

How Do Plants Make Your Home Happier?

Research finds that having plants at home is good for our health and well-being. How do you pick the right ones?

In both Europe and the U.S., people spend up to 90% of their time indoors. But spending so much time inside can have consequences for your mental health.

The World Health Organization estimates that 5% of adults globally suffer from depression. Stress, depression, and anxiety also accounted for 55% of all working days lost in the U.K. during the year 2021–22. Small improvements in our mental health can bring significant personal and financial rewards.

For those of us who are stuck inside all day, houseplants are an easy way of connecting with nature. This is particularly true for young people, many of whom may lack access to a garden.

Indoor plants have several mental and physical health benefits. Research has linked houseplants to reduced stress, lower blood pressure, and an improved state of mind. And office environments with plants have been associated with higher job satisfaction and reduced health complaints.

Houseplants make us feel good due to our inherent desire to connect with nature, and because we consider the green colors of most houseplants to be calming. Adding just a single plant can brighten up a dull space and boost your mood. But which should you choose?

Last year I investigated the psychological responses of 520 people to the appearance of different houseplants through an online photo-questionnaire.

The participants identified their favorite and least-favorite plant. Overall, participants perceived that all green and healthy plants would benefit their well-being. But three plants in particular—pothos, weeping fig, and palm—were believed to deliver the greatest sense of well-being. These benefits improved as plant attractiveness increased. In contrast, unhealthy plants were perceived negatively.

Our findings suggest that plants with lush green leaves, high leaf area, and dense canopies are likely to give the biggest boost to your well-being. People also believe that these plants will provide greater benefits to air quality.

Houseplants can benefit our mental health. But when choosing between plants, their appearance matters. For the biggest boost to your well-being, key aspects to consider are physical appearance, interestingness, beauty, and how healthy the plant looks. Keeping your plants green and healthy will help lift your spirits, so choose plants suited to your space that you can maintain easily.