

➤ Tried & tested / Tunnel cloches



Shelter from the elements

Geoff Hodge tests tunnel cloches – the perfect way to protect vegetable crops against the British weather

FROM autumn to spring, when the British climate can be less than friendly towards plants, a good cloche will help provide protection against the worst of the elements. Cloches can be used to keep vegetables cropping for longer in the autumn, protect overwintering plants, warm up the soil in spring for earlier

sowing and growing, and protect plants from pests and diseases. In other words, they're a vital piece of gardening kit. The temperature under the cloche will depend on the ambient outdoor temperature. Although the cloche will trap heat and the temperature underneath the cloche will always be a few degrees warmer than outside, it

probably won't stop plants freezing if the temperature drops very low. But they will protect against direct frost damage and keep damaging cold winds at bay, so providing several degrees of protection. During warm, sunny weather, the temperature under the cloche can rise significantly – often to damaging levels for young plants and seedlings, so it is

important that you can ventilate the cloche to reduce the temperature. A light cloche is easy to move around the plot, but in windy places it's likely to end up blowing away to the next plot! So those supplied with ground pegs – the more the better – or being able to bury the edges will be more stable and will help to keep the cloche in place.

The test I put up the cloches to see how quick and easy they were to erect. Those supplied as a one-piece, ready-to-use kit are the easiest, whereas those that have a separate cover can be a bit trickier and more time consuming to assemble. Tunnel cloches are made from polythene so they won't necessarily protect plants from severe frosts. I tested the night

temperatures under the cloches against the outside temperature. All the cloches produced a raise in temperature of between 2C and 5C (35-41F) above the outside night temperature. I also looked at accessibility – how easy it is to lift up the sides to access crops and for ventilation – and how securely the tunnel ends can be closed up to prevent wind getting in.

➤ Botanico Tunnel Cloche Kit with polythene

- Plenty of cover overlap at the sides, so the edges can be buried in the soil for stability.
- **Size** 3mx48cmx40cm high (10ftx19inx16in)
 - **Frame material** 4 plastic-coated steel hoops
 - **Cover material** Thin polythene
 - **Includes** 12 frame clips, 10 ground anchor pegs, two end pegs
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Features** Frame clips can be used to hold sides up and ends open for ventilation
 - **Price guide** £14.99
 - **Others available** Kit with fibre fleece; Kit with shading net



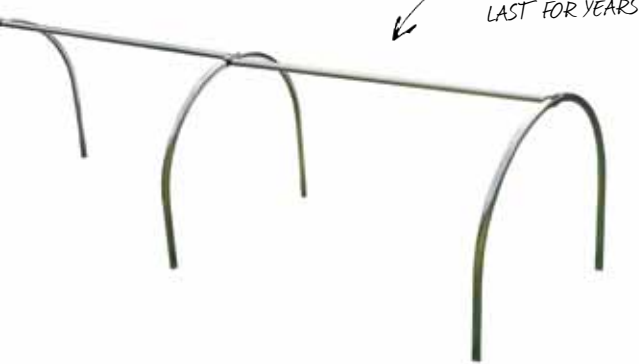
➤ Haxnicks Easy Poly Tunnel

- A pre-assembled cloche – the hoops are sewn into the cover. The sewn elasticated ends don't allow you to fully close up the ends for wind protection.
- **Size** 3mx45cmx30cm high (10ftx18inx12in)
 - **Frame material** 7 sturdy steel wire hoops
 - **Cover material** Polythene
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Features** Elasticated draw ends with toggles; lift-up sides
 - **Price guide** £17.99
 - **Others available** Easy Fleece Tunnel; Easy Net Tunnel; Giant Easy Poly Tunnel



➤ Two Wests & Elliott Cloche Hoops

- Only the frame hoops are supplied – you have to supply your own cover. High quality, aluminium will ensure these hoops last for many years. Very versatile – just supply your own polythene, fleece or mesh cover.
- **Size:** 5 hoops and 8 horizontal support bars to create a cloche frame 60cm (2ft) wide and up to 3.6m (12ft) long and 55cm (22in) high
 - **Frame material** Tubular aluminium
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Price guide** £42.95



➤ B&Q Tunnel Cloche with polythene cover

- A pre-assembled cloche – the hoops are sewn into the cover. Elasticated tie ends don't allow you to completely close up the ends for wind protection.
- **Size** 3mx50cmx40cm high (10ftx20inx16in)
 - **Frame material** 6 sturdy steel wire hoops
 - **Cover material** Polythene
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Features** Elasticated tie ends; lift-up sides
 - **Price guide** £10.98
 - **Others available** Grow Tunnel with Net Cover



➤ Gardman Grow It Polythene Grow Tunnel

- A pre-assembled cloche – the hoops are sewn into the cover. The sewn elasticated ends don't allow you to fully close up the ends for wind protection.
- **Size** 3mx50cmx40cm high (10ftx20inx16in)
 - **Frame material** 7 sturdy steel wire hoops
 - **Cover material** Polythene
 - **Includes** 2 end pegs
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Features:** Elasticated draw ends; lift-up sides
 - **Price guide:** £19.99
 - **Others available** Fleece Grow Tunnel; Netting Grow Tunnel; Insect Mesh Grow Tunnel; Giant Tunnel Cloche



➤ GardenSkill Poly Tunnel

- This is a high quality tunnel cloche – it reminded me of my tunnel tent and was quickly erected in exactly the same way. It will give you years of use.
- **Size** 3mx75cmx50cm high (10ftx30inx20in)
 - **Frame material** 4 three-piece carbon fibre rods
 - **Cover material** Polythene
 - **Includes** 16 ground anchor pegs with plastic side locator tabs, end guy ropes
 - **Ease of putting up** ★★★★★
 - **Quality/Ease of use** ★★★★★
 - **Features** Sewn-in support loops; zipped doors for access with ground pegs; material seams; polypropylene storage bag
 - **Price guide** £22.99
 - **Others available** 3 larger sizes; also available with mesh net



➤ Cloche alternatives



Fleece plant jackets for potted plants and specially tailored covers for vegetable cages and frames are easy to fit and should last for several years.



Use plastic bell cloches to protect individual plants on the veg plot. Or choose a modern version of a Victorian pyramid cold frame, with insulated panels and a removable lid. All products from Harrod Horticultural tel: 0845 2185301



Win our 'best buy'

We have 10 of the Best Buy GardenSkill tunnel cloches to give away! Send your name and address to Garden News Tunnel Cloche Giveaway, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FE or enter online at www.greatcompetitions.co.uk Closing date is Nov 8. Please write 'do not contact' if you don't want to be contacted by us or by carefully selected partner organisations.

Suppliers

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