

## I USE THE WORD INTERIORSCAPING TO

define designing and accessorizing the interior home or office with plants. The concept of bringing plants from the outdoors to the indoors has been around for centuries. Not only do plants create a natural aesthetic environment, they are also invaluable for removing toxins from the air such as formaldehyde, carbon monoxide, and benzene that are often used in producing furniture and office equipment. Bamboo palms, Sansevieria, Spathiphyllum, and most all Dracaenas help remove these chemicals from the air. Plants take in carbon dioxide and replace the air with oxygen. So adding houseplants indoors proves beneficial in more ways than beautification.

Interior gardening may sound like a simple project to undertake but don't be fooled. There are some basic rules for planting indoors and if they are followed, you should have a green thumb in no time. For starters, it is important to know what plants do well indoors. There are many garden resource books specifically geared towards interior gardening, so it is important to have some basic houseplant knowledge. The type of plant you choose will have special light requirements so pay close attention to the amount of light your plant needs. Do a little research to ensure that you are giving your plant choice the right amount of light. Once you locate the place in your home or office where the plant is going, check out the type and duration of light it will receive. Does the space get full sunlight, filtered sunlight, or will it be in an area with artificial light?

We probably all have seen the "Mother-in-Laws Tongue" plant, right? It is botanically known as Sansevieria, of which there are numerous species available. In case you haven't, it is a popular plant that will do well in low light and requires little water. I think it is going to be the first plant sent to planet Mars. Seriously, I think it has a snowball's chance of living there and I want to be the first horticulturist to send it off.

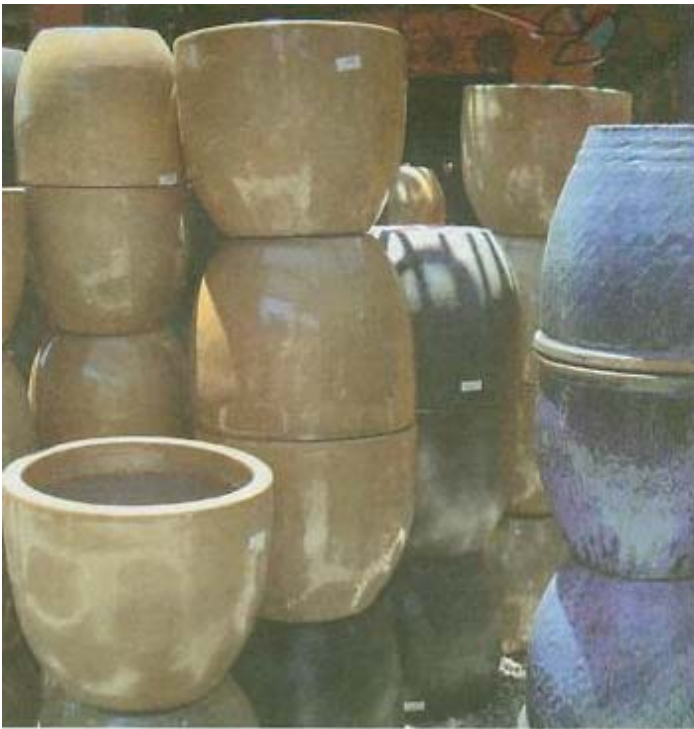
Shade-grown plants are grown for the shade not the sun. However, some plants like the Marginata, Schefflera, and Philodendrons will adapt to the sun, but they will have to drop all their "shade leaves," and produce new "sun leaves." You may know this as plants going into "shock." I call it leaf trading and most all plants will do this. Ficus are so light sensitive, they will drop their leaves if you move them from one side of the room to the other; but don't worry, they will grow back. As for sun-grown plants, they too must exchange sun



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# It's What's Inside That Counts

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR 'INTERIORSCAPING':  
BRINGING THE BEAUTY OF THE OUTDOORS IN



leaves for shade leaves if they are moved into lower light levels.

Let's go container shopping! This is the fun part because there are so many colors, textures, and styles to choose from. But first, there are some basic things to look for when choosing a container. They all must have drainage holes otherwise you will either be bailing out water or worse, your plants will die from root rot. Here are some options to consider:

Pots without drainage holes can be used as "holding" containers. Simply put your purchased plants (that come in black plastic liners) inside a decorative one. When you water, you can either water directly into the "holding" container or simply take the plant outside and water it there where it will drain excess water. If you water directly into the holding container you may have to remove the excess water if it doesn't evaporate. Plants need oxygen at the root level to live. Unless they are aquatic plants and even then their roots need a certain amount of oxygen to live.

For containers that you are watering into directly, you will need a dish liner beneath it to catch the runoff water from the holes. You may want to place a cork liner beneath the dish liner as some dish liners are porous and can leave rings on floors or carpets.

You can line your container (for those containers without drainage holes) with thick, plastic poly sheeting, also known as Visqueen. A 6-millimeter thickness is used in agriculture and is very durable. Line your container with it and let it overlap the top of the container slightly (you will later cut it to just below the container lip line). Next, add a 3-inch layer of gravel to the bottom of the container. Add a layer of weed block on top of the gravel to completely cover the gravel (this keeps the soil from washing into the gravel but allows water to drain through as the weed block is permeable). Then take a 1/2-inch diameter PVC pipe cut the depth of the container. Place the PVC inside the Visqueen where the soil and plant is planted and run it all the way through the weed block to the gravel. Remember, the weed block is there to keep the soil from getting down to where the gravel and excess water will accumulate should you have to siphon water out. Place a thin bamboo-reed stake into the PVC, this will be the dip-stick that is left inserted into the PVC. When it comes time to water, simply pull out the bamboo stick to see if there is water at the basin. If the "dip stick" is dry then water. If too much water is present, flexible tubing can be inserted into the



PVC and you can siphon it out (again, the weed block screens out the soil should you have to siphon out excess water).

Repotting plants should be done at least every one to two years. New soil can work wonders on plants. Don't expect a lot of growth from your interior plants, remember their roots are contained and the sunlight is less. Pruning is basically not needed. However, don't forget to fertilize them every four months with a timed-release granulated formula or you can use liquid, water-soluble fertilizers once or twice a month. The small plant spikes are also great to use. They can be inserted directly into the soil; each time they receive water, they slowly dissolve. Make sure you rotate your plants as this will keep them from becoming lopsided, as plants will grow towards the light. A simple quarter-turn weekly when watering will suffice.

Be on the watch for insects, too. They often enter the home just by opening the door. One aphid or mealybug can lay thousands of eggs and if one is on your plant, your uninvited guest population can rapidly spiral out of control. Check underneath the leaves occasionally for these culprits. They are quite common on houseplants and should be addressed quickly as they will interfere with the health of your plant. I usually take my houseplants outside and hose them down with the garden hose. If that isn't possible, then the shower will work; just make sure you have a way of keeping the topsoil from running down the drain (this can be messy). You can also use foliar sprays or systemics (pesticides that the plant absorbs via the roots). These are found at your local garden centers. It is important to check your plants for insects at the garden center before bringing them home. If a plant has them, don't buy them and inform the nurseryman.