress up there for overflow sleeping space. Of course, this move *could* get a cottage owner in trouble, not to mention “jeopardize the users of the building,” says Allen Whittleton, the chief building official for B.C.’s Sunshine Coast Regional



District. After all, “building codes are in place for the health, safety, and protection of the occupants of the buildings.”

Q: What about converting the deck to a sitting room and just dropping a sofa bed in there for extra guests?

A: A well-built deck should have no problem serving as the floor for an addition, but so many contractors have run into wobbly, poorly made decks that they’re leery of working with anything that’s an unknown quantity.

Cottage-country contractor Doug Marshall has seen both sides of the equation. He’s converted a deck into a kitchen to expand cottage living space, but he’s also been called in to fix another older deck conversion that was shifting on its foundation. A conversion “might make sense if you have a new deck with a permit, and it’s been inspected,” he says. But if your deck is old and its history is unknown, “it’s probably cheaper to rip it off and do the addition properly,” says Marshall.

Local planning laws could also put a brake on your deck conversion. Depending on municipality, in Damien Stokholm’s neck of the woods, “you have a 66-foot setback for the building, but the deck can go to 55 feet from the lake,” he says. “If you wanted to build on that deck that’s just 55 feet away from the lake, you wouldn’t be able to enclose it.”

Sofa beds, futons, Murphy beds, and that cottage standby, the bunk bed. Win! You don’t need a permit.

The good news is if you already have a screened porch, the municipality may consider it “interior living space, so you probably wouldn’t have a problem putting in walls and windows,” he adds. Parkes seconds this approach: at his Shuswap Lake cabin, they have “a screened porch with a bed. We added a couple of salvaged windows for protection from the weather, and it’s a good place to sleep.”

Q: What about evicting the lawn mower and the outboard, and turning our storage shed into a bunkie?

A: Depending on its condition, your shed may not be the most restful place, says Peter Nietlispach, who makes both kit sheds and bunkies for Peacock Woodcraft in Temagami, Ont. “If you’re sticking someone in a tool shed, are there cracks where the doors meet? Do the windows close? Do the mosquitoes stay out? Sealing up to keep bugs out might be a big challenge.” Plus, “if you’ve had the lawn tractor in there, does it smell of oil and gas? Does the floor smell musty?” he adds. “You might have moved the boat or the lawn mower out and set it up with a bed, but if it really stinks inside, no one’s going to want to sleep there.” As with the deck enclosure, if your shed is dilapidated or in need of major renos or repairs, “at some point it’s better to rip it down and buy or build a bunkie.”

There are legal issues too. Some areas, such as the Sunshine Coast Regional District, prohibit sleeping cabins altogether. Others restrict the number, size, and location of cabins. Some allow only one sleeping accommodation separate from the cottage, so if you’ve already converted your boathouse into sleeping quarters, a bunkie is out. And because adding a bunkie is essentially the same as adding a bedroom, you may also be inviting a septic review.

Of course, there are “storage” sheds out there with comfy beds, but an under-the-radar bunkie could leave you in the legal lurch, especially if, say, the renters throw a wild party, the neighbours hear

and complain, and the bylaw enforcement folks come for a look.

The other problem? Bev Mitchell, a special risks/high value underwriter for Johnston Meier Insurance Agencies Group in Maple Ridge, B.C., says that insurers aren’t keen on structures built without permits. They may not be inclined to offer renewal of policy, and, if something goes wrong (a guest gets injured, a fire breaks out), “it could result in questions or delays in the settlement,” she says.

Q: Okay, I get it. But what’s to stop me from sticking a sofa bed in the living room or doubling up with bunk beds in the kids’ rooms? Do I still need a septic upgrade?

A: “There’s not really a mechanism to catch that,” Eric Kohlsmith admits. But for cottagers who are kind to their septic systems, the thoughtful use of furnishings can help everyone get a better night’s rest.

Sofa beds, futons, Murphy beds, and that cottage standby, the bunk bed, are cost-effective, Parkes says. “You don’t need a building permit for them, and you’re not messing with the envelope or the structure of the cottage.” As a bonus, if you don’t like the results, “in most cases, it’s easy to take out again.”

Another option is to make modest changes to take advantage of existing space. Stokholm built a window seat/daybed (similar to a bump-out) in the window well at the end of a long hallway in a vintage cottage. By removing interior walls, Doug Marshall transformed a 700 sq. ft. cottage with three tiny six-by-eight-foot bedrooms (featuring single beds) into a two-bedroom cottage: one room features a queen bed, the second a set of bunks. A pullout couch was added to the living room. And—rest easy, cottagers—because a bedroom was eliminated, there were no septic issues. As Marshall says, “You’re taking away a bedroom? Sweet.” 🛏

Ray Ford is a regular CL writer. He’s wanted to try a Murphy bed ever since he saw one demonstrated in a Bugs Bunny cartoon.