

Winter Companions

As I write it is raining outside, possible snow tonight. There will still be some warm days to come but the days are shorter and colder. Time to pull up the tomato plants and plant some winter vegetables.

I miss the flowers and foliage of summer so I turn to houseplants to fill the gap in winter. Summertime I banish my houseplants to the outdoors on the north porch where there is only shade but lots of bright light. They love the extra humidity of the outside air and they flourish. Now that the nights are getting cold I bring them back in to give some life to my house in winter.

Houseplants not only help beautify my house but they help cleanse the air! Not much on a flower show but they come in many foliage colors, are easy to grow and require only minimal light.

NASA was the first to experiment with detoxifying the air with plants. While some plants filter benzene from the air, others filter formaldehyde. The plants most effective in filtering a variety of chemicals are Epipremnum aureum (Golden Pothos), Spathiphyllum (Peace Lily), Sansevieria (Snake Plant or Mother-in-law's Tongue), Dracaena, and Chrysanthemum. The University of Minnesota says that it takes 15-18 6-8 inch pot plants to clean the air in a 1800 sq ft house. That's a lot of plants you say? Yes, but some like the Snake plant are very low maintenance and isn't some clean air better than none? Besides doesn't it just make you feel good to have a couple mums in your house for their color?

Golden Pothos for example come in a variety of colors, Gold, Marble

Queen, Jade, Neon and Pearls & Jade. They are one of the easiest to grow. They can grow in soil or water. These are the plants you see often in offices, trailing down a file cabinet.

Spathiphyllum or Peace Lily comes in different sizes, from table top to huge leafed floor varieties. They are relatively easy but need lots of bright light (not sun) and some fertilizer now and then BUT they have the added benefit of flowers.

Sansevieria or Snake Plant is VERY easy to grow. It likes to be pot bound, grows straight up so requires little space, takes little water and very little light. It is the perfect plant for your dark corner.

Dracaena or Dumb Cane comes in my sizes and shapes as well. This plant can take moderate light, looks tropical and fits into many decorating schemes. Not too much water for this one, water when you stick your finger down into the soil and it is dry.

Chrysanthemums are year round favorite. Floral varieties are forced to bloom on demand. They come in a wide assortment of colors but do require water to keep their blooms. Like fruit, the cooler you keep them, the longer they will last. On a porch in winter they have been known to look great for 2 months. In the house, away from heater vents and woodstoves they can last several weeks. When the flowers are spent you can cut them back to 2-3 inches and plant them in the yard. Some of the varieties will be hardy to our cold winters, others not.

Other houseplants that are beneficial are Spider Plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*) , Weeping Fig (*Ficus Benjamina*) and Gerbera Daisies, just to list a few.

There are many studies to prove that plants make us feel happy. They brighten our environment, make oxygen from CO₂ and filter our air. Maybe that's why we choose to live in the foothills with it's many trees?

Now, not only think about your own environment but how you could make an effect on someone else. As you are thinking of the perfect Christmas gift, why not give a plant?