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One indoor plant can combat sickness, study finds

Reduced productivity, bad moods and increased allergies have all been linked to chemicals that float in the air at room temperature, or volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

VOCs are present in carpets, paint and furniture in Australian homes with research showing concentrations indoors are up to ten times higher than they are outdoors.

In a new study, scientists have discovered that simply adding one medium-sized plant (of up to 50cm) to a medium-sized room (of about 4x5ms) can increase interior air quality by up to 25 per cent.

Commissioned by Hort Innovation and delivered by scientists at RMIT University and the University of Melbourne, the study involved a meta-analysis of more than 100 research papers from around the world.

University of Melbourne researcher Dominique Hes said the work was timely.

“Human beings are less and less among nature with current estimates indicating that urban dwellers spend 90 per cent of their time in indoor environments – resulting in a high level of exposure to indoor contaminant compounds,” she said.

“Our aim was to take the world of research and synthesise the knowledge into a scale of benefits provided by plants by grouping them into two categories: air quality and wellbeing.

“Based on the leaf area and the species’ ability to remove certain contaminants, we were able to calculate how many of our sample plants were needed to improve air quality and wellbeing in spaces of various sizes.

“Through this study, we also found there is also no mistake - indoor plants improve air quality by filtering airborne toxins caused by organic chemicals in things like paints and furniture finishes.”

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said the study’s findings would help arm nursery men and women with advice based on science, and they also led to the development of an app to help users make their homes healthier.

“No-one knows more about plant varieties than nurseries,” he said. “So, we have combined that industry’s knowledge with this research to make various plant and species recommendations for different sized rooms with varying light levels. And the great news is, this is all available in a new, free [Plant Life Balance](#) smart phone app.”

The innovative app allows users to upload a photograph of their space to give it a health rating. If the rating is low, they can use the app to drag and drop plants over the photo of their area to see how a number of plants can improve their health, wellness and air quality.

Plant Life Balance partnered with Georgina Reid from [The Planthunter](#) to create seven looks to inspire and motivate increased greening in small spaces.

The app can be downloaded from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). See more information about [the app](#) and the RMIT University and the University of Melbourne [study](#).

MEDIA CONTACT: Kelly Vorst-Parkes on 0447 304 255 or Kelly.vorst.parkes@horticulture.com.au

