

There is a certain magic to the sweep of white that winter puts on things. But it isn't long before the spirit craves a touch of life, even if it's only a tiny green leaf sprouting from a twig. And nothing satisfies that craving faster than a greenhouse. Brimming with blossoms nestled among leaves, the greenhouse resembles a part of paradise attached to the side of your house.

In the old days, greenhouses were restricted to the wealthy upper classes; keeping the warmth in and the cold out required nothing less than a small miracle of engineering. But today, with lightweight materials, improved glazing, and readily available sources of heat, launching a greenhouse demands little more than getting the right angle of the sun. And because of the mushrooming interest in gardening, greenhouses are well within the limits of the average family's budget. Many are available in prefabricated units that can be put in place in less than a day. Others can be attached to the second story or fitted over a sunny window. You can select size and complexity to fit your interest.

As for plants, you can grow almost anything--from the most exotic of passionflowers to a modest row of carrots. The palm, cactus, geranium, primrose, fern, begonia, and African violet all thrive in a greenhouse. If you have a weakness for cut flowers, old favorites--such as the carnation, aster, snapdragon, chrysanthemum, pansy, and sweet pea--will provide a continuous supply of blossoms for every room of the house.

And because the greenhouse can offer close to ideal conditions for plants, growing things is almost as easy as picking up a watering can. All you need is at least three hours of sun per day and an undying passion for living things.