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Indoor Plants: Nature's Air Fresheners

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GARDEN NOTES

INDOOR PLANTS: NATURE'S AIR FRESHENERS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Most homes have at least one house plant. Possibly the most popular is the low-maintenance cactus. House plants serve to soften the hard interior and create interest by inviting nature into the home. Other benefits from house plants include higher humidity, added color and healthier air.

Aromatic plants bring into a room or house an often overlooked benefit. Not all house plants are fragrant, but some have a pleasant scent and thrive indoors. The long winter months, when only the smell of cooking fills the indoor air, is a good time to introduce some new fragrances that can help bring a glimpse of spring into the home, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

“Fragrant plants can help mask cooking and other odors, eliminating the need for air fresheners,” Goodspeed says. “It’s preferable to have a nice plant emitting a fragrant aroma than have the smell of burnt toast masked with the smell of ‘tree in a can.’”

He says scented geraniums are probably the most popular fragrant house plant. They do not thrive indoors, but will stay healthy if placed in a well lit location, plus there is a wide assortment of aromas. Among the most popular are lemon, almond, pine trees, peppermint, orange, pineapple and even chocolate.

However, one of the drawbacks with some scented geraniums is their scent is weak, Goodspeed explains. Some require that you rub the leaves to get a strong whiff of their fragrance. This would be fine, but most plants can only stand so much rubbing before they die.

“It’s the foliage of scented geraniums that carries the pleasant aroma,” he says. “These geraniums need to dry out between watering, and be fertilized only about once a month during the winter. In the summer they can be moved outdoors and allowed to bloom.”

Goodspeed says another blooming aromatic house plant is the gardenia. Lack of light is the biggest problem with getting a gardenia to grow and bloom indoors. They require a sun room, and do best in indirect light. In the winter they need to stay cool at night (55 to 60 degrees), and can be a high maintenance plant.

He suggests other flowering plants that may be easier to grow in the house: pink jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*), string of beads (*Senecio rowleyanus*), wax flower (*Stephanotis*

floribunda), and wax plant (Hoya). These plants all require some special care and bloom better in indirect light in a sun room or other well-lit location. They all should be allowed to slow down and rest during the winter, by reducing the fertilization and keeping them somewhat cooler.

Goodspeed says the Hoya, string of beads and wax flower are all vining plants and can be trained up a wire or trellis, or planted in a hanging basket. The flowers have a sweet fragrance that can be smelled throughout a small greenhouse or large room.

“The common hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*) can be planted in a pot and forced to bloom indoors during the winter months,” he says. “It also has a very sweet aroma that can fill a room. After they have bloomed and the foliage has died back, they can be planted outdoors and enjoyed for many springs to come. Buy new bulbs each year for forcing indoors.”

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