

Words About Wellness

Do we need more leafy greens... in our work environments?

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Decades of research have shown that plants and natural settings can have a positive influence on mood, and physiological indicators of stress (heart rate, blood pressure) are often lower after exposure to plants and nature. Indoor plants are thought to be “healthy,” in part, because they are believed to improve air quality by combating air-borne pollutants and substances that may cause “building-related illness,” and a 1989 NASA study showed that plants *did* clean the air in a closed, limited environment or chamber, but the evidence does *not* show that indoor plants are an effective tool to reduce indoor air pollution in “real world” settings. However, indoor plants *can* reduce CO₂ by up to 10% in air-conditioned buildings and up to 25% in naturally ventilated buildings; it makes sense that reduced CO₂ levels may have a positive impact since elevated levels of CO₂ are associated with declines in academic performance and productivity. Even in the absence of objective evidence of improved air quality, the presence of plants in workspaces is associated with *perceived* improvement in air quality, and the addition of indoor plants in workplaces has been associated with improved staff well-being and decreased sick-time, probably for a host of reasons.

A 2014 study by a group of UK researchers (Nieuwenhuis et al.) described three field experiments (pun intended?) that assessed the impact of “lean and green” offices on subjective perceptions of air quality, concentration, and workplace satisfaction as well as objective measures of productivity. Two of the studies were longitudinal. In all three experiments, enhanced outcomes were observed when the work environment was enriched by plants.

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Other studies – and lots of online sources – describe many different possible health benefits from exposure to plants, indoors and out. Horticulture therapy is a practice that uses gardening as therapy. Outdoor gardening has been associated with reduced risk for dementia, may improve emotional self-regulation and cognition, help to improve strength, balance, and endurance, and reduce hospital lengths of stay and use of pain killers. Some studies suggest that even *photographs* of plants and green spaces can have positive effects – which is why my computer at home is full of beautiful pictures of plants. No studies have found that adding plants to indoor work spaces has an adverse impact – so why not try it?



Want to learn more? Check out these links. Read critically!

The relative benefits of green versus lean office space: Three field experiments. Nieuwenhuis, M., Knight, C., Postmes, T., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 20(3), 199-214 (Abstract only) <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-30837-001>

Why Plants Make you Feel Better: <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/indoor-plants-can-instantly-boost-your-health-happiness-ncna781806>

The Perks of Being a Plant Lover. <https://www.healthline.com/health/importance-plants-home#moods>