

BLOG POST 08-11-21 *My Small Space Life*



Photo by Jason Gardner of Boston Fern (aka Sword Fern)

THE EXTRAORDINARY HEALING BENEFITS OF HOUSEPLANTS

By C. Ruth McBeath-Urrutia

When plants breathe, they enrich the air. The basic metabolism of a plant is photosynthesis—the transformation of sunlight into energy. However, their breathing mechanism directly affects humans in a very positive way. They ingest carbon dioxide, release oxygen and more. Houseplants contribute oxygen to your home, but also filter out unwanted chemicals in the air, such as benzene (garage fumes) and formaldehyde (fumes from carpets or furniture).

A 1989 NASA study found that, not only do plant leaves filter air pollutants, but plant roots and the microorganisms in the soil filter and destroy viruses, bacteria, and organic chemicals, breaking down these substances by the process of photosynthesis, where they are converted

into new plant growth. The entire plant is an air filter and “eats” air pollution. [Interior Landscape Plants for Indoor Air Pollution Abatement - NASA Technical Reports Server \(NTRS\)](#)



Neanthe Bella Palm (Parlor Palm) photo by Heather McKean

There are studies proving that plants are soothing in a home or workplace. But no studies are necessary for those who live with plants, in their small spaces. They would not feel at home without them. However, not all plants are beneficial and there is a long list of plants poisonous to pets (and children). Just because it is pretty, does not mean it is safe. The ASPCA provides a comprehensive list of toxic plants (to dogs, cats and horses). On their website at [Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants \(aspc.org\)](#)

If you are seeking out health benefits of greenery around you, as well as cleaner air, why not stick with choices that are never toxic, are always

beautiful and make your indoor air healthier? Here is a short list of three varieties of plants that can grace your small home, give you extraordinary beauty and clean your air with no worries.

- Nontoxic Palms : Neanthe Bella Palm (Parlor Palm) *Chamaedorea elegans*
- Leafy Plants : Peperomia - *Peperomia caperata* (or another variety)
- Ferns : Boston Fern (Sword Fern) *Nephrolepis exaltata*

The Palms – Neanthe Bella Palm *Chamaedorea elegans*

Palms are close to my heart, as I nurtured a potted palm for over ten years, only to have to leave her with a friend, when I moved across the country. The Neanthe Bella Palm, also known as the Parlor Palm, is perfect for small spaces. The plant grows slowly, according to the size of the pot, needs only indirect light, and (with a little leaf polish) can look like she came from a movie set. Give her a mixture of peat, clean potting soil and good drainage. Feed her with a watered-down mixture of fish emulsion (never commercial plant food), rotate her pot daily so

she gets an even amount of light, and watch her give you new fronds constantly.

Leafy Plants - Peperomia - *Peperomia caperata* (or another variety)



Peperomia Houseplant (one of various varieties)

Photo by Annie Spratt@unsplash.com

The safe varieties of leafy plants look too much like the toxic varieties, so I always stay with Peperomia. This little round-leafed bushy plant has so many varieties of leaf color and texture that you will find more than one that you love. They are all non-toxic. Another famous round-leaf houseplant is the “pink polka-dot” plant, *Hypoestes phyllostachya*. Easy to distinguish and commonly available everywhere, even grocery stores, this little beauty has different patterns of pink on its leaves. The ASPCA website lists this plant as non-toxic.

Peperomia - *Peperomia caperata* (or another variety)

Ferns The Ancient Boston Fern (Sword Fern) *Nephrolepis exaltata*

There are so many reasons to love a Boston Fern (Sword fern). I am focusing on the Boston Fern, as it is not only **not toxic** to pets, but has extraordinary health properties. Easy to find and different from other ferns that are not safe for pets (its leaf stems are sword-like—long and narrow), the Boston Fern needs some special care, as it is a fern. For proper humidity, give your fern a spritz of filtered water from a mister, daily. Make sure the soil is moist, but not waterlogged. Check with your nursery for the best food for your fern and keep the light indirect. Full sun through a window will literally burn your fern.

In return, your fern will care for you. If you have a carpeted rental or furniture that is not 100% solid wood, chances are you have formaldehyde fumes in your air. The Boston fern has been reported to be able to remove more formaldehyde (from carpets, furniture and upholstery) from the indoor air than any other houseplant. Boston ferns are also excellent air cleaners with benzene and xylene (substances that usually enter the indoor space through garages). In early studies by Dr. Bill Wolverton, he cites the Boston Fern as No. 9 of the top foliage plants that clean indoor air. See the FAQs on his website. <http://www.wolvertonenvironmental.com/>

For a complete list of houseplants that are toxic to pets (including horses), see the website:

[Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants \(aspc.org\)](http://www.aspc.org)

For a cute ASPCA graphic of pet-friendly houseplants, see

