

# greenhouse project

add winter insulation



Bubblewrap creates a cosy winter home for frost-tender plants

As the cooler months approach, add some insulation to your greenhouse to keep frosts at bay. **Kevin Smith** shows you how

## Easy insulation

I use my greenhouse for two things – overwintering exotics and raising seedlings in early spring. Both of these require it to be free of frost, which is simple to achieve using bubblewrap as insulation. My cannas, bananas and tree ferns don't need added heat to get them through the winter – just no frost. As my

greenhouse is in a mild, city location, bubblewrap is all I need to keep them alive. Some seeds do need heat to germinate though, so I use a small fan heater to warm up the greenhouse in early spring. It heats up quickly and the bubblewrap keeps all the warmth in, saving valuable energy.

## 5 STEPS TO... insulating your

## greenhouse for winter



**1** Empty the greenhouse entirely, so you can manoeuvre the large roll of bubblewrap easily. This is also a great opportunity to clean the greenhouse thoroughly to get rid of any pests. Hold the bubblewrap against the glass to work out how to best position it so you make as few cuts as possible.



**2** When you've worked out all the different lengths of bubblewrap you need, cut them from the roll *in situ* so you can make sure each piece overlaps its neighbour and no gaps are left that may let in drafts. Cut the square and rectangular pieces first, before tackling the triangular ones for the eaves.



**3** If you have an aluminium-framed greenhouse, buy a pack of plastic fixings to secure the bubblewrap. If you have a wooden-framed greenhouse, pin or tack the wrap in place, using plastic washers to prevent it tearing.



**4** Make sure all the roof vents are closed before you fix the roof insulation in place. Stand on a stable ladder, and if possible get a friend to help you, as it's best to fix the entire piece in one go.



**5** Next tackle any fiddly triangles below the roof, attaching them in the same way as all the other pieces. Finally, create a 'curtain' to cover the door – fix it just along the top, so you can simply push it to one side when you go in or out.

## Tidy up for the winter

I like to divide and replant my bananas and cannas annually. This gives me the chance to take proper stock of the plants I have and get rid of any dead or scruffy foliage – or even entire plants if they're struggling to survive.

This is a job that can also be carried out in spring, at the start of the new growing season. However, as my city garden is very mild and sheltered, I've experimented over the past few years and now prefer to divide my plants during the autumn.

I find that bringing 'tidy' plants into the greenhouse over winter helps to prevent diseases and frees up a little time during the busy spring months. Also, once the risk of frost has passed, the plants can be taken straight outside again, as they're ready for the growing season ahead.

However, I don't recommend autumn division if you're in a cold part of the country or an exposed site – it'll be safer to bring plants indoors, pick them over for pests and dead leaves, then divide them in spring.

## 3 STEPS TO... dividing and overwintering exotics

**1** Remove bananas and cannas from their pots or carefully dig them up if they're in a border. **2** In autumn I simply divide plants by either pulling the shoots apart by hand (this may be possible with younger cannas) or splitting them with a sharp spade. If you leave this until spring, cannas

may not have leaves, so it's best to cut the rhizomes with a knife, making sure each piece has a good shoot. **3** Remove dead and damaged leaves and pot up the new plants in fresh compost. Water them well and transfer them to a frost-free greenhouse for the winter months.



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