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Greenhouse Housework by Gabriel Ash

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Before you start greenhouse gardening in earnest, make sure your glass palace is ready to receive its new growing guests.

Some seedlings are such susceptible little things that you need to do your best to ensure they have clean growing conditions to develop. That might seem a bit weird when outside they seem to sprout like mustard and cress. The trouble is that a good percentage of the plants that we want to grow in our gardens hail from far distant shores, which means they need warmer or different conditions. Sometimes it is these conditions that encourage things other than our seedlings to grow. Fungal spores overwinter everywhere, ready to continue their own life cycle as the weather changes. They are especially prevalent in the greenhouse and can knock down trays of young seedlings in their prime.

To keep your greenhouse bug and fungi free you need to be vigilant. Tidy up and clean out all the pots, trays and modules that you plan to use this year. Remove last yearâ€™s bags of compost and add to the garden as a mulch or dig into the vegetable patch. Take out any used capillary matting and add to the compost heap. Buy some fresh lengths from the roll at the garden centre and cut it to size ready to use this spring. Look at any stakes that you have used in the season and clean them up. Take care to check whether there are any overwintering ladybirds in the tops of bamboo poles and if there are put them somewhere safe while you carry out your chores. Sweep up any loose debris. If you have an old vacuum cleaner use it to remove dust and debris from as many surfaces as possible.

Then clean as many of the greenhouse surfaces as possible. Use a dedicated greenhouse cleaner such as Clearway from Green Gardener (www.greengardener.co.uk) or Armillatox (www.armillatox.co.uk), these will remove algae and mould and clean up the greenhouse. Donâ€™t forget the floor and the greenhouse frame. Once you have cleaned it as best you can consider fumigation, using a special greenhouse smoke. These are widely available but do check the instructions and ingredients to ensure you are happy with how they work. There are some chemical free versions for organic growers based on garlic as well as others based on alternative ingredients. Itâ€™s best if you can clean the greenhouse first and remove any debris, so that the smoke can reach every nook and cranny. Make sure the smoke is suitable to use with any plants still in the greenhouse and follow the instructions carefully.

Donâ€™t forget to check the greenhouse vents. If your automatic vents werenâ€™t operating correctly at t end of the summer then now is a good time to overhaul or replace, but take care if you have tender plants inside that may be affected by open vents while you work.

Look at your propagation kit, clean it out ready for use and start to plan the order of what you are going to sow if you havenâ€™t already started.

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