

Breathe Easy With Indoor Plants

By Lee Oliphant

Q. I've heard that indoor plants actually clean indoor air. Is this true?

A. Houseplants can be beautiful and help to clean the air we breathe. Research shows that common houseplants, and some potted blooming plants, fight indoor air pollution. They absorb pollutants like benzene, formaldehyde, and trichloroethylene, commonly found in building materials, household cleaners, and carpets, and rendering them harmless. The leaves in these plants absorb the pollutants, sending them to their roots where they become food for microbes.

[NASA](#), has been conducting extensive experiments to find which plants are most effective in removing toxins from our indoor environment. Flowering plants such as gerbera daisy and chrysanthemums were found effective in removing benzene. A good excuse to bring those pretty flowers indoors. Spathiphyllum (Peace Lily), Pothos (anyone can grow it), and Dracaena, were found to remove pollutants and gasses. Also effective are Areca and reed palms, dwarf date palms, Boston and Australian sword ferns, English ivy, rubber plants, Sansevieria and Ficus benjamina.

According to research, one plant can clean a 10' by 10' room with a ceiling of average height. If your ceilings are exceptionally high you may need 2-3 plants to effectively clean the air in an average-sized living space.

Most of the above "air vacuums", are easy to grow, and need only indirect light. They have few requirements other than dust-free leaves and a regular watering schedule. The University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) has an online publication on houseplants, their benefits and their care at <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/2193/33861.pdf>. You may request a copy of this publication and other information on houseplants at the Master Gardener's Desk, address below.