

Greening the Indoors

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Many businesses and corporations put plants in buildings because they look good, but study after study shows plants provide much more than just natural beauty. Plants are actually hard at work cleaning the air and reducing office noise and stress in the workplace.

When companies want to increase productivity and improve the quality of life for workers, managers usually don't put plants at the top of the list but perhaps they should, says indoor-plant specialist Larry Pliska.

According to NASA, workers are constantly bombarded with unseen fumes from carpets, furniture, office cleaning products, printers and photocopiers. Health experts say exposure to these toxic chemicals can result in dizziness, nausea, blurred vision and even respiratory problems.

Scientists have discovered many common indoor plants can remove noxious gases effectively. For example, English ivy (**figure A**), one of the smallest houseplants, does an excellent job of cleaning the air of toxins, especially benzene and trichloroethylene (TCE).



Plants in an office provide natural beauty *plus* a healthier environment, studies show.



Figure A



Figure B



Figure C

Peace lilies (**figure B**), *Dracaena marginata* (**figure C**), dwarf date palm (**figure D**), bamboo palm and Janet Craig dracaena (**figure E**) are also high-scoring clean-air promoters.



Figure D



Figure E

Even a single plant can make a difference. In one Texas A&M University study, researchers discovered that employees in rooms with a leafy plant or a simple vase of flowers produced 15 percent more ideas and innovations in the workplace.

Plant-filled rooms contain 50 to 60 percent fewer airborne molds than rooms without plants. By cleaning workplace air, plants can reduce employee sick leave.

With health and safety in mind, many companies are realizing the benefits of interior landscaping. An atrium at the Galleria Office Building in suburban Detroit uses natural light and numerous low plantings as a haven for weary workers.



This atrium in suburban Detroit uses natural light and low plantings as a haven for workers.

At its world headquarters in downtown Detroit, General Motors has invested approximately \$500,000 in plantings. The automaker recently transformed an old parking garage into a five-story winter garden complete with numerous palms, white birds and underplantings.



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Not only are they beneficial at work, plants also promote good health in the home. It's estimated the average home should have at least eight live plants. Use bromeliads (**figure F**) to brighten up an interior space. Succulents (**figure G**) are excellent plants for the home because they grow at room temperature and store water in their leaves.

The key to growing any plant is proper light and care. With most people spending up to 90 percent of their time indoors, plants are an inexpensive way to stay healthier and happier.



Figure F



Figure G