

# Home truths

THIS MONTH IN WHAT REALLY GOES ON INSIDE A HOME, WE GET TO GRIPS WITH THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF **HOUSEPLANTS**

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**MAYBE IT'S OUR LOVE** for all things Scandi that kickstarted the houseplant revival. The Danes and Swedes have always appreciated the power of plants in the home, whereas we lost sight of it in the 80s when too many parched spider plants expired on windowsills. Or perhaps it's because we now spend between 80–90% of our time indoors, and hanker for a link to nature, however slender.

Whatever the reason, a potted plant does us good both mentally and physically, and is a cheap way of enlivening a room.

This time around there are numerous ways to display them, from terrariums to concrete planters, and plenty of plants to choose from, from tiny succulents to monster aloes. Most hail from tropical climates, and their preferences for warm, dry environments, out of direct sunlight, suit centrally heated rooms. They don't need a lot of care, mostly it's simply a case of watering when the compost dries out, so there's no excuse for letting them die. Reason enough to bring one home and generally improve your quality of life.



## FIVE LOVELY PLANTS

**1. ALOE VERA** (Barbados aloe): a very undemanding desert plant, above, with sharp spiky leaves and tubular flowers. Can withstand both direct sunlight and damp and humid conditions.

**2. CHINESE MONEY PLANT** (*Pilea peperomioides*): can be tricky to find but worth the search. Its lily-pad shaped leaves on long stems have a white spot in their centre.

**3. MONEY PLANT** (*Crassula ovata*): a bringer of fortune. It needs little attention but is happiest in direct light.

**4. PURPLELEAF FALSE SHAMROCK** (*Oxalis triangularis* subsp. *papilionacea*): each stem has three butterfly-shaped leaves that fold up at night. Pretty pink flowers in spring.

**5. STRING OF BEADS** (*Senecio rowleyanus*): trails prettily from a hanging planter. It looks delicate but is hardy and requires infrequent watering.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAIN PICTURE BY ERIKA RAXXWORTHY FROM HOUSE OF PLANTS (FRANCES LINCOLN)



## WHICH PLANTER?

You can use anything you like to put a plant in so long as it doesn't leak. From expensive ceramic planters to re-used cans (olive oil tins are good options), there is no end of choice. Be sure that the plant is in an internal pot with a hole for drainage, though – other than lack of watering or light, the one thing house plants cannot endure is sitting in water. If watering is too much of a responsibility, choose a self-watering pot.

### 1. UPSIDE DOWN POT WHITE SKYPLANTER BY BOSKKE, £12.50

Plant with herbs and dangle in the kitchen for easy snipping, or suspend other plants decoratively around the house.  
[cowandco.co.uk](http://cowandco.co.uk)

### 2. SELF-WATERING POT EVA SOLO SELF-WATERING HERB POT, £45

A wick supplies the plant with water from a reservoir beneath it. All you have to remember is to fill it up.  
[johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)

### 3. BELL JAR BOTTLE TERRARIUM WITH CONCRETE BASE: SMALL, £25; LARGE, £30

Put a pot or two of succulents and cacti beneath the glass dome for maximum impact.  
[shop.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://shop.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### 4. TERRARIUM LARGE GLASS HOUSE TERRARIUM, £60

A mini greenhouse in which to cultivate a few ferns or other tropical plants. It's sealed so will require no watering.  
[shop.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://shop.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### 5. CEMENT POT STRATTON CEMENT BOWLS, £35 FOR TWO

The rough texture and subtle greys of cement and concrete look good in modern interiors and act as a foil to plants with dark green foliage.  
[gardentrading.co.uk](http://gardentrading.co.uk)

### 6. FLOOR PLANTER MID-CENTURY TURNED LEG PLANTER, £149

A contemporary take on a Victorian jardinière. Needs a decent sized plant such as a calathea or a large cactus to pull it off.  
[westelm.co.uk](http://westelm.co.uk)

5



6



1



2



3



4







Vitra Eames lounge armchair, £5,500; Harmony ribboned lamp, £90; Fushion Weave Basket, £15, all [johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)

## DISPLAYING YOUR PLANTS

### IN THE LIVING ROOM

A bigger room deserves bigger plants so this is an opportunity to buy a showstopper plant like a big cactus or a rubber plant and let it occupy some space. Alternatively, bring a forgotten corner to life with a cluster of plants of different sizes: grouping plants increases humidity and diminishes watering needs.

**Idea:** place plants against a dark wall to make the green 'pop'.

### IN THE BATHROOM

If your bathroom has some natural light, humidity-loving plants like orchids, ferns and palms will flourish. You can stand them on trays of damp pebbles to increase humidity.

**Idea:** trail spider plants or ivy down a window to create a living curtain.

### IN THE HOME OFFICE

A few pots of greenery provide a counterbalance to a computer screen and other bits of charmless

technology. They will also process VOCs, see right, emitted by technology, and create a calm environment conducive to creativity. The danger is in the watering: make sure plants on your desk sit on a saucer, otherwise your keyboard will be a goner.

