

Tips for Researching How to Build a Hoophouse

Lessons Learned from Hardwick Community Garden

1. Suggest researching 4-6 companies.
2. Quotes for greenhouses are for the **greenhouses only**.
 - a. They do not include any materials/costs for:
 - Siting
 - Construction
 - Heating
 - Electricity
 - Ventilation options may be available (end-wall vents, roof vents) but will need to be discussed, along with any mechanical controls to open/close vents.
 - Wood elements of the hoophouse (baseboards, etc.). **Recommend** using untreated wood for baseboards and elsewhere In hoophouse (e.g., no plywood).
 - b. **Poly** covering comes with the hoophouse but will need to be replaced in 4-5 years. It deteriorates over time and becomes dirty – shutting out needed light.
3. When comparing companies, it's best to consider:
 - a. What kind of customer support do they offer – do they provide technical assistance for the non-technical to understand details/structure/specification for the hoophouse?
 - b. If possible, we strongly recommend finding a company where you can talk to the same person over time who will get to know you and your skill level and address your questions accordingly. If you have to call a general help number and get a random person each time, you may have a harder time with the quote process and any questions after the hoophouse is delivered and while you're building it.
 - c. If at all possible find other farmers in your area and ask if you can go and visit them/their hoophouse. Walk around it and inside it to get a feel of the width and length and make a decision on a) how much space do you really need and b) how much space can you afford. Ask the farmers their experience with the hoophouse and with different companies.
 - d. Always ask (several times) – “What else will we need besides your kit to get the hoophouse up and running”.
 - e. Ask if they can send a parts list for things that you will need to provide to the contractor for the construction. Also ask this of the contractor who should be experienced with this.
 - f. Ask how long their quote is good for (this can vary from one month to 3 months), before you have to renegotiate. This can be important for your decision-making process – to share with anyone involved in making the decision.
 - g. Ask how shipping is done and if there are any added costs besides what's included in the price.
 - h. Ask how the hoophouse will be delivered and if you will need a forklift to get a palette(s) off of a flat-bed truck.
 - i. Always ask for details on strength. One company was only able to say “it's very strong” with no concrete info so they were dropped off the list of consideration near the beginning. The companies should be able to give a wind speed that their hoophouses are spec'd for. The highest we found was 90 mph, but there may be higher.
 - j. Understand how the hoophouse is anchored – will you need to put down cement blocks? Or can you brace the hoops at their base with buried rocks? Etc. Again, it's useful to get a contractor involved who has experience putting these up. You wouldn't want to get caught at the last minute with a crew ready to put up the hoophouse that has to be put off because you need to spend the first part of the day first doing the cement.

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4. Highly recommend finding a contractor who has experience putting up hoophouses. Ask for references – other farmers they have worked for. Ask the contractors how they feel about managing a work crew of volunteers (so you can save money). The construction can take 2 to 3 days (closer to 2), so if you can get volunteers who can come for at least ½ day each that would be great.
5. **Siting** is a very important consideration for the hoophouse. Have you checked to see if you’re in a flood zone? Wetland? Etc. Even though you may not have a grant to build a hoophouse from **NRCS**, their technical advisors are tasked with providing technical assistance for things like siting hoophouses. It’s a good idea to contact them **early on in your process** and ask if they can come to your site and do an assessment on orientation, location etc. to help you make siting decisions. They can also help with soil samples – you may need to make a decision on whether or not you can grow in-ground in the hoophouse depending on the quality of your soils, or instead, bring in soil and make raised beds. **NRCS** will have an office in your region – google them and make an appointment.
6. When doing your final assessment of what different companies offer and their costs:
 - a. Remember to estimate added costs for any lumber, ventilation features, etc. which may differ company to company.
 - b. Try to define and compare other factors that may be important to your project over and above costs (customer support, complexity of construction, etc.) as cost alone may not be the best yardstick.
 - c. Understand that each company will have their own way of presenting the hoophouse’s features and specifications. You may have to do a little head-scratching to compare apples to oranges, but it’s possible to do.

Resources:

Attra Webinar on hoophouses - good info - 1 hour long	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZ-JAGKcup8	YouTube Video - Free
UVM Hoophouse Guide - also available from High Mowing	http://www.uvm.edu/~susagctr/resources/HighTunnels.pdf	PDF - Free
High Tunnels, Low Cost Technology to Extend the Season	http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/Videos/videoorderform.html	\$15 -DVD
Hoophouse Handbook (2nd ed)	http://www.growingformarket.com/store?p=all	Growing for Market - \$28/printed / \$20/pdf download
NRCS	https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/?cid=stelprdb1046250	Explains the NRCS “Incentives” program – funding only available for commercial farms, but click the “Core Practice>High Tunnel System” link for a well written short guideline.
NRCS	https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FS_E_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_010217.pdf	Another short, very good NRCS guideline created with Vern Grubinger, UVM Extension; UMASS Extension; and Bob Pomykala, VVBGA