

WOMEN *for a Healthy* ENVIRONMENT

Indoor Air Pollution:

Houseplants That Remove Toxins from the Home

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranks indoor air pollution as one of the top 5 threats to public health and notes that people living in industrial societies spend as much as 90% of their lives indoors. Below are descriptions of common household plants that can improve indoor air quality by absorbing toxins. The ratings* are based on ease of growth and maintenance, resistance to pests, efficiency at removing chemical vapors, and transpiration rates (the higher the ranking, the better). Caution should be made when selecting plants and placing them in your home. Some may cause allergic reactions or be poisonous, so please keep away from children and pets!

- Aloe Vera (*Aloe barbadensis*) - This plant needs a lot of sun exposure to fully grow and a moderate amount of water. Aloe Vera has the ability to absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen at night, giving it a rating of **5.0**.
- Boston Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata* "Bostoniensis") - This plant is a little more high maintenance than other plants. The leaves must be misted and watered to keep them from turning brown and wilting. The Boston Fern is the best plant tested for removing air pollutants, especially formaldehyde, and adding humidity to the air, making it have an overall rating of **7.5**.
- Dragon Tree (*Dracaena marginata*) - This plant needs little sunlight and needs to be watered regularly. Dragon Trees are great for cleaning the air because they are one of the best plants to remove xylene and trichloroethylene, giving them an overall rating of **7.0**.
- English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) - It is easy to grow, as long as it is not exposed to high temperatures. They need sunlight, so make sure they are close to a window or else the ivy will lose its color. English Ivy's are effective in removing formaldehyde and have an overall rating of **7.8**.
- Florist's Mum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) - This plant produces bright big flowers on small plants for about six to eight weeks. They need to be in a cool



Aloe Vera



Dragon Tree

location, with exposure to light, and regular watering. Florist's Mums are effective in removing formaldehyde, benzene, and ammonia, giving it an overall rating of **7.4**.

- Gerbera Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii*) - This plant produces beautiful flowers, with full sun exposure and regular watering, this plant will thrive. It's valuable to indoor pollution removal because it is able to remove toxic gases, giving it an overall rating of **7.3**.
- Heart-Leaf Philodendron (*Philodendron oxycardium*) - This plant needs low light conditions and is perfect for the indoors. It's great for hanging baskets because it grows fairly slow. Its ability to remove some chemical vapors gives it a **6.3**.
- Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum* Sp.) - This plant produces a beautiful white lily and will reliably bloom indoors. They are effective in removing alcohols, acetone, trichloroethylene, benzene, and formaldehyde. Since the peace lily is able to remove so many chemicals from the air, it has an overall rating of **7.5**.
- Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) - This plant is best known during the holiday season, but it can be grown all year long if it is water thoroughly when dry. It has the ability to remove chemical vapors, giving it a **5.1**.
- Prayer Plant (*Maranta leuconeura* "Kerchoveana") - This plant is easy to grow, all it needs is a little sun and water and it's happy. It has the ability to remove chemical vapors, giving it a **6.0**.
- Rubber Plant (*Ficus Robusta*) - This plant needs little light and can tolerate cool temperatures. It's easy to grow and effective at removing formaldehyde. With an overall rating of **8.0**, it is the best of all the ficus plants at removing toxins from indoor environments
- Snake Plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) - This plant is tolerable to many conditions and is recommended for first time plant growers for its low maintenance. Snake plants are unique because at night they remove carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, giving them a rating of **6.3**.
- Tulip (*Tulipa gesneriana*) - This plant is a perfect seasonal plant, which needs a lot of exposure to light. Tulips are great for the indoors because they are able to remove formaldehyde, xylene, and ammonia from the air, giving it a rating of **4.7**.



Heart-Leaf Philodendron



Peace Lily



Rubber Plant



Snake Plant

Sources:

*Wolverton, B. C. *How to Grow Fresh Air: 50 Houseplants That Purify Your Home or Office*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1997. Print.

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