CELEBRATING 24 YEARS!

Welcome to my weekly series!

ASK THE LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

SPRIGS & TWIGS HAS BEEN DESIGNATED AN ESSENTIAL BUSINESS AND WE ARE OPEN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH CT GOVERNOR NED LAMONT'S EXECUTIVE ORDER 7H, DATED MARCH 20, 2020.

Now that winter is upon us and my house is closed up tight, I'm wondering if I could use houseplants to improve the air quality? Kathy

Absolutely. We often think about air pollution and the quality of the air outside our houses, but the air quality inside our houses is often worse, especially in the winter when windows and doors are shut. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are the source of toxins that show up in your home that affect the quality of air that you breathe. VOCs are carbon-based chemicals that easily evaporate ("off-gas") from a number of products in our homes. Common products that off-gas VOCs: paints, solvents, varnish, cosmetics, moth balls, carpets, adhesives, cleaning chemicals, disinfectants, nail polish remover and gasoline (to name a few). While there are literally thousands of VOCs, a few of the most common are: benzene, formaldehyde, and trichloroethylene, xylene and toluene and ammonia. A partial list of where these VOCs come from - Benzene is found in pesticides, detergents, rubber and plastics. Formaldehyde is off-gassed from building materials, glues, paints, dishwashing liquids, fertilizers and cigarette smoke. Trichloroethylene is often an ingredient in paint strippers, spot removers and fluids used in dry cleaning and rug cleaning. Xylene and toluene come from the use of paints, paint thinners, adhesives, synthetic fragrances, nail polish and cigarette smoke. Ammonia is used in many household cleaners and is used to make fertilizers. Measurements of VOCs in outside air and air inside houses show that concentrations of VOCs inside of your house can be up to 5 times higher than those outside. When the weather will allow it, open your windows to ventilate and exchange some of the inside air with outside air.

House plants will also help. Over twenty five years ago, NASA conducted a study looking at indoor plants for indoor air pollution abatement. The results showed that there are a number of plants that will remove different specific toxins from the air and researchers now recommend using a mix of two or three of them for every 100 square feet of floor space in your house. While many plants will only remove one or two of the toxins, there are several plants that remove all or most of the VOCs listed above. Those are: English Ivy (Hedera helix), Peace lily (Spathiphyllum 'Mauna Loa'), Varigated snake plant, mother-in-law's tongue (Sansevieria trifasciata 'Laurentii') and Florist chrysanthemum (Chrysanthemum morifolium). Of course, their effectiveness depends on the level of toxicity in the air. One word of caution however, each of the specific plants listed here are toxic to dogs and cats if ingested.

Be cautious of products you bring into your house, open the windows and ventilate when you can and bring in a variety of indoor house plants and know that not only do they make you feel better, but they are improving your health as well!

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