

Plants for Cleaner Air

Our modern buildings, offices and homes are so energy efficient today. The ever-rising cost of energy demands that our structures are more tightly sealed and heavily insulated. The air inside our buildings is often recirculated continually with little fresh outside air introduced.

However, many of today's building materials and our everyday office items release toxic gases which ideally would be removed through proper ventilation or open windows. But commonly, many of these toxins are left behind. Some common sources include:

- carpet, plywood, particle board, paneling, adhesives, paint, etc.
- copy machines toner and ink
- cleaning supplies
- dry cleaning solvents

Three of the more widely present volatile organic compounds (VOC's) are formaldehyde, benzene and trichloroethylene. These *VOC's* contribute to what is known as ***Sick Building Syndrome***.

Scientists have understood for decades that plants possess the ability to remove several toxic compounds from the indoor air we breathe.

*"The gas-exchange processes of green plants are well developed as a result of their need to take up, transform, and release gaseous materials such as carbon dioxide, oxygen and water vapor to support photosynthesis and respiration" *1*

Once absorbed by a plant these harmful compounds are used by the plant's own growth processes.

Some physical symptoms of *Sick Building Syndrome* include:

- headache
- eye, nose or throat irritation
- dry cough
- dry or itchy skin
- dizziness
- nausea
- acute sensitivity to odors

¹ taken from '*Studies on the Decontamination of Air by Plants*' by J. J. Cornejo, F. G. Munoz, C.Y. Ma and A. J. Stewart, *March 1999*

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While any plant may help cleanse our indoor air, the most important factor is the health and vitality of the plant – an actively growing and healthy plant is more efficient in the process. The following list of plants are some shown to be especially helpful:

1. Snake plant
2. Heartleaf ivy
3. Satin ivy
4. Pothos ivy
5. 'Janet Craig' dracaena
6. Peace lily
7. Corn plant
8. Fig trees (including Weeping fig, Fiddleleaf fig and Rubber tree)
9. Kentia palm
10. Lady palm