



Green Outside, Green Inside

By Wendy Marks
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There are a lot of studies about the health benefits of indoor plants. Much of what I am going to write about here is taken from NASA studies and the American Lung Association. NASA is, of course, concerned about creating good indoor air quality because of the challenges filtering the air in a space station so that people can live healthily. The American Lung Association is more focused on disease issues; they want the public to know all the factors that contribute to lung disease. On a more aesthetic note, plants add life to an environment and make us feel better just by seeing, smelling and touching their leaves and flowers.

I am writing this now because so many of us will be turning on air conditioners soon and blocking out fresh air. I am someone who suffers from seasonal allergies, so I do need to use an air cleaner at night and close the windows at times. But indoor air quality is an important issue all year.

Here is what the American Lung Association has to say:

"Indoor air quality can cause or contribute to the development of infections, lung cancer and chronic lung disease such as asthma. People who already have lung disease are at greater risk...Here is a list of some of the chemicals that can harm your body:

"Volatile organic compounds, second hand smoke, residential wood- burning, radon, pet dander, nitrogen dioxide, mold and dampness, lead, formaldehyde, floods and water damage, dust mites and dust, cockroaches, cleaning supplies, and household chemicals."

So we need to deal with indoor pollutants year-round. If you are working in an office with inoperable windows, you may be rebreathing really unhealthy air. The same is true, of course, in winter when we keep our windows closed most of the time.



When we exhale we produce carbon dioxide. That's great for plants, but not so great for humans. Our cleaning products, our furniture and rugs, even our food and our cooking create gasses that are not good for our health— significant quantities of benzene and formaldehyde, to name two. In fact, I've read some studies recently showing that indoor air quality is significantly worse than it is outdoors. That may sound counterintuitive— we are now providing standards for outdoor pollution but none for indoor pollution.

I try to not state a problem without trying to find a solution. Here's where we come back to NASA and the space stations. NASA has identified plants that they feel are the most effective in helping clean the air indoors. Here's my take on the list.

Aloe Vera is great to have in the house. It can be used for the occasional cut or burn. It is super easy to grow and very hard to kill, and is a major player in absorbing benzene which is prevalent in rugs, furniture and cleaners in your environment. It's a great choice, especially if you don't have a green thumb.

Peace lily. I love the symbolism of the peace lily, and when you look at it, it does make you feel kind of peaceful. It has beautiful white flowers on long stems that point toward heaven. The peace lily is capable of reducing the impurities in the air by about 60%; it also removes mold spores from the air and uses them to feed its roots. In a bathroom, it can help with mildew on tiles, and can absorb vapors of chemicals from plastic shower curtains.

Spider plants, those ubiquitous stringy-looking things, are able to take 90% of mold, algae, and dust out of the air. They absorb formaldehyde and CO₂. They're also very hard to kill, for those of you who don't have green thumbs.

English ivy is terrific if you have pets. It absorbs airborne fecal matter (not something I want to think about very often, but I do have pets), also formaldehyde and benzene which are very prevalent in office environments.

Boston ferns are awfully pretty and they actually humidify the air, which can be of great service during the winter when indoor air is so dry. They also absorb formaldehyde.

Heart leaf philodendrons are good for homes that don't have pets or small children, because the plants are toxic if eaten. They also remove formaldehyde and other chemicals and are very easy to grow.

Eucalyptus smells fantastic; its scent actually helps prevent and cure colds and flus. Just smelling the air can help respiratory problems.

Chinese evergreen. The cool thing about this plant is that the longer you have it and the older it gets, the more pollutants it absorbs.

So let's take our tips from both NASA and the American Lung Association and use these natural air cleaners to make our indoor air quality safe and free of chemicals and pollutants.

So let's green our inside world, improve our health, cheer our spirits, and enjoy living with our green neighbors year round!

Namaste,
Wendy