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How to Build Your Own Hoophouse

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Building a hoophouse is a bit like having children: there's a lot of pleasure involved at the idea's conception, but limited knowledge of the real work involved down the road. But just as it is difficult for me as a family man to imagine living without my children, I'd have a tough time living without my hoophouse. It is a central part of my gardening life, not to mention a favorite hang-out for my little boys. This page is meant to give you the inspiration and know-how to start a hoophouse project of your own.

With the frame in place, we turn our attention to installling the hoops

First, a few words of inspiration: tomatoes, melons, and peppers. Need I say more? A hoophouse provides the extra heat units you need to realize your wildest kitchen gardening fantasies. It allows you to have an earlier start, a later finish, and lots of extra warmth in between. The first year I had mine up, I was so excited about all the possibilities that I gardened right through the year and was harvesting Mache and Claytonia salads in the dead of winter which is not bad seeing that I live in Maine (Northeast USA). As if that weren't enough, here's the show stopper: with a hoophouse, you can garden in the rain and not get wet!

Defintely a two-person job and three's even better

Now the nuts and bolts. There are many plans available on the internet for building a hoophouse (see links below). The first one is the one I used for mine, adapting it from a 12' x 14' to a 12' x 16' in order to enjoy that extra row of whatever. Some of you will cringe with fear when you open up these plans and see that there's some basic carpentry involved. Fear not: I'm living proof that you don't have to be a handy person to build one, nor rich for that matter. What you do need is courage, patience, and a bit of creativity to deal with the problems that will inevitably arise as you go along. There will be rips in your plastic, cracks in your joints, and (in my part of the world) snowstorms that will try to make your hoophouse into a large plastic pancake. Once again, do not worry for most of these problems can be resolved with some clever thinking on your part and several rolls of duct tape.

Hoops and sides are in place

Three words to the wise: secure, support and ventilate. Once the plastic is on, your hoophouse will catch the wind like an oversized kite. Make sure that the four corner posts are dug deep into the ground. Although the plans below don't call for it, I would also suggest adding some additional deeply-dug support to the front and back walls. Similarly, if you live in the snowy north like I do, I would recommend that you envisage an internal support structure (2-3 beams supporting the spine will do) before the first snowstorm threatens. Once the snow has fallen, be sure to remove it quickly from the top of your structure to prevent stressing the joints. Finally, a hoophouse is for growing plants not for baking bread. If you feel uncomfortably warm inside, then your plants probably do too. Make sure you open it up and allow the air to flow.

View from inside

Download the plans here:

Small (12' x 14') hoophouse plans from North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/programs/extension/publicat/postharv/green/small_greenhouse.pdf [1]

Hoophouse instructions from the Washington State University
http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/em015/em015.pdf [2]

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Source URL: http://kgi.org/build-hoophouse

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