**Idea:** try a row of the same plant lined up along a windowsill. Succulents and mini cacti look smart.

### IN THE KITCHEN

This is the place for pots of herbs, kept in handy reach, ready for snipping. They will need good light, and different herbs have different watering requirements, so watch out for that. 'Non herbs' are welcome, too, and will create a link between the home and the garden.

**Idea:** to keep worktops clear, put plants in hanging or upside-down planters and dangle somewhere you won't bang your head.

NASA  
researchers  
recommend one  
potted plant per  
9 sq m of indoor  
space

## HOW POTTED PLANTS PERK YOU UP

A life surrounded by plants is not simply aesthetically pleasing, it can improve your health. Plants act as a kind of pollutant sponge, absorbing carbon dioxide and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released from manmade products such as paint and technology which can cause headaches and dizziness. Some plants, eg orchids, aloe, peace lilies, also release oxygen at night and so improve the quality of air while we sleep. And, finally, plants including ivies, rubber plants and Boston ferns transpire water vapour, making them natural room humidifiers, which can reduce the amount of dust in a room.

## HOUSEPLANT READING LIST

- *Urban Jungle* by Igor Josifovic & Judith DeGraaff (Callwey)
- *At Home with Plants* by Ian Drummond & Kara O'Reilly (Mitchell Beazley)
- *Botanical Style* by Selina Lake (Ryland Peters & Small)
- *My Tiny Indoor Garden* by Lia Leendertz & Mark Diacono (Pavilion)
- *Bring the Outside In* by Val Bradley (Bantam Press)



## TERRARIUM MASTERCLASS

Emma Sibley, right, of London Terrariums advises on growing plants under glass indoors

Terrariums were invented by a Victorian entomologist Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward. He discovered miniature ferns growing in a sealed jam jar intended for a moth chrysalis and realised that it provided the ideal environment for tropical plants. They protected the plants from dust and pollution, maintained a high humidity, and regulated the temperature, so plants could photosynthesise, be self-sufficient and water themselves.

**Any clear vessel is suitable** for a terrarium. It shouldn't be air tight, though, eg, remove rubbers seals from Kilner jars. Open terrariums need to be watered and misted to stop plants drying out.

**The secret to keeping plants alive** in a terrarium is not to water. Terrariums are self-sustaining: plants produce heat



and oxygen which condenses on the glass which is enough to keep them alive. They will need sunlight to photosynthesise but not direct light. You may need to take the cork out occasionally to dry the plants a bit and decrease humidity but this will be rare.

**The best plants to put in a terrarium** are those from tropical, humid and damp climates. Ferns, miniature palms, *Ficus pumila* and *Fittonia*, which is native to the jungles of Peru, all work well. Emma runs terrarium workshops; [londonterrariums.com](http://londonterrariums.com)

## WHY WE LOVE AN AIR PLANT

Caro Langton and Rose Ray of house plant specialists [ro-co.uk](http://ro-co.uk) give us the lowdown on these carefree plants

The genus of air plants, or tillandsia, is from the bromeliad family. In the wild, they generally grow as epiphytes, anchoring themselves with roots to other plants and trees for support. Amazingly, despite their diverse natural habitats, they require little care. This is partly because they are such slow growers. However, it is a common mistake to think that air plants need only air to live. In fact, they survive in the wild by absorbing moisture and nutrients through their leaves, which are varied in shape, size and colour. Because of this, they do not require roots or soil, but do require minimal watering and pruning to live indoors.

### A FEW POINTERS

- When displaying, remember they require a good flow of air, so avoid enclosed containers or surfaces that absorb or contain water.
  - Most species of air plants are suited to bright, indirect light that replicates the dappled light of their native habitats. Avoid brightly lit windowsills in summer months.
  - A day time temperature of 10-30C suits airplants, with cooler temperatures at night. If the room is warmer, increase frequency of watering. Protect from frost and draughts.
  - To water, either dunk in the bath or spray with a mister. They are happiest soaked once a week, with an occasional misting in warmer weather. They only draw up as much moisture as they need so you can water liberally.
- House of Plants by Caro Langton and Rose Ray (Frances Lincoln) is full of information on caring for air plants and other house plants.





## EXTRA SOMETHINGS

*Turn your home into a lush, green sanctuary with these house plant accessories*



**Faceted planter, £75**  
[habitat.co.uk](http://habitat.co.uk)



**Drop Diamond himmeli, £24**  
[ro-co.uk](http://ro-co.uk)



**Macramé plant hanger, £24**  
[iansnow.com](http://iansnow.com)



**Hanging terrarium, £30**  
[gardentrading.co.uk](http://gardentrading.co.uk)



**Monstera leaf print, £24**  
[papermash.co.uk](http://papermash.co.uk)



**Brass plant mister, £24**  
[notanotherbill.com](http://notanotherbill.com)



**Indoor watering can, £40**  
[haws.co.uk](http://haws.co.uk)



**Orla Kiely flower pot, £17**  
[annabeljames.co.uk](http://annabeljames.co.uk)



**Ceramic hanging planter, £15**  
[miafleur.com](http://miafleur.com)