

# Taking your garden indoors

SANDRA BATLEY OFFERS SOME GUIDANCE AND ADVICE WHEN EXTENDING YOUR GARDEN INTO YOUR HOME'S INTERIOR

MENTION THE WORD 'HOUSEPLANTS' AND CHILDHOOD memories of Sansevieria trifasciata (mother-in-laws tongue) in brown and orange glazed pots, or Chlorophytum comosum 'Vittatum' (spider plant) dangling out of macramé hanging baskets may spring to mind.

That 70's horticultural vibe left a lot of people permanently put off ever growing plants indoors and even created a number of serial houseplant killers; while the 90's featured Yuccas and Ficus as a popular indoor statement.

The new millennium however, has bought a fresh approach; houseplants are worthy of their inclusion back into our homes. Relegating plants only to the outdoors would be a travesty. We all know plants have a multitude of benefits; they are good for the soul, whether by their colour or scent. They can lift your spirits and calm the body and mind and are beneficial to the atmosphere, as they absorb carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with oxygen via photosynthesis. They also act as natural ionizers, helping to remove harmful toxins and pollutants from the air.

## PLANTS FOR EVERY ROOM AND DECOR

Indoor plants can complement every area of the home and every type of décor. The right container provides the perfect link between a plant and its surroundings. The idea of cultivating plants indoors can be a daunting one. Whether you live in a modern small apartment or a spacious old villa it is important to choose plants according to the conditions of your room rather than just because you like the look of a particular plant.



## INSPIRED BY ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

An architecturally designed home often has an emphasis on simplicity and generous open-plan living spaces accompanied by cool clean lines. Sculptural plants with an emphasis on form make a statement against a clean white drop. For an urban chic look, use plants where unique forms and sculptured shapes are the rule rather than the exception. Try cacti and succulents such as Beaucarnea recurvata (Pony tail palm). Popular due to their low maintenance, their impressive forms look stylish in a modern planter. Aeonium 'Schwartzkopf' is another reliable beauty, looking dark and sensual all year round. It looks fantastic in a smooth concrete container or a plain black glazed pot. Because of their desert origins succulents have the remarkable ability to store water in their leaves or stems, making them ideal as container plants in hot dry areas of the home.



## MINIMALISM

Simplicity is the key to this style of interior design. Essentially, plants in this style of home should be carefully chosen for their understated elegance and form. The container should complement, not overpower the plant. Stunning plants such as the white moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) will make a sublime statement in a Zen-like interior. They will flower for anything up to 8 weeks, year on year if properly cared for. Place on a glass coffee table or on a windowsill as these beauties like the sun, but not anywhere too bright. It just loves a centrally heated environment. Stiff-leaved Aloes or Sansevierias make a striking display and are a good low-maintenance choice.



## MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY

Modern homes in an open-plan layout with clean lines and with an understated mood allow for the introduction of some funky plants. Striking and exotic plants complement light coloured walls and floors. Dracena marginata or Dracena deremensis love being in bright light in a warm situation, while Succulents planted in white ceramic pots look good on the windowsill or balcony. Containers should echo the smooth lines of the furniture. Add some polished black pebbles or fine gravel for that extra decorative element and tidy finishing touch.



#### BACK TO NATURE

Homes inspired by nature and built around sustainable principles using eco-friendly materials such as timber, glass and rammed earth create a relaxed, yet modern environment. Plants should complement the natural look both inside and outside of the home to reflect this relaxing environment. Choose containers or plants that are more natural or weathered such as stone, old terracotta pots, tin buckets, timber or hand painted recycled pottery jugs. If the natural beauty of the bush surrounds your home, bring the outdoors in by using plants with lots of lush foliage such as Howera (Kentia palm), Ficus, Aspidistra (Cast iron plant), Asplenium bulibiferum (Hen and chicken fern) or Chamaedorea (Parlour Palm).



