Orangery vs. Conservatory: Which One Suits Your Home?

Understanding the difference between an orangery and a conservatory

If you are planning an extension that brings in natural light and connects your home to the garden, you have probably come across the terms "orangery" and "conservatory." While both add space and brightness, they are not the same thing. The choice between them depends on how you intend to use the room, the style of your house, and your priorities for comfort throughout the year. This article compares the two options so you can decide which one fits your needs.

What defines a conservatory

A traditional conservatory is built mainly of glass, with a glass roof and large windows. It is designed to let in maximum daylight, creating a bright space that feels like being outdoors but with shelter. The frame is often uPVC or aluminium, and the roof is typically a clear or tinted polycarbonate or glass. Because so much of the structure is glazed, a conservatory can heat up quickly in summer and lose warmth fast in winter. Many homeowners find that a conservatory becomes too hot to use on sunny afternoons and too cold on chilly evenings without extra heating or cooling.

Conservatories are usually built on a low brick base, but the walls remain predominantly glass. They are popular as sunrooms, plant rooms, or casual seating areas where temperature extremes are acceptable. If you want a space that feels open and bright, and you do not mind managing the climate with blinds, fans, or portable heaters, a conservatory can be a straightforward and cost-effective choice.

What defines an orangery

An orangery takes a different approach. It has a solid roof with a central glass lantern or rooflight, and the walls are mostly brick or stone with large windows. The solid roof provides better insulation than a full glass roof, which helps keep the room cooler in summer and warmer in winter. The central roof lantern lets in natural light from above while the solid sections reduce heat loss and solar gain. This design makes an orangery feel more like a permanent room rather than a temporary glass box.



Orangeries originated in the 17th century as buildings where citrus trees were kept over winter. The solid walls and roof protected the plants from frost, while the tall windows and roof lantern gave them enough light. Modern orangeries follow the same principle: a sturdy structure with plenty of glazing but not a fully glass envelope. They are often used as kitchens, dining rooms, family rooms, or home offices because they stay more comfortable year round spaces without relying heavily on extra heating or air conditioning.

Key differences in comfort and usability

The main practical difference between a conservatory and an orangery is how they handle temperature and light. A conservatory with a full glass roof lets in more sunlight, which can be lovely on a spring morning but overwhelming in July. Even with blinds or reflective glass, the heat buildup can be intense. In winter, the same glass roof lets warmth escape quickly, making the room feel draughty and cold unless you run a heater constantly.

An orangery, with its solid insulated roof and central lantern, moderates these extremes. The solid roof blocks direct sunlight over most of the room, reducing overheating. The roof lantern still admits daylight from above, but the amount of glass is smaller, so the room does not bake. In winter, the insulated roof holds heat better, and the room warms up faster. This design naturally creates more comfortable year round spaces without requiring elaborate climate control systems.

That said, an orangery does not have to be stuffy or dark. Modern orangeries can include large sliding or bi-fold doors, tall windows, and even additional skylights in the solid roof sections. The balance of solid and glazed areas can be adjusted to suit your taste and the orientation of your house. You get the best of both worlds: plenty of natural light and a room that feels like part of the house, not an add-on.

Structural and planning considerations

Both conservatories and orangeries usually fall under permitted development rights if they meet certain size and placement rules, but it is wise to check with your local planning authority. The rules can differ based on the height, proximity to boundaries, and whether the property is listed or in a conservation area. An orangery, because it has a solid roof and more substantial walls, may be treated more like a traditional extension in planning terms. A conservatory with a glass roof and lightweight frame is often seen as a separate structure, which can sometimes have different conditions attached.

The foundation requirements also differ. A conservatory can sometimes sit on a shallower base because the structure is lighter. An orangery, with its brick walls and solid roof, needs a proper foundation similar to a house extension. This adds to the cost but also gives a more permanent, solid feel. If you plan to use the room as a kitchen, dining room, or home office, the extra investment in foundations and insulation is usually worth it.



Which one suits your home best?

Your choice depends on what you want the room to do. If you mainly want a sunny spot for plants, a place to sit in good weather, or a bright playroom for children, a conservatory can work well. It is lighter on the budget and gives that airy, greenhouse feel. Just be prepared for temperature swings and the need for blinds or ventilation.

If you want a room that you can use every day, all year round, for living, dining, cooking, or working, an orangery is the better bet. The solid roof and better insulation make it a genuinely usable extension rather than a seasonal space. It also blends more naturally with the architecture of a traditional house because the brick walls and pitched roof can match the existing building. Many homeowners find that an orangery adds more value to their property because it functions as a true extra room.

There is also a middle ground. Some modern conservatories use insulated roof panels instead of full glass, or include a solid roof with a central lantern, blurring the line between the two types. You can specify a conservatory with a tiled or insulated roof if you want the look of a conservatory but better thermal performance. Similarly, you can design an orangery with more glass than usual if you prioritise light. The key is to think about how you will use the space and what compromises you are willing to make.

Practical tips for making a decision

Before you commit, spend time in both types of room if you can. Visit showrooms or friends' homes to feel the difference in light and temperature. Think about the orientation of your house: a south-facing glazed room will get far more solar gain than a north-facing one. Consider the existing heating and cooling. A conservatory may need underfloor heating, radiators, or even air conditioning to be comfortable in winter and summer. An orangery, with its better insulation, may only need a modest heating source.

Ventilation is important in both. Roof vents, opening windows, and possibly a ceiling fan in an orangery help prevent stuffiness. In a conservatory, you may need more vents because the glass traps heat. Good ventilation also helps reduce condensation, which can be a problem in rooms with high humidity from plants or cooking.



Finally, think about resale value. A well-designed orangery that matches the house style and provides usable space tends to appeal to buyers. A conservatory that is too hot or too cold may be seen as a negative. If you plan to stay in your home for many years, your own comfort matters more than resale. If you might move soon, consider what a future buyer would value.

Making the right choice for your home

Both orangeries and conservatories can add light, space, and enjoyment to a home. The decision comes down to how you intend to use the room and how much you value year-round comfort. A conservatory gives you maximum glass and a connection to the outdoors, but it

demands more effort to keep it comfortable. An orangery offers a more solid, insulated structure that naturally creates more comfortable year round spaces, making it a practical choice for everyday living. By weighing the pros and cons of each, you can choose the option that best fits your lifestyle, your home's architecture, and your budget.