



# CONSERVATORIES

O N L I N E

## TOP CONSERVATORY TIPS

Here are some of our favourite tips. We are very much obliged to Tina Dunlop at [The Almost Impartial Guide](#) for her assistance in putting this together. These tips are not in any particular order - we hope you find them useful.

We have put an (\*\*\*) beside any particularly important tips.

TIP 1 \*\*\* [Click here for our most important tip](#)

TIP 2 \*\*\* Always calculate your internal floor area when ordering a conservatory. Most suppliers will quote sizes based on external sizes. Typically your internal depth (projection) is 10.5 inches (275 mm) less than external depth while internal width is 21 inches (550 mm) less than external width if you use a cavity wall construction. A BIG DIFFERENCE! It's the internal floor area that most people are really interested in.

TIP 3 \*\*\* A follow on from the above. Always manually mark out the area of your new conservatory when designing and obtaining quotations. Do this as accurately as possible. A few stakes and string will do the job. You could even get a potential supplier to mark out the area. Don't however let them remove it when they leave - you will need the lay-out as a reference when other suppliers quote.

TIP 4 Unless you feel especially confident - do not go for the cheapest quotation. A bit of a generalisation we know - but rarely in our experience does the cheapest supplier also supply the best product or the best service.

TIP 5 When obtaining quotations do not try and "beat every supplier into the ground". Most of the better companies will not wish to trade in this way - only the less professional will usually have the flexibility. These less professional companies will often "agree" to your request but end up short changing you later. We are not suggesting that you don't negotiate. What we are suggesting is that you negotiate fairly. Make a detailed list of the features "you must have" and ask each company to give their best price. Don't expect to get a conservatory with a glass roof, Pilkington "K" glass and Argon filled units for the price of a standard double glazed conservatory with 16 mm polycarbonate in the roof.

TIP 6 It is always good practice to allow a small contingency (say 10%) for "extras" or additions you may make to the order after you place your initial order. Builders can have unforeseen work or you may decide to make some changes as work proceeds. There may be some landscaping or similar.

TIP 7 - This is one of our favourites - especially if you have children. It's the TIME CAPSULE tip. Simply put some current newspaper clippings plus a brief description of yourself and family in a waterproof/rot-proof container. A 2 litre plastic carton with screw cap is perfect. Children love to include some "original artwork" and written descriptions of themselves. The fun and sense of occasion is amazing. Perhaps someday somebody else will share in this. You can "hide" the time capsule almost anywhere - but the favourite is within the cavity walls or under the floor if you have a suspended floor.

**TIP 8 \*\*\*** - When designing a conservatory with top fanlite openers be aware that the transom (cross member below opener) will often be in the way of your eye view when you stand up in the conservatory. This will "spoil" your view of the garden. If you don't have much of a problem with the height of your conservatory you may overcome this by raising the overall height of your eaves (conservatory frame height) by say 150 - 200 mm. Then when opener is fitted it is less likely that the transom will be in your eye view. (Unless you are 6ft 6" that is!)

A follow on from the above is to consider the effect of your dwarf wall height on your view of the garden from within the conservatory. If you have a garden which "slopes away" then a dwarf wall will take away a large part of your view. A good suggestion is to actually create a "dummy wall" (some timber or boxes will do) and sit in a chair at proposed conservatory floor level to see the effect. Discuss both of these important points with your conservatory supplier.

**Our grateful thanks** to Cavan Sullivan of **Welsh Window Systems** (Contact Cavan on Free Phone 0800-9805175) for the above tip.

**TIP 9 \*\*\*** Buy the best possible conservatory you can afford. For a relatively small additional sum spent now you can have a conservatory which will give you many years of satisfaction. Of course you want value for money - but don't try doing it too cheaply. Consider glass roofs, Pilkington "K" glass (Low E) etc.

**TIP 10** When you go on holiday - please make sure you have adequate shading and ventilation for your conservatory. You don't want to come home to a conservatory full of dead plants!

**TIP 11** Candles and such like are wonderful in a conservatory - especially in the evening. However do remember that these candles will melt/bend in the daytime heat!

