

Be well

SCIENCE-BACKED
WAYS TO BUILD
A STRONGER,
CALMER YOU

Green therapy

The best and most beautiful way to make your home more tranquil and less toxic? Grow something!

BY LISA LOMBARDI

People's longing to connect with nature and other forms of life has a name: biophilia.



THE HUMBLE HOUSEPLANT HAS wellness superpowers—just ask NASA. Starting in the late 1960s, its scientists began looking for a way to improve air quality in a closed-environment vessel (aka spacecraft). What they eventually discovered: Not only do plants add oxygen and take in carbon dioxide, they can also remove dangerous pollutants called volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

To this day, houseplants are still the gold-standard tool for cleaning indoor air, which, according to the EPA, can be even more polluted than the atmosphere outside. “One of the simplest, cheapest, and probably most effective methods to reduce the concentration of VOCs in

indoor air is phytoremediation—using plants to remove contamination,” says Vadoud Niri, PhD, associate professor and director of the chemistry graduate program at SUNY Oswego. He estimates that just one medium-size plant should clean a space of about 1,076 square feet (research in this area is still ongoing).

Perhaps more unexpectedly, plants can aid in healing: Hospital patients with plants and flowers in their room reported less anxiety, fatigue, and pain, according to a study in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. Plants can even help you stay emotionally serene. Just being around greenery dials down the body’s reaction to stress, according to an

earlier similar study.

Call it plant therapy, and fill your prescription, because modern life is becoming less and less leafy. By one survey’s estimate, around 90 percent of us spend close to 22 hours a day inside! Houseplants are filling a void in our shut-in, digital-first lives, says Ryan Lee, the co-founder of Rooted NYC, a Brooklyn, NY-based business that delivers potted plants nationwide. “Our generation is unique in that we spend almost all our waking hours looking at the most unnatural thing in the world, a blue screen,” he notes. “Once people see thriving greenery and feel a plant’s texture, it gets them back to their roots—nature.”

Six resilient plants

Top picks for the gardening-challenged, from Rooted NYC co-founder Ryan Lee.



1 ZZ Plant

Bring this to work. “It’s the most low-maintenance, low-light plant ever.”
Care: It needs low to moderate indirect light; water only when top 2-3 inches of soil is dry.

2 Marble Queen Pothos

“It vines down so it’s great on a shelf. And it has a nice aesthetic jade green color with white marbling.”
Care: It needs medium to bright indirect light; water every 1-2 weeks in spring and summer (every 2-3 weeks in the off-season).

3 Snake Plant

“It’s one of the best at cleaning the air and can adapt to most indoor light situations.”
Care: Water it every 7-10 days in spring and summer, and every 2-3 weeks in the winter.

4 Hedgehog Aloe

“It’s a cousin to aloe vera, and has the same healing properties. Its shoots aren’t as juicy, but you can still apply the gel found inside the leaves to wounds.”
Care: It needs direct light; water it every 2-3 weeks (even less frequently in winter).

5 Kimberly Queen Fern

“Great for a bathroom because it likes low light and loves humidity.”
Care: Water it every 7-10 days in spring and summer (10-14 days in the off-season).

6 Dracaenas

This “very low care” plant removed 94 percent of the acetone from the air in a SUNY Oswego study.
Care: It needs medium to bright indirect light; water every 7-10 days in spring and summer (10-14 days in the off-season).