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## The indoor issue: houseplants are coming in from the cold

March 29th, 2011 by Rhiannon James    Home » Inspiration » Design » The indoor issue: houseplants are coming in from the cold



Having lots of houseplants has not been a must-have for most people since lava lamps and coloured bathroom suites were all the rage. But now, making a statement with plants is back with a 21st century twist.

A sure sign of indoor plants' resurgence was their appearance on the catwalk at London Fashion Week last month. Vanda orchids, with their roots exposed, writhed on either side of Kinder Aggugini's runway and miniature orchids were given to the front row to wear as a modern twist on the corsage.

The orchid display was the brainchild of Ian Drummond, Creative Director at Indoor Garden Design who said, "Traditionally it would always have been floristry at London Fashion Week but plants are becoming much more popular I'm pleased to say. And everyone loves Vanda orchids because they're a whole different concept. You can see their root system so it's like having a piece of art rather than the traditional plant in a pot."

And it's not just the fashionistas who have woken up to the power of plants. Shops and restaurants are also making a feature of houseplants. Restaurant, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon and fashion and homewares store, Anthropologie, have both created lush green walls inside their buildings. And celebrities' favourite haunt, The Ivy, has turned one floor of its private members' club into an indoor garden, using giant oval planters filled with grassy Sansevierias.

In our homes too, dramatic planting is back and it's becoming increasingly easy to achieve. Constructing indoor green walls was once too complex to be practical for the average home but now a number of companies have launched kits which are simple to use. Woolly Pockets are recycled plastic pockets which attach directly to the wall and can be combined to create whatever scale of planting you like. A felt tongue at the back of the planter wicks water to the plants' roots and a built-in moisture barrier makes sure there are no drips. You can buy Woolly Pockets from Garden Beet ([www.gardenbeet.com](http://www.gardenbeet.com), 0203 397 2377) and Amazon ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)). Or there's Treebox's Easiwall system, where you plant up a series of troughs to create a wall effect ([www.treebox.co.uk](http://www.treebox.co.uk)). "There's definitely a rising interest in vertical systems" said Peter Belton, Proprietor and Designer at East of Eden Plants, a company that sells large indoor plants and designs interior planting schemes.

Large architectural plants are another feature which has moved out of public spaces and into our homes. "People want dramatic effects and dramatic plants, like the bigger palms. And they particularly want them combined with designer planters" said Mr Belton.

Even at the smaller end of the scale, plants with immediate impact are becoming more popular. Kenneth Mitchell, Dobbies' Plant Buyer said, "There has been a big spike in sales of pre-planted containers which are up 63% this year on last year. Customers are telling us they'd like something individual and creative, but that they prefer the convenience of it being pre-planted."

The ability to make a statement is not the only reason indoor plants are growing in popularity. The health benefits of indoor plants are also starting to encourage more people to bring some greenery into their home. Indoor air can be up to ten times more polluted than the air outside and some houseplants are powerful filters which remove harmful airborne contaminants, known as VOCs or Volatile Organic Compounds. Various studies have also shown that plants are effective in lowering stress levels and increasing feelings of calm.

So if you fancy making a feature of houseplants, what should you do?

Whatever the size of your ambitions, there are a few key ways to make an impact.

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## Make a match of it

First and foremost, of course, you should pick the plants you love. But it can also help to think about the kinds of plants that suit your style. The current retro revival in interior design, for example, has reignited interest in Seventies classics such as Spider Plants. "There's a kind of retro kudos thing that's going on at the moment," said Paul Thomas, Director at House of Plants, a specialist indoor plant retailer.

If your rooms are quite minimalist and modern on the other hand, you could choose something bold and sculptural. "Sansevieria cylindrica has very upright, stiff stems which make a perfect fan. They're very architectural and modern and getting more and more popular," says Stephen Davies, Indoor Plants Manager at Clifton Nurseries. Alternatively, you could go for contrast and choose a soft, delicate plant such as a Maidenhair Fern. Selaginella is another plant that works well in a modern interior, according to Mr Davies. "It grows into a perfect, bright green dome, creating a very crisp, clean look," he said. For more ideas, try visiting the Flowers and Plants Association's website which suggests plants for every sort of room style ([www.flowers.org.uk/public/www\\_plants\\_for\\_places.php](http://www.flowers.org.uk/public/www_plants_for_places.php)).

It can also be useful to think about colour. "Choose something where the colour is right for the room it's going in. A splash of wonderful colour in a very simple white bedroom, for example, looks fantastic," said Diana Yakeley, interior designer and author of *Indoor Gardening*.

Before you buy anything though, don't forget to check that the plant likes the conditions in the spot you've picked. You can find out more about this in our [feature on caring for houseplants](#).

## Hello, pot

It could be the planter that makes all the difference to the effect that you create, however. "It's quite often the container that will make a plant look trendier," says Mr Davies. "You can put an Aspidistra in a white ceramic cube and it looks really, really modern but if you put it in a traditional blue and white bowl, then you've got the classic Victorian houseplant," he says.

## The power of groups

Grouping plants together to maximise the effect is another thing to try. Ms Yakeley says, "I think massing things together can make a big impact. Instead of having one orchid in a pot for example, if you group five or six in one beautiful basket, that looks amazing and luxurious." For a slightly edgier look, you could take inspiration from the catwalk and hang four or five Vanda orchids in a window. "When they're in flower, they'll be stunning and when they're not, you've got these weird root systems exposed. It's an easy way to achieve something unexpected," said Mr Drummond.

If you're using a trough or a group of pots, then you could also look at repeat plantings between larger specimens to create a mini drift effect, just as you would in a garden. "A drift, of Bromeliads for example, looks far more dramatic than single plants," said Mr Belton. Alternatively, on a smaller scale, look at planting up a number of identical containers with the same plant – the repetition will pack more of a punch.

## Pile on some more layers

Layering plants is another technique which can be effective. "Some of our clients have very tall rooms so some of the palms we use are four to five metres tall which is pretty daunting. But then you layer it down with something at two or three metres and then something at the ground level which gives a much richer effect," says Mr Belton. Even if you're working on a much smaller scale, combining plants at different heights will give much more depth to a display.

Diana Yakeley – [www.yakeley.com](http://www.yakeley.com)

Indoor Garden Design – [www.indoorgardendesign.com](http://www.indoorgardendesign.com)

East of Eden Plants – [www.eastofedenplants.co.uk](http://www.eastofedenplants.co.uk)

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The City Planter is the magazine for urban gardeners. Whether you've got a garden, a roof terrace, a balcony or even just some room indoors to grow plants, you'll find all the gardening ideas and advice you need to create a beautiful and truly satisfying green space in the city.

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