**TIP 12 \*\*\*** Do remember to inform your insurers of your new conservatory / sunroom addition. Adequate cover for complete rebuilding should be arranged as soon as the conservatory is erected.

**TIP 13** Unless there is no alternative do not place doors in the front of the conservatory. This creates a "corridor" effect and limits your usable space for furniture etc. Better to position the doors on the side - ideally as close to the main house wall as possible so as to minimise the interruption to your "flow" and usable space.

**TIP 14 \*\*\*** If you "employ" one company to do all the work - try to meet their builders before placing a firm order. You may feel the company is the builders - but in almost all cases the company sub-contracts out this element of the work to a separate building contractor. You will most likely spend more time with this person on your conservatory project than any other. Ask them if they can foresee any problems. What do they do with rubbish? Will they reinstate around the new conservatory base after construction or will that be an extra? If you are having electrics or plumbing installed it is most likely the builder will in turn be sub-contracting out this element of the work. **YOU CAN SEE HOW PROBLEMS CAN OCCUR - ESPECIALLY IF INFORMATION IS NOT PASSED ON FULLY OR "TRADES" DO NOT FOLLOW ON AS QUICKLY AS YOU HOPED.** You must feel comfortable with this person - so do take your time on this element. Obviously if you are employing the builder direct you will have more control over this element.

**TIP 15** If you think planning permission may be required you should check personally with you local planners. Do not rely on the conservatory supplier to do this for you. Most conservatory supplier's conditions of sale specifically put responsibility for obtaining any approvals on you the customer. You are the one who is responsible.

**TIP 16** A conservatory should not be a "bolt on" to your property. Always endeavour to match your new addition into your home. Match brick work and render details. Make it feel and look as though it's always been there.

**TIP 17 \*\*\*** If you have a particularly large or difficult project in mind it is often a good idea to have your own plans/drawings produced for you by an architect/draftsperson. Of course this will be an additional cost - but it is our experience that you will save time and perhaps even money with this method. You will receive impartial advice on what is practical and possible and will therefore be better equipped to "handle" the sales representatives. You will be able to ask each representative to quote on a "like for like" basis rather than having each representative coming up with their own design based on their own or company's agenda. You will discover - if you have not already done so, that when it comes to conservatories there are lots of different and conflicting opinions. Your architect may even be able to recommend some companies for your project.

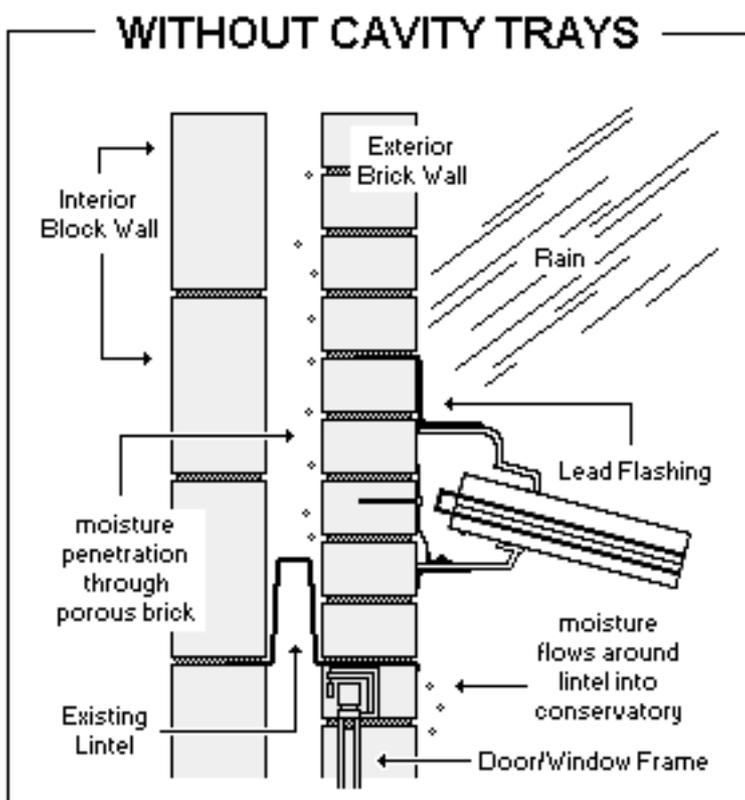
**TIP 18 \*\*\*** Our final tip in this section and perhaps one of the most important. Do not be the Customer from HELL. To get the best out of any Conservatory Supplier or Builder maintain a friendly but professional rapport. Do not assume that they will always be trying to get "one over" on you. Their advice may be in your best interests. If you appear defensive and untrusting - always assuming the worst of your supplier - the whole experience will be unpleasant for both you and the supplier. Be vigilant - but always prepared to listen to their advice - especially if problems occur.