#### MODERN MEDITERRANEAN

Homes inspired by the charm of the sun-baked Mediterranean countries use furnishings, materials and finishes with warm, earthy toned colours. It is important when choosing indoor plants for this style of home to reflect this unique style. Hot, colourful flowering plants, planted in distressed terracotta pots look just the part. Try Bougainvillea or Lavender if you have a particularly hot, sunny family room or conservatory. Hibiscus or Pelargoniums add a cheery fun element to a space. Try growing smaller variety Citrus that love being pots in the full sun.



**Sandra Batley** of flourish is a multi award-winning landscape designer based in Auckland, with a passion for people, plants and design. Visit Sandra at [www.flourishgardens.co.nz](http://www.flourishgardens.co.nz)

#### TRADITIONAL AND CLASSICAL

Homes with gorgeous timber wooden floors, antiques and furnishings that have softness, comfort, colour and elegance. This style of home suits potted scented plants with delicate flowers and soft foliage. Lily of the valley or Gardenias look romantic and restful in pale coloured pots. Spathiphyllum wallisii (Peace lily) has a glossy attractive green foliage with scented, luscious pure white flowers. They enjoy humidity but can't stand draughts or direct sunlight. Other white flowering plants such as Cyclamen, Orchids, Begonias and Hyacinth add an air of elegance to any room of the house. Complement them with gorgeous green foliage plants such as Asplenium nidus (Birds nest fern), Adiantum (Maidenhair fern) and Belchnum spp.



#### TABLETOP GARDENS

For a different approach to indoor plants try creating your own living table arrangement. Combine flowering plants with ground cover to create an 'in the garden' look. Or go for a native combination of ferns and moss for a zen garden effect. Seen here we have Freseas set in aquarium gravel with their roots in water, Daffodils with creeping tyme to cover the soil and miniature Primrose Hybrids.

For more ideas on indoor gardens check out 'Tabletop Gardens' by Rosemary McCleary, photography by William Holt and published by Storey Publishing.



#### POTTING MIX SAFETY

You may be surprised to find a health warning on a bag of potting mix. In fact handling soil, potting mix and compost carries a slight risk of legionnaires' disease (which can be fatal).

It's believed you contract the disease by breathing in Legionella bacteria which are carried in minute water-vapour droplets – for example, when you open a bag of compost. Common early symptoms include loss of appetite, headache, muscle pains, stomach pains and diarrhoea, and fever. A dry cough may develop into pneumonia.

##### To avoid catching legionnaires' disease you should:

- ▶ Wear gloves
- ▶ Open bags slowly and away from your face
- ▶ Avoid opening bags in unventilated places
- ▶ Wash your hands afterwards
- ▶ Water gardens and compost gently, so that water and soil don't splash up.

If you think you're affected, you should see your medical practitioner immediately.

- Info supplied by Consumer, for more information visit [www.consumer.org.nz](http://www.consumer.org.nz)



## 10 tips

### For taking care of your house plants

1. Buy plants from a reputable source & inspect them for bugs and disease before you buy
2. Pay attention to the natural habitat of the plant, its preferred light & heat levels. Try to reproduce the conditions it would find in the wild.
3. Most plants prefer to dry out a little between thorough waterings.
4. Water from below – stand them in a dish of water until all the water has been taken up.
5. Use the correct plant food for flowering/foliage plants. Feed regularly to keep them healthy.
6. Plants that like high humidity need regular, preferably daily misting; stand them in a saucer of damp pebbles to encourage additional localised humidity.
7. Give broad glossy leaves an occasional wipe with a damp cloth.
8. Pinching out the tips of some houseplants can encourage them to grow bushier; keeping flowering plants slightly potbound makes them flower more.
9. Avoid strong heat or chilly draughts. Many houseplants like to be outdoors in summer – check all frosts are over first.
10. Check your plants regularly for signs of stress, pests or disease. Remove dead leaves and flowers as they occur.