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The peace lily is mildly toxic. Wash hands after handling to prevent irritation.



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Bamboo palms thrive in interior conditions that other plants cannot tolerate.



PHOTO BY BONNIE COURTER

Spider plants absorb chemicals in air, including formaldehyde, xylene, benzene and carbon monoxide.

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

# Breathe better houseplants



**Debby Finley**  
Master Gardener

**Question:** The long winters in Oregon can create stuffy homes. Are there easy-to-care-for houseplants that might help improve the inside air?

**Answer:** Not only can houseplants add freshness and color to your home, it is possible that indoor plants can keep you healthier and happier. Studies have shown that houseplants can improve your mood, lower stress and anxiety and even minimize headaches by improving air quality.

NASA has done extensive studies on the role of houseplants in cleansing the air, hoping to use these benefits for future space stations. In conjunction with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, the 1989 NASA Clean Air Study concluded that indoor plants may provide a natural way of removing volatile organic pollutants from the air as well as absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen through photosynthesis.

Plants also release water vapor into the air, which increases humidity, and this can help ease dry skin and respiratory ailments due to the drying effects of winter heating systems.

Four popular interior plants studied included the peace lily, snake plant, spider plant and bamboo palms.

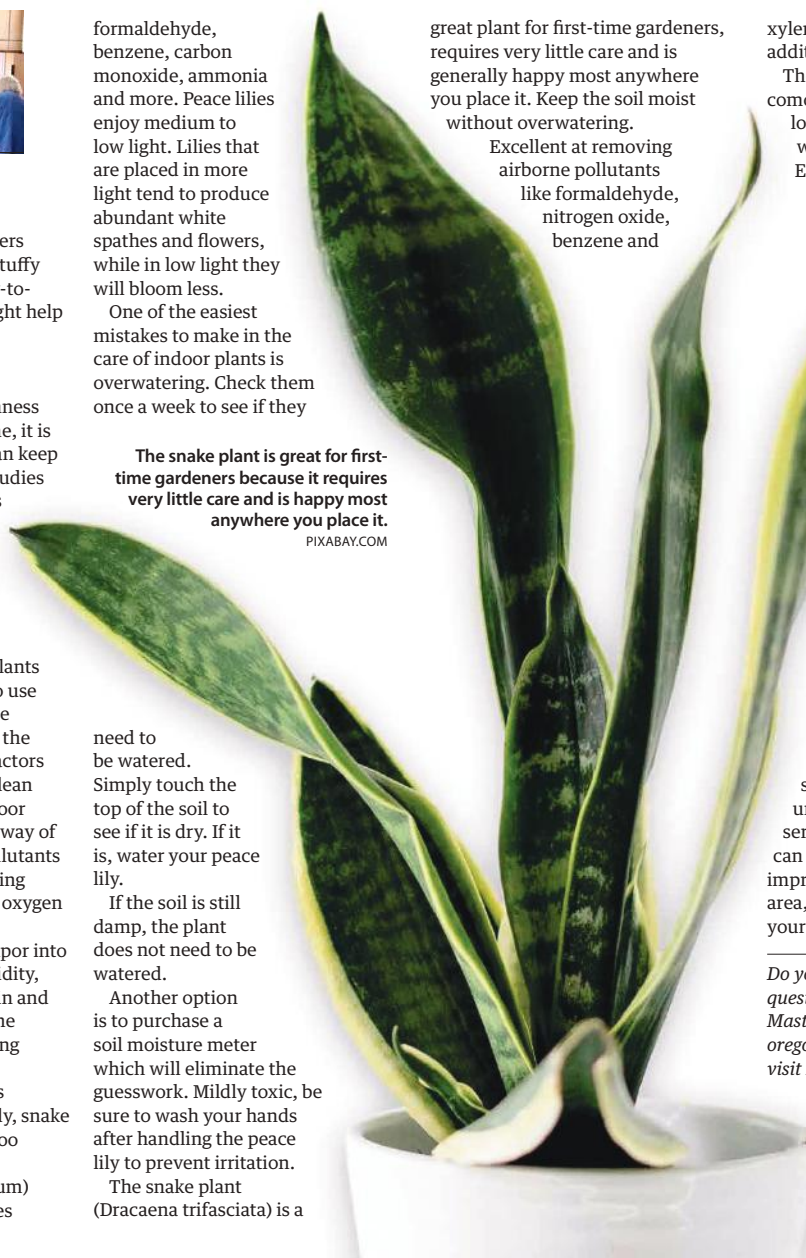
The peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*) is easy to care for and removes

formaldehyde, benzene, carbon monoxide, ammonia and more. Peace lilies enjoy medium to low light. Lilies that are placed in more light tend to produce abundant white spathes and flowers, while in low light they will bloom less.

One of the easiest mistakes to make in the care of indoor plants is overwatering. Check them once a week to see if they

**The snake plant is great for first-time gardeners because it requires very little care and is happy most anywhere you place it.**

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need to be watered. Simply touch the top of the soil to see if it is dry. If it is, water your peace lily.

If the soil is still damp, the plant does not need to be watered.

Another option is to purchase a soil moisture meter which will eliminate the guesswork. Mildly toxic, be sure to wash your hands after handling the peace lily to prevent irritation.

The snake plant (*Dracaena trifasciata*) is a

great plant for first-time gardeners, requires very little care and is generally happy most anywhere you place it. Keep the soil moist without overwatering.

Excellent at removing airborne pollutants like formaldehyde, nitrogen oxide, benzene and

xylene, the snake plant is a beneficial addition to your home.

The spider plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*) is recognized for its long, narrow, cascading leaves which resemble a spider's legs.

Easy to grow, low maintenance and proven to absorb harmful toxins in the air, they also make excellent hanging basket plants. Bamboo palms (*Chamaedorea seifrizii*) are great for corners of a room. It is a sturdy plant that grows tall. It

removes a range of harmful pollutants, like formaldehyde, benzene, carbon monoxide and chloroform. Bamboo palms prefer part sun and moist soil. Misting the plant will help prevent spider mites.

Although interior plants should not be thought of as a universal cure or the solution to serious indoor air pollution, they can be a comforting presence while improving your personal breathing area, your mood and perhaps, even your health.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*

*Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*