When it's cool outdoors, I love to walk through an old greenhouse and feel the warmth around me. Slatted wooden benches, a hard-packed dirt floor, rusty heating pipes and, of course, plants all add to the pleasure. Throw in an old chair and a cup of tea and I'm a child again, back in my uncle's greenhouse watching his tomatoes grow. It's the all-pervading earthiness, combined with nostalgia-inducing fragrances that evoke these feelings. To me, a greenhouse is such a comfortable place to be.

Around this time of year I begin to think, boy, it sure would be nice to have a greenhouse in my backyard. I do have a small one, but it's just something I knock together in April to hold seedlings prior to planting, little more than a glorified cold frame. So, why don't I have a real greenhouse in my back yard? I'm not sure. Just haven't got around to it, no space available, not cost effective. These are the usual excuses, but they aren't very strong ones.

Making the Commitment
I know I'll be looking closely at all the greenhouses on display at the spring garden shows. I'll also be asking all kinds of questions and carefully considering the pros and cons. After returning home, I might even venture into the garden with a tape measure to size up suitable locations. I do this every year, but somehow the commitment is lacking. Part of the problem is that it's a conundrum. If I use space in the garden for a greenhouse, where would I plant all the extra stuff that I'd be sure to grow in it? I barely have room now.

And so it goes. Maybe you aren't trouble by indecision and are happily planning for a new greenhouse. If so, here are a few tips to keep in mind.
Basic Guidelines

Look twice at the quality, especially if you get the bug at a garden show. There are high-quality greenhouses on display at reasonable prices. The framework is usually solidly constructed of aluminum with windows of glass or polycarbonate, but I’ve also seen flimsy plastic frames. These look fine at first glance, but you wouldn’t want to be inside one during a wind storm.

It’s easy to say buy the biggest, but do consider where it will be situated. Out of the way at the bottom of the yard might be the first choice, but unless you like trudging through snowbanks to visit your orchids, the closer to the house the better, provided it will receive plenty of sunlight. Additionally, having a greenhouse close to the house means it will be easier to provide heat, light (if required) and water.
Finally, do ensure good drainage beneath your greenhouse. I might wax nostalgic about packed dirt floors, but these really are impractical. Paving stones or gravel are far superior, or better still, install a concrete base. Either way, ensure the greenhouse is anchored to the ground. There’s no point buying one if you’re going to donate it to a stranger three blocks away after the first gust of wind.

**Additional Considerations**

Before signing on the bottom line, think about the extras. How will you heat it? How will you cool it? How will it be ventilated? These are important factors to consider and they need to be addressed.

A greenhouse might produce wonderful, evocative fragrances, and your very own tomatoes in January might prove delicious, but if the cost of growing them is equivalent to a trip to California to pick your own, you might want to hang on to the growing space.

*Text by David Hobson*

*Photos by Marnie Wright*

(Photo on page 1 taken on the grounds of Serenity Property Management in Port Carling, Ontario.)

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