

Who needs a glasshouse?

Contrary to popular belief, you can grow an impressive number of cool and intermediate orchids in Sydney in a simple shadehouse. However if your interests extend to warm growing tropical orchids, you should consider the alternatives carefully.

A glasshouse brings with it a new set of problems including expense, heating, ventilation, and temperature and humidity regulation. Not only orchids thrive in this environment. Pests also multiply faster. In short you become responsible for a new micro-climate, akin to an intensive care unit. A common initial problem is how to stop the temperature rising uncontrollably in summer, when increased ventilation and shade may be required. Some species may need added heat in winter. If you have the space and money a purpose built glasshouse is ideal. However, there are a number of smaller and cheaper alternatives you may wish to consider.

Prefabricated hothouses

These are plastic frames covered in clear plastic and can be obtained in a range of sizes from your local hardware store. If you have limited space these can be a very economical solution to the problem of over-wintering tender species. I use mine in winter for tender species such as *Zygopetalums* and small seedlings.

Another big advantage of these small units is that you can set up any number with different aspects and microclimates to suit a range of different orchids. Once you find the best aspect, you can choose a hothouse to suit the space. They are easy to move and dismantle. The plastic of course has a finite life. As with any vertical stacking system, care must be taken to ensure that run-off does not carry disease from the plants above. Trays can help prevent this.

Pergolas

Many frost-tender species such as *Cattleyas* can be satisfactorily wintered under the polycarbonate of a pergola. In winter little shading is required. If space is a problem, consider hanging the orchids high under the roof.

Indoors

A number of options are open for indoors. A sunny bay window is ideal. If you have a solarium it may only need some attractive stands to maximize the use of available space and light.

Wardian cases

A Wardian case was an expensive piece of furniture in its day, often made to measure and as large as a wardrobe. Fans, heating and lighting were included of course and featured expensive polished timber construction. A great way to display your collection if money is no object!

Fishtanks

Tanks can be obtained (often second hand) in many sizes and require little modification to serve a similar purpose. Essentially terrariums, they house smaller orchids, indoors or out. They are waterproof and can be moved fairly easily with the seasons to maximize winter light. The lid position regulates warmth, ventilation and humidity. A novel use is for deflasking tiny plants. A layer of coco-chips and

gravel in the bottom of a small tank is a suitable medium and the water level is easily seen and monitored.

Before you decide, speak to members of the Society with glasshouses. No matter which option you choose, the only certainty is that you will never have enough space!