



Integrative Manual Therapy

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Client Services

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• **Improve Your Environment**

• Helping Yourself

Improve Your Environment

Making Your Home And Work Environment More Livable

A recent Lung Association test indicated the quality of indoor air can be far worse than some "polluted" air outdoors. In Los Angeles, "staying inside is probably worse than going outside during a smog alert," said Lydia Paneri of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. Noxious gases from such innocently seeming items as particle board used in furniture, cleaning materials, foam insulation, electronic equipment, carpets, synthetic clothing, paper towels and even facial tissues can cause headaches, nausea and long-term illness. Fortunately the levels of potentially harmful gases can be reduced by putting live plants in your home or work environment.

Last year a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) study revealed that live plants can clean and purify the air by reducing the amounts of formaldehyde, benzene and carbon monoxide in tightly sealed modern buildings. Plants are especially important in light of the growing number of climate controlled and energy efficient buildings. According to Dr. B. C. Wolverton, the NASA investigator in charge of environmental research, "the more foliage, the healthier the environment is going to be." A single plant, three or four feet high, can clean the air in a 100 square foot space, explained Lydia Paneri. They are more effective in soil that contains activated charcoal, which traps chemicals so they can be taken up by the roots, she added. Paneri noted that plants convert the chemicals into water, oxygen and other harmless by-products.

Answering the question, "Will any plant do or are some better than others?", the NASA study listed 6 of the more aggressive "pollution fighters". They are Philodendrons, Gerbera Daisy, Chrysanthemums, Spathiphyllums (Peace Lily), Dracaena Warnecki and Dracaena Marginata (Dragon Tree). Spider plants, English Ivy, Bamboo Palms and other ordinary houseplants can also take chemicals from the air. Wolverton estimated that 15 to 20 Golden Pathos and Spider Plants can clean and refresh the air in an 1800 square foot home. In tests with both formaldehyde and benzene in small spaces, Philodendrons cut air toxicity levels by more than 87percent in a 24-hour period, according to the NASA study. As a result, growers in Florida, where many Toronto plants come from, are now touting their flowering and green

plants as "Clean Air Machines".

"There are several things to consider when choosing a plant, according to Merion Clement, owner of Simmons Flowers, a Toronto floral and interior landscape design company on Parliament Street. Light levels are probably the most important. According to Clement several of the "pollution fighters" do well in relatively low light situations. The Dragon Tree, Golden Pathos and Bamboo Palm require 50 to 150 foot candles or the light produced by one candle. The Spider plant is a medium light plant, while flowering plants such as Chrysanthemums and Gerbera Daisies are high light plants, which require 250 foot candles of light or more.

A trend towards energy conservation is making it more difficult for plants to get enough light. Energy conservation often means less lighting in homes and offices and more spot-lights illuminating only a specific workspace, said Tina Clement, manager of Simmons' interior plantscaping division. Heavy bronze or smoke tint on the windows, glare-cutting screens on lights and window covering can all decrease the light available to plants, added Clement, who feels a light meter is indispensable in helping clients to realize that moving a plant from one corner to another may kill it, if the light levels are different. In addition to light level changes Tina Clement also educates customers about the effect of office renovations on plants. Recently, one of her clients made no effort to move plants out of the office during renovation. As a result the plants became dusty and dirty. Some of the sensitive ones developed spider mites, said Clement. Business and home owners with plants need to realize that they are living and need proper care. They should pay for a plant specialist to come in at least once a week to care for the plants or learn the proper care themselves. Marion Clement noted plant care personnel need to know plants, the disease that might affect each one and how to prevent or control pest infestations.

Proper watering techniques are critical to the survival of plants and vary according to the plant, light levels and the season. A good employer will make sure their plant care technicians will continue to learn as they work, keeping abreast of new trimming or pruning techniques, new plants and systems for watering and fertilizing, said Clement, adding "businesses are not just paying to have a bit of water thrown on the plants. "One way, Simmons trying to educate clients is with the design of their plant care technicians T-shirts. The "Invest in Green to keep the air clean" logo has been very successful in encouraging people to ask questions, said Clement, who recently attended a conference for women executives and entrepreneurs. She displayed "pollution fighters" like Spathiphyllum, Philodendron and Dracaena Warnecki and talked with women about what they are doing in their offices. She discussed how women can use plants as "clean air machines" to create healthy and attractive indoor environments.

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