



# REWARDS AND RISKS of Indoor Plants

*Like everything, having house plants includes some risks and rewards. With a little planning and research, it is easy to safely add color and freshness to your home, office and other interior living spaces.*

Is having indoor plants good for mental and physical health? Numerous studies dating back more than 20 years suggest that there is a positive impact to having plants in indoor spaces. A few of these studies include:

- A 2009 study by Park and Madsen found that patients in hospital rooms with plants required less pain medication, had lower heart rates and blood pressure and experienced less fatigue and anxiety than patients without plants (DOI:10.1089/acm.2009.0075).
- Lohr, Pearson-Mims and Goodwin of Washington State University (1996) found that participants were more productive (12% quicker reaction on a computer task) and less stressed (lower systolic blood pressure) when indoor plants were visible.
- In 2011, a literature review in a study called, “People-plant Relationships in an Office Workplace: Perceived Benefits for the Workplace and Employees,” cited dozens of additional studies that demonstrate benefits of having indoor plants.

Overall the benefits of having indoor plants may include reducing stress, purifying air, raising humidity, improving sleep, fighting colds and generally improving well-being. Increasingly, people grow produce and herbs inside, as well, allowing for increased nutritional opportunities year-round.

While there is a question as to how many and which kinds of plants are needed to realize some of these benefits, there is little doubt that adding plants to an interior space often provides more than just good aesthetics. But are there dangers? One consideration for adding plants to the home is toxicity to children and pets.

Any plant can cause stomach upset to a human or animal if consumed regularly or in large quantities; however, some plants are poisonous. The National Capital Poison Center has a database of poisonous plants online at [www.poison.org/articles/plant#poisonousplants](http://www.poison.org/articles/plant#poisonousplants). If it is suspected that someone has consumed a poisonous plant, contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222, or visit [poisonhelp.org](http://poisonhelp.org) for guidance. Text POISON/797979 to add this contact information to your cell phone. If the person has trouble breathing, has a seizure, collapses, can’t be awakened or is in other distress, contact 911 immediately.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has an extensive directory of plants that have been reported as being toxic for dogs and cats, meaning they can be dangerous, even deadly. A searchable database is found at: [www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants](http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants). For pet emergencies, contact your veterinarian or the ASPCA 24-hour emergency hotline at 1-888-426-4435.

If you have pets or young children in your home, care should be taken to keep toxic plants out of reach. Some common plants that are toxic for humans, dogs and/or cats include:

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* species), anthurium (*Anthurium* species), calla lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*), Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema* species), croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*), florist cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*), dumbcane (*Diffenbachia maculata*), peace lily (*Spathiphyllum* species), schefflera (*Scheffleraactino phylla*), split-leaf

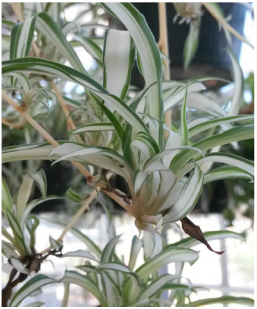
philodendron (*Monstera deliciosa*), and shamrocks (*Oxalis* species). If in question, seek advice before adding a house plant in an area where kids and pets have access.

Fortunately, there are many popular house plants that are non-toxic and make a good choice for homes with kids, cats and dogs. Following are five options, along with growing tips from the Clemson Cooperative Extension Home and Garden Information Center ([hgic.clemson.edu/category/indoor-plants/](http://hgic.clemson.edu/category/indoor-plants/)). ■

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**Areca Palm**  
(*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*)  
This palm grows to six or seven feet and has long, feather-shaped fronds. Areca Palms do best in bright indirect sunlight and when temperatures are from 65-70°F at night and 75-85°F in the daytime. The soil should be kept moist. Areca palms are very susceptible to spider mites.



**Spider plant**  
(*Chlorophytum comosum*)  
This plant is excellent in hanging baskets. The long, grass-like leaves may be green or striped yellow or white. Spider plants grow best with bright, indirect sunlight and temperatures between 50-55°F at night and 65-75°F in the day. It’s best to move them a few feet from windows to protect them from drafts in the winter.



**Boston Fern**  
(*Nephrolepis exaltata*)  
The Boston has arching fronds that can be up to three feet long. It prefers bright indirect or filtered sunlight with night temperatures between 50-55°F and day temperatures between 68-73°F. The soil should be kept barely moist and high humidity is preferred. Spider mites, mealybugs and scale insects can be a problem.



**American Baby Rubber Plant** (*Peperomia obtusifolia*) These are great plants for beginners. They can grow to 6-10 feet tall, though they can be pruned as necessary for space. They have large, glossy, leathery leaves. They will do well near an east facing window where they can get morning light. They prefer night temperatures from 60-75°F, and daytime temperatures from 75-80°F. Soil should dry slightly between watering. Keep away from drafts.



**Moth/Moon Orchids** (*Phalaenopsis* sp.)  
Moth orchids have long arching sprays of flowers that remain fresh for months. Flowering occurs in winter or early spring. As they are adaptable to most indoor light conditions and thrive in low light, these orchids grow best with little to no direct sun and prefer night temperatures around 65°F and 75-80°F during the day. Do not let these get completely dry or sit in a waterlogged pot.