

Natural resources

Ian Drummond, creative director of Indoor Garden Design, argues that interior planting is essential to the health and well-being of office workers



Given a choice, people sit where they can see plants, says Jane Stiles in a 1995 Oxford Brooks University study. Planting is essential for the well-being and general health of people who work in offices, whether it's a traditional or home office.

In this climate it's very easy for people to overlook interior landscaping and think about 'pruning' planting from the budget. Office plants have been much maligned. We've all witnessed the sad cacti in the corner looking drab and totally neglected. But research by the Flower and Plants Association and Plants for People shows that not only do plants look beautiful, but they greatly improve health and well-being.

Those health attributes include removing carbon monoxide from the air, absorbing noise and dust, improving people's concentration and memory retention,

reducing anxiety and combating fatigue. Plants also promote feelings of relaxation, calm and well-being, which is particularly helpful for combating stress.

Dr Tove Fjeld, of the University of Agriculture in Norway, undertook a study for the Flower Council of Holland. Principally it was aimed at discovering how far plants could benefit our physical and psychological health. Office staff, working in offices of 10 sq m, were questioned on their health, particularly symptoms related to spending a lot of time indoors and being under stress. After two months without plants, a range of houseplants was placed in half the offices. After a year, the plants were swapped to those offices with no plants in. After another year all staff were questioned on what effect the plants had had on health and well-being.

Professional contractors looked after the

Health attributes include
removing carbon
monoxide from the air,
absorbing noise and dust,
and combating fatigue

plants, so any benefits to the office staff were from looking at the plants and the plants' effect on the atmosphere and air quality, rather than from nurturing them. The results demonstrated that when staff had plants in their offices, there was a significant drop of around 25 per cent in tiredness, coughing, sore throats and cold-related illnesses. Eight out of 10 of those surveyed agreed that 'I feel good when there are plants in the office - I would like to have more plants in my office in the future.'

Personally, I believe that people's external surroundings contribute to their general well-being and to that of the office interior. Plants make interiors feel much more spacious, looked-after and clean. In other words, they really do make a valuable

contribution to the 'fitness' of the office.

Indoor Garden Design designs interior planting for big commercial clients and spaces, such as IPC Media in the Blue Finn building in London and a roof garden for the British Library. Based in Highgate, north London, the company's own office space is a living example of an eco and ergonomic workspace - a giant greenhouse filled with all manner of plant species, including enormous ferns and palms.

We encourage clients to think about planting not only as part of the furniture, but as a way of creating an eco-environment that can contribute to the well-being of their employees. Planting for health is not something new - for years the Chinese have used plants to create living energy in their

homes. For the future, we would like to see office plants appear on a checklist of essentials for architects and to be included in BREEAM ratings of offices. I have been in talks with the UK Green Building Council to push this angle.

John Alker, head of advocacy at the council, states that: 'Sustainable buildings should not only be good for the environment, they should be good for the quality of life of their occupants - whether homes or places of work. Plants and indoor greenery are an important but often overlooked part of this.'

I hope we continue to move away from just having the lonely pot plant in the corner, and that facilities people see office plants as crucial to improving the environment and well-being of their office space **FMX**



FURTHER INFORMATION

Indoor Garden Design is a creative interior landscape design agency. Ian Drummond is also a committee member of eFIG, the European Federation of Interior Landscape Groups - an independent, not-for-profit group promoting the use and benefits of interior plants, raising industry standards and setting the guide for industry quality and reliability.
www.indoorgardendesign.com
www.efig.eu.com

To find out more about indoor garden design or the health benefits of planting, visit:
www.plants-for-people.org
www.flowers.org.uk

