

1 Scandi cool

You have to hand it to those Swedes – their buildings can be pretty impressive. This is a case in point: half timber building, half greenhouse. the idea is to be as sustainable as possible, with large beds nourished by recycled waste. And it comes with amazing views over Lake Vattern.

2 Start small

An excellent solution for the smaller garden: this potting shed from Gabriel Ash combines a tool shed with a tiny lean-to greenhouse. You may not manage to grow everything your heart ever desired, but at least you can make a start without



1

ULF GELANDER



2



3



4

JAMES WHITE, ALITEX LTD, MARK BOLTON, DIVOO ZEIN ARCHITECTS



5

3 In your dreams

This is everybody's vision of a dreamy glasshouse: more than enough space for everything and a rather wonderful surrounding garden. Designed, constructed and erected by Alitex, it is so smart that nobody would ever dare leave empty compost bags and old pots shoved under the potting benches.

4 Glory days

Once upon a time, all walled gardens looked like this, with elegantly stepped glasshouses along the sun-warmed walls. Housing everything from pineapples to winter-flowering houseplants and glowing tomatoes, this survivor can be found at Miserden Nursery in Gloucestershire.

5 Shady character

This is not strictly speaking a glasshouse; rather, it is made of mesh and is intended to nurture shady woodland species, so the idea of hot sun and glass is complete anathema. The trees go straight through the mesh and the house covers an entire glade. It was designed by Divoze Zein Architects for a site in Taiwan.



James Alexander Sinclair is a garden designer, writer, broadcaster and founder of into-gardens.com. He has served on the RHS Council for the past five years.

Clear advantages

Which of us has never turned green with envy over an impeccably ordered glasshouse? James-Alexander Sinclair covets the grown-up gardener's ultimate accessory

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

Dislodging the crisped remains of last autumn's leaf fall, she pressed lightly on the old door, which swung open with a groan of relief. She stepped through and stopped, mesmerised by the lichened glasshouse that leant, exhausted, against the mellow brick walls. Just visible through the tumbling vine a tousled gardener could be seen tending to his cuttings. "Monty," she breathed as he turned his gentian-blue eyes upon her, and she knew that this was the beginning of something wonderful... There, a bit of romantic fiction. What better way to start a piece about that most covetable of garden accessories, the greenhouse?

A greenhouse is capable of inspiring more garden envy than anything else. Other people may have sickeningly perfect borders, or gobsmackingly green lawns, but to wander into a perfectly organised greenhouse smelling of warm humidity is a different

experience. The first time I peered into the glasshouses at West Dean Gardens in Sussex, I was consumed by covetous awe at the serried rows of chillies and perfectly trained cordons of tomatoes. It was a truly life-enhancing moment. I have only recently acquired a greenhouse of my own and, although I am resigned to the reality that it will never measure up to the one at West Dean, it does give me enormous pleasure. Cuttings are taken, succulents are sheltered and cucumbers are grown. After progressing from sunflower competitions to window boxes to mixed borders, the next logical step is to own a greenhouse of one's own.

I suppose that the father of the glasshouse is the extraordinary Joseph Paxton, who started off at Chatsworth building forcing frames and finished by designing the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park (his original design sketched out on a blotter can still be seen at ▶

6 Place to call home

This is in the excellent walled garden at Kelmarsh Hall in Northamptonshire where the interior designer Nancy Lancaster lived, decorated and gardened in the early 20th century. It is half glasshouse and half gardener's cottage. Nowadays the walled garden has fewer vegetables, but is packed with an extraordinarily colourful fandango of dahlias.



6

7 Pure and simple

I really like this idea from Pure Greenhouses: a glasshouse with no timbers, rafters or struts. Just thick slabs of glass held together with chunky stainless-steel fixings. Not really one for the traditionalists, but a perfect companion to the smaller, more modern garden.



7

8 Space-saver

Not all greenhouses have to be rectangular. This is a very handsome gothic arched house by Serres et Ferronnerie d'Antan (French, obviously). This is the Petite Potagère model, which comes with very elegant bamboo blinds to protect your seedlings from the midday sun. This is a really good solution for the space-strapped gardener.



8



9

CLIVE NICHOLS, MARK EVANS, SERRES ET FERRONNERIES D'ANTAN, MAGGIE KEARNS PAPERSTUDIO

▷ the Victoria and Albert Museum). He was one of those Victorian polymaths who did all this as well as publishing a magazine and being a Member of Parliament.

Greenhouses come in different guises, depending on what they are for, what you want them to look like and how handy you are with a power tool. Basically, you can break them down into three categories: the spiffy, the practical and the homemade.

The first are those purveyed in large glossy advertisements and on trade stands at Chelsea. I mention no names, but you can guess who the manufacturers are: their buildings are beautifully made and quite expensive. They straddle the gap between greenhouse and conservatory and can be used for both lounging around on rattan sofas sipping brandy alexanders and for serious plant growing. These are the direct descendants of the old Victorian

greenhouses and can be fitted out with underfloor heating pipes and all manner of curlicues. The practical variety are made of sensible things, such as cedar or naked aluminium. They may not be pretty enough to be the focal point of a vista or the centrepiece of a walled garden, but that is not really their purpose: these are businesslike structures that are designed purely for growing tomatoes or nurturing cuttings. The homemade, meanwhile, are often found on allotments and are a mixture of ingenious craftsmanship and upcycled materials. Rejected window frames and floorboards rescued from skips are miraculously transformed: charming, but not always weatherproof.

The siting of your greenhouse is very important: try not to put it under a tree and avoid slopes, which make construction tricky. If you are growing standard summer crops, it is best to run it north to



10

CHRISTOPHER

9 Upcycled chic

A perfect example of the craft of scavenging. Assorted mismatched doors and window frames have been given a lick of paint and reassembled into a greenhouse that is not only functional but positively joyful. Perhaps a bit out of place outside a château, but absolutely perfect for an allotment.

10 Outside in

It is a great idea to have a greenhouse inside a building – it gives you extra insulation. Here the greenhouse covers the stairs and is populated by lots of plants dangling like stranded abseilers from the ceiling. It may not be the best idea for the average house, but it works well for the Vækst Restaurant in Copenhagen.

Further reading

The Greenhouse Expert by Dr DG Hessayon (Expert, 1994) – great for the beginner.

Vegetables and Herbs for the Greenhouse and Polytunnel by Klaus Laitenberger (Right Way, 2013) – how to grow tasty year-round produce.

south, as this will give equal sunshine on both sides and may stop overheating. If you need maximum light all year round (perhaps for alpine), site it east to west for the best light on dingy winter days.

If you have always yearned for somewhere warm to cosset your cotyledons or grow more tomatoes than you could ever eat, you need a greenhouse. Life is short: greenhouses are a healthy extravagance, being good for the soul and not at all fattening. Provided you throw no stones. □

READER EVENT

Don't miss James's talk on Sex, Death and Gardens at the *Gardens Illustrated* Festival, 25-26 March 2017. See page 10 or go to gardensfestival.com for details.

Where to buy

- **Alitex**
Tel 01730 826900, alitex.co.uk
- **Gabriel Ash**
Tel 1829 271890, gabrielash.com
- **Griffin Greenhouses**
Tel 01962 772512, griffinglasshouses.com
- **Hartley Botanic**
Tel 01457 819155, hartley-botanic.co.uk
- **Pure Greenhouses**
Tel 033 3200 5833, puregreenhouse.co.uk
- **Serres et Ferronnerie d'Antan**
Tel +33(0)2 54 23 70 34, serresdantan.com/en/