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UGA offers course on tiny house construction

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Retired University of Georgia professor Peter Hartel built a house in his backyard with a complete kitchen, bathroom, storage area and breakfast nook.

And it's one-tenth the size of the average American household, at 204 square feet and 6.5-foot-high ceilings.

These "tiny houses," Hartel said, are the perfect size for a modern graduate student or young couple, looking to spend only about \$50,000 for a space.



Students at UGA this semester are taking a course focused on building tiny houses, taught by David Berle, an associate professor in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

"The class is learning about green building concepts and how a green house is built," Berle said.

The construction of the house is the hands-on portion of the class.

Tiny houses tend to vary in how they are constructed, but in using less materials overall, they can be considered fairly green.

For instance, the house under construction at UGArden is built on wheels and uses solar panels and a composting toilet.



Photo by Tim DeWitt

The idea for these houses dates back to the 1960s, but the concept resurfaced recently as a way to live off the grid, as most tiny houses are built as mobile homes and in rural areas to avoid building codes that structures built on land must abide by.

“One of the reasons I built the house was to understand the problems with zoning and building code,” Hartel said.

He was unable to construct a stairwell in his tiny house due to building code regulations and had to make sure the house was built a specific distance away from the main structure on his land, was built to specific proportions and had a separate trench dug for various utilities.

“Why would you not wanna separate out your water from your sewage?” Hartel said. “That makes perfect sense. But on the other hand, why do you need a door that’s seven feet tall?”

Hartel also said the codes will have to change, as tiny houses are on the rise for young people who are attracted to small, cheap and transient living. They are already common in other places across the world, he said.

“I’ve spent some time in Japan, tiny houses, totally routine there,” he said.

Hartel said he welcomes people to come and stay in his tiny house, including a common guest list of graduate students, foreign exchange students and doctoral students trying to finish their dissertations in privacy.

“You can stay in the tiny house ... you just have to call in advance,” Hartel said.



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