

CAN HOUSE PLANTS Clean the Air in Your House?

House plants are great for decoration, but they serve an even more important purpose. They help clean the air you breathe.

During the early 1970s, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) discovered that the air inside Sky Lab 3 was contaminated with more than 100 toxic substances.

NASA needed a way to ensure clean air in its spacecraft. So they put environmental engineer Bill Wolverton, Ph.D., to the task. After much research, he found a simple, natural answer: plants.

Dr. Wolverton knew that plants recycle oxygen, so he placed different plants in sealed chambers into which he injected common indoor air pollutants, such as benzene, formaldehyde, and trichloroethylene, to see if the plants would break down the toxins. He didn't have to wait long. Within 24 hours, Boston fern, dracaena, Ficus benjamina (rubber plant), and chrysanthemum eliminated up to 90% of the poisons in the chambers.

Which Plants Work Best?

Dozens of plants are effective at removing pollutants from indoor air. The plants absorb the chemical through tiny holes in their leaves, and bacteria in the roots are plants excellent recyclers, but they also get better with time.

"The longer a plant is exposed to certain chemicals, the more effective it becomes at removing them," says Dr. Wolverton.

Below is a list of the most effective plants for removing common indoor air pollutants, such as formaldehyde, carbon monoxide, benzene, and trichloroethylene. Plants in the palm family are the best at removing volatile organic compounds from indoor air, according to Dr. Wolverton.

Bamboo palm, Chinese evergreen, English Ivy, Chrysanthemum, Corn plant,* Diffenbachia, Mother-in-law's tongue, Janet Craig,* Peace lily, Marginata,* Spider Plant, Warneckii,* Golden Pothos, Wandering Jew, Rubber Plant/ *(a type of Dracaena)

Two potted plants per 100 square feet of floor space will help clean and freshen the air in a home. Dr. Wolverton suggests placing a plant within your "personal breathing zone" a space six to eight cubic feet around where you work at your computer, watch television, or sleep. Placing several inches of aquarium gravel over the soil in the plant container will help prevent the formation of mold, a common allergen.

Plants Only Part of the Picture

Although the experiments of Dr. Wolverton and other scientists indicate that plants can remove contaminants from indoor air, the EPA notes that most research to date has used only small chambers. Therefore, the results cannot necessarily be applied to large offices and entire homes. The EPA maintains that the ability of plants to improve indoor air quality is limited compared with the effectiveness of proper ventilation.

-DEBRAH MITCHELL/WWW.EPA.GOV AMERICAN JOURNAL OF THE MEDICAL SCIENCES.

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Seven Ways to Stop Smoking

The Key to Quitting

One thing to keep in mind is that almost everyone who quits has to try more than once, "says Anne Davis, MD, past president of the American Lung Association. "You shouldn't be discouraged. The key to quitting, say the experts, is patience and perseverance.

How to do it—keep these points in mind when you quit:

Know why you are quitting—

pick a reason that you believe in, be it for your family or for yourself. If you believe in your reason, it's easier to stop.

Change your environment—Worry about not smoking for just one day, and not the rest of your life. Besides, it gets easier to stave off the desire the longer

you don't smoke. The nicotine will be gone from your system in three to five days, after a month the worst of the withdrawal symptoms will go away.

Taper off—Some studies show that a majority of permanent quitters

achieved their goal by quitting "cold turkey." But tapering off is another approach that works better for some. *The key to tapering off is to cut down the number of cigarettes you smoke each day.* One way to do this is to delay the first cigarette of the day. Try the two-hour approach—if you have your first



MARGINATA (A TYPE OF DRACAENA)

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cigarette at 7 AM try and wait until 9 AM for a couple of days and then push it back to 11, and so on. By the end of four weeks you won't be smoking at all. **Overwhelm the addiction**—Think about the things that lead to lighting up, and don't do them. Avoid places, like bars, where smoking is part of the atmosphere.

Practice the three D's—When you feel like a smoke, **Delay**. Try to think of something else. Breathe deeply, and count to ten slowly as you do so. **Drink** water; which helps flush the nicotine out of your system. **Do** something else: chew gum, tap a pencil or crack your knuckles until the craving passes.

Keep a **Diary**—Each time you feel like a cigarette, write down the time of day, what you're doing, and how badly you want a drag on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 for the worst craving. A diary, says Dr. Davis, helps you to learn to unlearn the almost Pavlovian responses that make you want to smoke.

Work with your health care provider—for advice on nicotine patches, gum, inhalers or combining counseling, support groups, or classes sponsored by the American Lung Associations. —JEFF SIEGEL/AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION/ TOBACCO INFORMATION AND PREVENTION SOURCE (TIPS)



Help for Fearful Flyers

Tips for the Just Plane Scared

For uneasy flyers, there are some simple methods that may soothe anxiety:

- Eat a nutritious meal before boarding to keep blood sugar levels even.
- Get to the airport early, since rushing can contribute to nervousness.
- If possible, meet your flight crew.
- Watch the safety demonstration and study the emergency instruction in your seat pocket.
- Pack a light snack. Seattle-based flying phobia therapist Robin Fay-McNair, MS, recommends “foods that make you feel like you're taking care of yourself.
- Confide in a friendly seatmate--that might distract you and put you at ease.
- Drink enough water to prevent dehydration.
- Avoid alcohol and sedatives, since they may contribute to feelings of loss of control. Effects are difficult to predict during flight because of changes in altitude pressure.
- Stay busy. Listen to soothing music, watch the in-flight movie, read a great book, or work. If safety conditions allow, stroll around the cabin.
- Practice deep breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.

If Tips Aren't Enough

But what if you can't even force yourself near an airport? What if the quality of your life is suffering because you absolutely cannot fly?

It's time for professional assistance, there are various resources available for coping techniques, including clinics, airline-run self-help groups, private therapists and even virtual-reality therapy.

The National Institute of Mental Health suggest consulting your family physician. Your doctor can rule out other medical conditions and refer you to a mental health professional.

—TERRY MILLER SHANNON/BELIEFNET HEALTH AND HEALING

The **Fifth of May** is a holiday that commemorates Mexico's victory over the French army in 1862. In the city of Puebla, where the momentous battle took place, the celebration has a grand fair – replete with music, games and great food.

Combine all ingredients except lime and sugar blend on high until smooth. Wet rim of a glass with lime wedge, then dip glass rim into sugar. Pour drink into glass and serve immediately.



Caliente Colada “a fruity alcohol-free drink to usher in May!”

- 1/4 cup pineapple juice
- 3 Tbl. cream of coconut
- 2 tsp. Jalapeno Pepper sauce
- 1 cup crushed ice
- 1 lime wedge
- Sugar, for the glass rim

The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance, and even our very existence depends on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to our lives.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN