

How to Improve Greenhouse Hygiene

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Greenhouses may provide a controlled, protected environment for plants to grow, but these same conditions are also ideal for diseases and pests to thrive. Many of these pests, like spider mites, are tiny and easily go unnoticed until they reach serious levels. Good hygiene should therefore be high on your list of priorities. By keeping a greenhouse clean and neat, you ensure that many pests and diseases need never become a problem. At the same time, you will be providing better growing conditions for your plants.

1. Keep conditions in your greenhouse as hygienic as possible. Don't bring diseased plants into the greenhouse if it is avoidable. If you must bring in contaminated plants- isolate them. Remove any decomposing plant or fruit matter.
2. Removing algae from the greenhouse glass. First wet the algae thoroughly to loosen the deposits, then scrub them off with warm, soapy water and a scrubbing brush. A plastic plant label is useful for cleaning between panes of glass where algae have accumulated.
3. Have a thorough cleanup every autumn. Clear out the plants while you scrub down the glass and frame, both inside and out. Throughout the year, sweep the floor and staging as needed to remove fallen leaves and plant debris, since these often carry fungal spores and provide a perfect site for fungi or pests to overwinter.
4. Renovate wooden greenhouses. With a wooden greenhouse, you need to keep the frame in good condition. Clean the wood each year and treat it with preservative every 1 to 3 years. Avoid using a substance that is harmful to plants, such as creosote. Repair small rotting areas with wood filler.
5. Pinch out dead and dying foliage, flowers and stems promptly, since they may cause dieback. Remove weeds from pots and gravel to keep air circulating well and prevent competition for moisture and nutrients.
6. Wash out all pots and trays after they have been used. As you finish with pots and trays, scrub them out so that they are clean and ready to use again. Keep your water source clean so that it does not harbor diseases
7. Keep a regular check on the state of the greenhouse framework, along with any ventilation, watering or heating systems. Any damaged areas or operational problems should be dealt with before they have a chance to become serious. Regular checking need not take long, but combined with prompt action, it can save a lot of damage in the long run.

Greenhouses have advantages and disadvantages compared to gardens regarding the control of pests and plant diseases:

- it is easier to control the greenhouse environment than the open garden
- some pests flourish in greenhouse conditions
- some controls can be used effectively in the greenhouse but not in the garden.

Greenhouse Hygiene Practices

Good greenhouse hygiene practice is simple and though the routines can be mundane, they are worth the effort to maintain plant health. Good practice includes:

1. Inspect plants frequently
2. Remove any signs of damage or decay in the plants, their soil or the surrounding environment, to minimize the build-up of harmful bacteria
3. Clean all pots, containers and equipment and avoid storing them in the greenhouse
4. Regularly clean the greenhouse interior and exterior, including all equipment

Greenhouse glass often gets dirty quite quickly from dust and debris carried by the wind so a regular clean of the outside of the greenhouse will usually be necessary. This applies especially during the winter when the dust build-up can significantly reduce the amount of light available to the greenhouse interior.

The glass can be washed with a mild or diluted non-toxic disinfectant. On the inside of the greenhouse, this is best done at a time when the plants can be removed. The greenhouse can be left to air off before the plants are brought in again. Algae will develop in the spaces where the glass overlaps in most modern greenhouses, primarily due to the build-up of moisture. Such algae is best removed using a metal scraper of the type used for decorating. Used carefully, it will not scratch the glass.

Controlling Variables in the Greenhouse

As well as maintaining greenhouse hygiene by cleaning, the normal activities to control temperature, humidity, light and air circulation help keep plants growing evenly and healthily, thereby making them less susceptible to disease and pests. While specific equipment may be in use for particular plants, e.g. propagators for seeds and young plants, for the general environment the following methods apply:

- Keeping temperatures down by ventilation. Some pointers are described in [Greenhouse Ventilation](#). Other aids to ventilation include using slatted rather than solid staging to aid air circulation. It is also good practice where possible to maintain space between plants and to avoid them being placed too near to the glass.
- Keeping temperatures up by heating, applying bubble wrap plastic to areas of the greenhouse or wrapping greenhouse fleece around plants and their containers
- Managing light by shading parts of the greenhouse using blinds, or applying a coating to the outside of the glass during the summer
- Ensuring that watering of the plants is regular rather than letting it become ad-hoc or infrequent, either of which will cause the plants to deteriorate
- Maintaining humidity by damping down, usually by soaking the floor and staging, or by the use of capillary matting or for large greenhouses, some degree of automation.