Cleaning a retractable roof covering

November 9, 2021

Over time, the light transmission of retractable roof or wall coverings may be reduced due to:

- UV radiation
- Dust or dirt accumulation
- Algae accumulation on the upper or lower side
- The impact of chemicals used outside or inside of the house

Unfortunately, it is not possible to improve light transmission if the cause is due to either UV radiation or chemicals.

Dirt, dust, and algae can usually be removed using a power washer. However, care must be taken not to use excessive pressure especially if the roof covering is beginning to weaken due to age or chemicals since excessive water pressure may cause physical damage to the covering.

If algae growth is occurring, then it may be beneficial to use a biological solvent to help make it easier to remove the algae. The retractable roof coverings are made using polyethylene and polypropylene it is critical to make sure that any chemicals do not attack polyethylene or polypropylene. Examples of chemicals or compounds that should NOT be used are:

- Sulphur
- Chlorine
- Iron
- Bromine derivatives
- Petroleum
- Copper sulphates.

An example of a biological solvent that can be used is Virkon.
https://biosecurite.vetoquinol.ca/eng/content/virkon-greenhouse#tab_section_0

If using a biological agent, it is always recommended to first apply it to a 1m x 1m (3' x 3') area and then wait 4 weeks to see if there has been any visual change or change in texture to the roof covering. If there has been any change, then discontinue use of the chemical agent.

When applying a biological agent to clean the upper surface of the roof, some growers have retracted the roof covering 15cm (6") and then raised a sprinkler head up through the roof opening to broadcast the spray over the top of the roof covering. It is recommended that the house is empty when cleaning any roof covering and to ensure that the cleaning agent is washed off the roof to ensure that any residue doesn't drip on the plants either from rain or condensation.