

Houseplants

12.19.2016

Q: I would like to give my friend a house plant as a hostess gift but she has cats so I don't want to give her one that is poisonous. Can you recommend a houseplant to give her?

A: Houseplants are a wonderful gift, not only do they help beautify the house but they help cleanse the air! NASA was the first to experiment with detoxifying the air with plants. While some plants filter benzene from the air, others filter formaldehyde and other household toxins. The University of Minnesota says that it takes approximately 15 (8- inch pot size) plants to clean the air in a 1800 sq ft house.

Unfortunately most of the plants listed as the best at filtering the air are also toxic to cats. However all houseplants will filter the air and brighten our mood while doing so. The Gold Fish plant, Spider Plant, all Peperomias and most of the small palms are easy to grow and non-toxic to cats. They take moderate light and fits into many decorating schemes. Other house plants that are a bit harder to grow but that are cat safe are the Prayer Plant, the Phalaenopsis Orchid, the Polka Dot plant and many of the Begonias. These plants like bright filtered light, may require special watering practices and warmer house temperatures at night.

With all houseplants avoid placing them in trouble spots, such as near heat or air conditioning ducts, on electronics or a radiator or between a curtain and a frosty window. Remember that air conditions can be very dry in the winter because of heated air. You can provide a little extra humidity with a pebble tray and some misting.

House plants should only be fertilized every other month with a good houseplant fertilizer and allowed to rest without fertilizer during the winter months. They should also not be overwatered, and at least once a month should be put under the shower spray to flush accumulated salts out of the pot and rinse dust of the leaves.

There are many studies to prove that plants make us feel happy. They brighten our environment, make oxygen from CO₂ and filter our air. During the short winter days when many folks are feeling depressed a plant will help to cheer them up. As you are thinking of the perfect Christmas gift, why not give a plant?

For more information on house plants that are safe for pets, both cats and dogs, check out the ASPCA's website. <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>