

Green up rooms  
with easy-care houseplants

# Indoor cheer, year-round

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**W**INTER'S big chill earlier this month did a number on our gardens.

Fifteen-foot-tall angel's trumpets resemble giant melted candlelabra. Ten-foot shell gingers are brown husks, impatiens a soggy mess.

Houseplants can get a gardener through such times. These green beauties lift our spirits, bring serenity to our homes and offices and clean the air.

A moth orchid will flower for weeks on the dining room table. A rabbit's foot fern will warm a cold-gray filing cabinet. Denise Eichmann, senior project manager at **Ambius**, a provider of office plants to businesses, recommends using trough plants as natural screens. Tall containers show off plants while taking up little floor space.

**To keep indoor plants at their best, she recommends:**

- Avoid overwatering, a common cause of plant

death. Use your finger to determine if soil needs more moisture. Don't let plants sit in water. Thin-leaf plants generally need more watering than those with thick foliage.

- Mist or group plants to boost humidity in heated or air-conditioned rooms. Or place pots on pebbles in a shallow tray of water.

- Bright, indirect light from a window is ideal for many houseplants. Gentle morning sun from an east window can be acceptable; harsh rays from a west window are not. Rotate plants so all sides get light.

- Variegated plants often need more light than all-green types. Keep them closer to a window.

- Plants acclimatize slowly to different surroundings by changing their leaf orientation and structure. If possible, **PLANTS**, *Please see* **PLANTS**, *Page E5*

avoid moving them once they've adapted to a place.

- Frequent, diluted applications of liquid houseplant fertilizer provide a steady dose of nutrients; or use a time-release fertilizer.

- Prune plants to encourage bushy growth.

- Going on vacation? Ask a friend to help give your plants water, light and warmth.

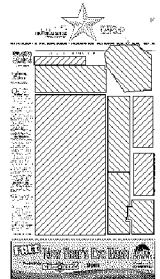
**Five easy options to green the indoors:**

**1 ZZ PLANT**, *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*, is virtually bullet proof. The fleshy 2- to 3-foot stems of this good looker are lined with glossy, deep-green leaves tolerant of low light.

**2 SNAKE PLANT** or **MOTHER-IN-LAW'S TONGUE**, *Sansevieria spp.*, is hard to kill. This succulent tolerates high-to-low light and doesn't require much water. Use one as an accent or mass them in a larger planter and display them in an empty fireplace when it's warm.

**3 GOLDEN POTHOS** or **DEVIL'S IVY**, *Scindapsus aureus*, is an easy-care vining plant that will grow in any light except direct hot sun or total darkness.

**4 CHINESE EVER-GREEN**, *Aglaonema spp.*, can have solid green or variegated foliage.



age, tolerates various settings and is typically long-lived.

**5 BIRD'S NEST FERN**, *Asplenium nidus*, is surprisingly accepting of life indoors. Lush with elliptical, erect fronds, it needs only moderate-to-bright indirect light and water every five to seven days.

For other suggestions, see [www.houstongrows.com](http://www.houstongrows.com).

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**GOLDEN POTHOS**



**SNAKE PLANT**



**CHINESE EVERGREEN**



**ZZ PLANT**



FILE PHOTOS

**HAPPY INDOORS:** Bird's nest fern is tolerant of indoor life, whether in a cachepot or in an antique pail. Given medium light and water every five days or so, it's also long-lived.

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