



Trowel Talk!

November, 2010

Houseplants: a breath of fresh air!

There is a debate among those of us who love plants and who are always looking for more reasons to have them share our living quarters: Can houseplants significantly purify the air in our homes?

For some time now we have been encouraged to keep indoor plants to help provide healthier air. We know that in the basic process of photosynthesis, plants, using energy from the sun or other light sources, combine carbon dioxide and water to form sugars with oxygen as a byproduct. As plants absorb water through their roots, air is pulled into the root zone, where microorganisms facilitate the breaking down of chemicals into sources of food and energy.

Why is this important? As we effectively seal our buildings to be more energy efficient there is a negative impact on the quality of indoor air: We breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide and as we reduce the frequency with which the air is replaced the level of carbon dioxide in that air increases.

Besides carbon dioxide, the air in our homes contains other impurities such as benzene and formaldehyde – emitted from synthetic building materials – and it has been demonstrated, in carefully controlled conditions, that

plants also remove these chemicals from the air. There is, however, considerable debate about how significant this contribution is. A recent study done in a real life situation indicates that to reduce formaldehyde levels by just 11%, it would take many more plants than is practicable.



Spider plant



Peace Lily

Based on the information at hand, we recognize that indoor plants can help to purify air to a certain extent and study results show that some of our most popular houseplants are good at it. The lowly spider plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*), despite its very narrow leaves, has been found to remove formaldehyde and benzene. Other common plants that have been shown to remove chemicals include dracaenas, florist's mums (*Chrysanthemum x morifolium*) Chinese evergreens (*Aglaonema commutatum*), palms such as reed palm (*Chamaedorea seifrizii*) or Kentia palm (*Howea forsteriana*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata* 'Boston-

ensis'), peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*), and the weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*). What's even better is that most of these plants can do well under relatively low light conditions, except for English ivy, the spider plant and weeping fig that need medium to bright light.

Plants are integral parts of our interior decoration, they provide us with a lifetime hobby, and in our climate they are our winter garden. At this time of year, many of us give or receive indoor plants such as Christmas cactus (offering us bright flowers just in time for the holidays) and Norfolk Pine (a performer that can do double duty as an apartment-size Christmas tree).



Norfolk Pine

What could be a more perfect and simple relationship for our indoor living and working spaces than plants and humans? Plants take in carbon dioxide and water and produce oxygen: Humans breathe in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Add the potential for elimination of volatile chemicals and you need to ask yourself why you are delaying that trip to the plant nursery.

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November TO DO List

- As the ground starts to freeze, protect tender trees and shrubs.
- Wrap the trunks of young trees to prevent splitting due to freeze/thaw cycles.
- Rodent damage to trees and shrubs can be avoided by either wrapping tree trunks with plastic tree wraps or painting on a repellent such as "Skoot".
- Continue to water trees and shrubs that were planted this past year until the ground freezes completely.

Tip of the Month:

Garden tools should be properly cleaned and stored at the end of the gardening season.

Tool maintenance gear includes a scrub brush, abrasive pads (the kind used on a ceramic stove top), paint thinner, boiled (NOT raw) linseed oil, fine grain sandpaper, 3-in-1 oil, a small round file and a hand-held sharpening stone. All of these can be purchased at hardware stores. Some rags and heavy-duty paper towels complete the kit.



Stainless steel tools such as a transplant spade, edger and garden fork will not rust, but will benefit from a good cleaning. Scrub them with the abrasive pad and then use paint thinner to wipe off any gummy residue. This cleaning should bring them back to looking almost new. The same treatment works wonders on small hand tools.



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

No advice clinics until Spring 2011

SPEAKING EVENTS:

None scheduled until the 2011



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

After cleaning your pruning saw, sharpen the beveled edges of the teeth with a file. A file can be used to smooth out nicks on the blades of shovels and cultivators too.

For unfinished wooden handles, use sandpaper to smooth any rough spots and then rub them with boiled linseed oil to protect them from drying and weathering.



Cutting tools such as secateurs, shears, and loppers need sharpening too, but this type of work is better done inside since it is easier to clean them if they are taken apart. Use the same cleaning method as described earlier. Then sharpen the cutting edges with several careful

strokes of the sharpening stone. Apply some 3-in-1 oil to the hinges and blades as you re-assemble them and then adjust the tension until they move easily. A good, sharp pair of secateurs should be able to cut paper.



This isn't hard work but the results are very satisfactory. Now when spring arrives, you and your tools will be ready.

(excerpts, with permission, from an article by Kelly Noel, Master Gardener – March 2006)

*There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments.
~Janet Kilburn Phillips*



Rain Barrel Truckload Sale

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10:00am – 2:00pm
parking lot at Building 72
Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm
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