The best houseplants to improve air quality

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Studies show we spend close to 92 percent of our day indoors. What’s more, certain air pollutants are 100 times more concentrated in our homes than they are outside. This means the quality of the indoor air we breathe is important for our overall health.

Indoor air pollution occurs when certain pollutants from particles and gases contaminate the air of indoor areas. These toxic particles and gases, called volatile organic compounds (VOC), are released from the synthetic materials in our daily spaces, including carpets, vinyl floors, cleaning products, air fresheners, paint, upholstery fabrics and more. Two of the most common indoor VOC examples are benzene, found in some plastics, fabrics, pesticides and cigarette smoke, and formaldehyde found in some cosmetics, dish detergent, fabric softener and carpet cleaners.

Walking into a home or office building is not likely to make you sick immediately but, over time, your body can absorb potentially toxic substances in the air. Exposure to indoor air pollution can resemble symptoms similar to a cold or seasonal allergies, including headache, scratchy throat, dizziness, fatigue, runny nose and itchy watery eyes. These symptoms usually disappear within a couple hours after leaving the polluted environment.

While we are exposed to indoor air pollution daily, the good news is you don’t need to invest in expensive air filtration and ventilation systems. There is another very practical and affordable way to clean the air indoors: houseplants.

Studies conducted at the University of Georgia, Pennsylvania State University and NASA have all demonstrated that potted plants in the home can absorb harmful chemicals through their leaves and roots. In a study with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, NASA researchers discovered that indoor plants were able to remove up to 87 percent of air toxins within 24 hours.

There are other benefits to houseplants, as well. Researchers at The Royal College of Agriculture found students were more attentive and more likely to return to class if there were plants in the lecture halls. The Agricultural University of Norway found potted plants reduced stress in office workers and lowered the number of sick days taken. Additionally, they found plants in the workplace decreased fatigue and increased productivity.

Experts recommend one plant (6 to 8 inches in diameter) for every 100 square feet. In office buildings, they recommend one large plant for every two employees. While that may sound like an excessive number of plants for a large house or building, keep in mind having some plants is better than having none at all. When adding plants to your home or office, be sure to purchase them in clay pots, as plastic pots can release VOCs.

Here are five of the most beneficial houseplants for improving indoor air quality:

**Peace Lily**

This tropical plant breaks down and neutralizes toxic gases like benzene, formaldehyde and carbon monoxide. This is a great choice to add to your office, as some studies show they absorb electromagnetic radiation from digital devices. They acclimate to a variety of indoor environments, do not require much light, and droop when water is needed.

**English Ivy**

A common outside climbing plant, this ivy may reduce the amount of mold in the air inside your home, as well as absorb toxins from cigarette smoke. It is said to be fantastic for asthma and allergies. It is easy to grow and care for but can he harmful if eaten, so it is wise to keep the plant away from pets and children.

**Mother-in-Law’s Tongue or Snake Plant**This plant is easy to care for and grows well with little maintenance. It increases the oxygen supply in the room, removes benzene, nitric oxide and formaldehyde. Do not overwater this plant, as it will rot if the soil is moist for too long. This plant may also be toxic when ingested, so take care if you have pets and children.

**Bamboo, Reed or Lady Palm**This plant thrives in low light and easily tolerates the warm and cool air conditions of the home environment. It readily absorbs out-gassing from furniture, so if you have purchased a new chair or couch you may want to decorate with this palm. It can grow up to 6 feet tall and add elegance to any room.

**Aloe Vera**Aloe is well known for its healing properties and is especially soothing for burns. However, it is also known to remove formaldehyde from the air. Aloe is a smart choice for a sunny kitchen window.

Adding just a few potted plants can go a long way toward improving your indoor air quality and reducing health risks.