

MEETING REPORT - Small Greenhouses

Tom Coles, who gave us the "How to Show" workshop, let us in to the secrets of small greenhouses. Glass is the best light transmitter, but is also expensive. Polycarbonate, especially if of twin-walled construction, will not let in so much light and you will get leggy seedlings more prone to disease, but it does hold the heat. It does become brittle over time. Consider first where your greenhouse will go. The ridge should run North/South and the ridge should be at least 2ft above the eaves so water runs off. Collect your rainwater, so plan a drainage system. Cedarwood frames are better than treated softwood, but not as durable as aluminium, which also has thinner glazing bars. Taller greenhouses transmit more light, and roof vents or louvres are very important for good ventilation and air movement. Vents should be opposite the prevailing wind, so there isn't a howling gale, and you can even have automatic vent systems. Plastic frames need bolting down, and are good for overwintering, especially if used with horticultural fleece. Bubble wrap can be used with purpose made insulation clips, far superior to tape.

Staging or benches can be of pressure treated wood but will eventually rot unless on wooden slats or brick. Thermal sheeting is necessary if you are heating the greenhouse. This is an aluminium mesh which traps heat and also diffuses sunlight in hot weather. Misting systems are useful, and can be automatic, but need regular descaling. Lighting systems promote growth - use blue/green for leaves and pink/orange for flowers. Mini polytunnels are useful, just protect with fleece from frosts. Mini greenhouses are space savers, but need bolting down. You can use old doors and windows to make effective cold frames. Simple cloches provide protection and are movable, and plastic bottles are a cheap alternative, just cut off the bottom and remove the cap for ventilation. They make good mini propagators too. With Tom's ideas we will see some amazing produce at the Village show.

His recommended websites: www.growfruitandveg.co.uk and The National Veg society at www.nvsuk.org.uk The RHS website also has a mine of helpful information.