

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Plants help improve health, indoors and outdoors

By Janet Sellers

In our community, we enjoy the benefits of our local forest and our healthful forest air. Our ponderosa and other pines offer amazing benefits—known as phytoremediation—including boosting our immune system, improving vision and respiratory health, stimulating circulation, and protecting against pathogens. Now that we are indoors much more every day, let's take a good look at our indoor air quality. Can plants help us indoors to create better air and better health? Certainly! Indoor air quality is vastly improved with some specific plants that help, offering phytoremediation for our indoor air.

Indoor air chemicals include acetone, found in the off-gassing of particleboard, household cleaners, rubber cement, and paint. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that indoor air is often two to five times worse than the outdoor air that we breathe. Houseplants are beautiful and highly effective air-filtration systems, and budget-friendly as well.

Specific plants remove volatile organic compounds from the air. In August 2016, Vadoud Niri, a chemist at the State University of New York of Oswego,

presented his team's findings on the best houseplants that remove pollution at the 252nd National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society. While the idea of using plants to clean indoor air is not new, Niri's findings showed the results of specific plants and their specific air-cleaning results.

Dracaena removes up to 94 percent of acetone from the air. Bromeliads remove toxic air from six of eight sources in a 12-hour period including toluene, a toxic solvent emitted from popular items such as burning paraffin candles, which also emit benzene. (Benzene is a carcinogen found in automobile exhaust as well as the candles.) The safest candles to burn are unscented beeswax candles.

In chamber testing, spider plant removed ethylbenzene (80 percent), p-Xylenes (92 percent), and o-Xylene (83 percent). Ethylbenzene is a toxic solvent found in inks, paints, artificial elastomers (fake rubber), and in drinking water near fracking operations. It is injected into the ground during fracking operations.

Indoor toxic symptoms are enough to make us run out and get the plants just so we feel better. Symp-

toms include ailments such as reduced productivity, headaches, fatigue, personality changes, flu-like symptoms, brain fog and more.

Since plastics out-gas, avoid plastic pots and chemical-laden soils. Use clay pots and OMRI-approved soil (approved for organic use)—safe and without harmful chemical additives or pesticides.

And here's something to think about for what to do with the Christmas tree after the holidays. Pine trees offer health benefits in pine bark tea, pine needle tea, spa bath to relieve arthritis and exhaustion, and used in a steam to relieve sinusitis and congestion.

Crush three to four handfuls of fresh pine needles lightly between your hands and add to two quarts of water. Let this stand for at least an hour. Put the water and needles in a pot and boil for 10 minutes. Strain and add your pine tea to your bath.

Janet Sellers explores forest habitat models and traditional Ethnoecology for local gardening success. She can be contacted at janetsellers@ocn.me.

Art Matters

Holidays, art, and saving lives



By Janet Sellers

It's that gifty time of year. What fun for all of us to give and receive. A lot of gift giving revolves around happy surprises and unique gifts, or totally abandoning stuff and giving the funds instead to a favorite cause.

But a new social sense of gift giving is focusing on sharing meaningful gifts that double their impact by holding on to aesthetic and social awareness via a portion of the cost going to a favorite socially responsible cause.

There are many avenues to make this social giving a success, and we can do this in art as well. Having things and sharing them is good of course, but having the ability to create things ourselves from observation and imagination is downright thrilling—it's something to share anytime we like. How do we begin on this sharable path to creativity and satisfaction?

Do one thing at a time.

"Focus your awareness on one thing at a time; practice this instead of distraction." — the monk "Dandapani" at TEDx talk

This is very likely the most true thing about art—and other things in life—in terms of starting, making, and finishing the work. Taking an art class is a powerful way to get that habit.

My students tell me that they learn a lot in the classes and that they know they are ready for the next step each time and develop simple or complex works even as beginners. They can take what they have learned and practice it or simply look at what we did in class and they know and remember day by day and are interested in doing so. They are learning focus with the tools of concentration and process with a goal.

How does this happen? It happens in the class because I am teaching one thing at a time, we do it, check for accuracy, and then move on to the next stage until it is complete. In our case it is art, but it is much more, too. Learning in person, in a procedural way, allows us to take the steps necessary to create from our imagination and make a real physical object.

This focusing habit spills out into other areas of life in very positive and constructive ways. There are endless studies, writings and information about how art helps creativity in our lives, but what are these studies really telling us? They are telling us that creativity always follows mastery, and mastery is accomplished by practice and focus.

When the artist John Singer Sargent was asked why he was so good at art, his answer was, "miles and

miles of canvas," meaning that he practiced constantly and his work became his practice. He was extraordinary in his art, but very likely more so in his practice and in his focus and dedication to his craft.

We can tell something is of good or poor quality because we know what quality is. We have lots of practice in our daily lives, and visual media offers this visual practice from the best minds in the world.

Fortunately for everyone, drawing and doodling and using the tools of art is very pleasurable and intriguing. We can leave our cares and our worries, watch lines and colors flow, and watch how our pencil or brush makes something that has meaning. We are both creator and observer with artwork.

In this hectic holiday season, let's not be overwhelmed by the busyness that our society inflicts upon us—let's do one thing at a time, with focus, and remember to enjoy ourselves and each other. This is a lifesaving effort and we need to do it often!

Here's to seeing you in art at our local art shows and art classes. Happy holidays my friends!

Janet Sellers is a local artist, writer, and art teacher. Her artwork is exhibited in Colorado galleries, museums, and outdoor public art. She can be contacted at janetsellers@ocn.me.

Snapshots of Our Community

RRR earns NFPA certification



Above: Last year a small group of Red Rock Ranch homeowners worked with the Colorado State Forest Service and the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District to create a 10-year wildfire risk-reduction plan. As a result, Red Rock Ranch earned National Fire Protection Association certification as a FireWise USA® Community. Their first-year efforts logged thousands of volunteer hours ranging from administrative work to on-site fuel-reduction efforts that created defensible space around 71 homes. As one of seven national FireWise USA® 24-month "Site of Excellence" pilot program participants, Red Rock Ranch actively engaged residents to complete the program's defined goals and objectives. Sites of Excellence receive special street signage, \$1,000 in chipping services, publicity in the National Fire Protection Association Fire Break newsletter and social media, mentoring for local FireWise teams, and an expense-paid trip for two representatives to participate in a two-day Home Ignition Zone training workshop. This highly motivated community's 2018 year-to-date volunteer efforts qualify Red Rock Ranch as FireWise in 2019 as well. *Submitted by Tom Owens, Beth Lonquist and Dave Betzler.*

Kiwanis presents grant to LPMS



Above: On Nov. 8 Larry Young, president of Monument Hill Kiwanis Club (left), presented a \$2,000 grant check to Lewis-Palmer Middle School Assistant Principal Bill Kissell and counselor Amy Sienkowski. The grant was made possible by El Pomar Foundation from the Karl E. Eitel Fund, which was established to improve the lives of at-risk youths. The funds will be used by LPMS to improve the capacity and quality of the Patriot Prep program. This program for selected rising sixth- and seventh-graders, provides supplemental education and learning assistance to improve potential success in transitioning from elementary to middle school. Additional assistance is provided by the Monument Hill Kiwanis Service Leadership Program through local high school Key Clubs. The Service Leadership Program, directed by Max Williams (right), enables student-led clubs at all D-38 school levels to develop leadership through service. *Photo by RF Smith.*