Whilst most trades will come prepared with their own food and drinks - do take the time to offer them hospitality. A cold drink on a warm summer day or hot soup in the winter will build on your relationship - resulting in a better job for you.

### An Extra and Very Important Tip

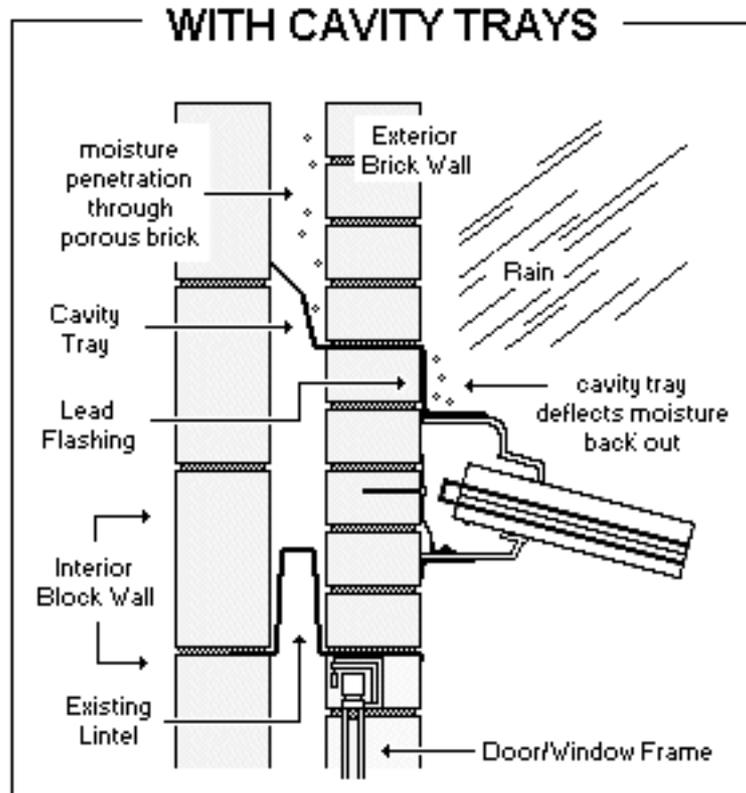
To use a cavity tray or not to use a cavity tray - that is the question?

The following situation is one which is often not considered when building a new conservatory. Most homes built with cavity walls will have "cavity trays" inserted above doors and windows. Its purpose is to "deflect" moisture that "transfers" across the outer skin of brick work back out - rather than let it "bridge" across the cavity at lintel level - causing damp inside. In most properties the lintel effectively acts as the "cavity tray" and deflects this moisture back outwards. See diagram below.



As you will see from this drawing, it is possible once your conservatory has been built for moisture to appear within your conservatory. This can be a particular problem if you have decided to plaster / render what was previously your outside wall - covering over the "weep" holes that usually exist above doors and windows. This situation is worst when you live in an exposed situation and experience driving rain. (Coastal situations / tops of hills)

Fortunately there is a solution to this. The solution is to insert a new cavity tray just above your conservatory roof level - thus diverting moisture above your conservatory roof rather than inside your new room. The following drawing illustrates.



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It should be noted that inserting cavity trays when building conservatory additions is not yet considered the "norm". Often there are no particular problems, especially in sheltered areas. However it is wise to raise this issue with your installer/supplier. It should be something reviewed by every conservatory purchaser - at least if you make the decision it is not necessary you will now be fully in the "picture". Regrettably a lot of purchasers only find out about the problem when it happens.

Cavity trays are usually created in lead or can be bought "ready made" in plastic. Ask your supplier for advice.

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