

# Indoor Plants to Gardens and Back Again

By Mollie Shelley

There are plants in my garden, some of them great assets, which started life as indoor plants. They were retired for a variety of reasons – sometimes they had outgrown their pot, or were looking jaded or perhaps I'd grown tired of looking at the same old plant. What I hadn't expected in most cases was how well they'd do and what an enormous contribution they would make in their new home.

There has been significant and reliable research done into the benefits to air quality made by indoor plants. Studies were done in homes and offices that showed they reduced by as much as 70% the pollutants, some carcinogenic, emitted by such things as carpets, plastics and new furniture. And that in a period of only 24 hours. This small miracle occurs even in air-conditioned offices. It is not only the leaves that contribute to this result but also the interaction with the air of plant roots and micro organisms in the potting soil.

Most indoor plants started life in a natural environment and were originally selected as pot plants because of their potential to live with a restricted root run and in reduced light. Hybridists have made significant contributions but when plants are returned to conditions not too dissimilar from their native habitat they thrive.

It can be an expensive exercise replacing indoor plants but there is no reason why you couldn't set up a system whereby you reuse

the plants that a year or so ago you consigned to the garden. Many of mine have sent off runners or have developed clumps that can be divided, thus providing new plants - some for the garden, some for the house. Even the Parlor Palm *Chamaedorea elegans* has had seedlings. Here is a short list of some of the plants that have proved successful in both locations.

The ferns top the list. In particular the Maidenhair Fern *Adiantum* is happy in shady locations where its roots are protected by rocks or paving. *Asplenium bulbiferum*, *Blechnum gibbum* and *Pteris* ferns are even hardier and there are others. The *Philodendron* hybrids 'Xanadu' and 'Congo' thrive and may need occasional pruning. Next on my list would be the *Spathiphyllum* or Peace Lily, both the smaller *s.wallisii* and the newer large hybrid *Spathiphyllum* "Sensation" which seems to thrive in shady areas with little attention. Both varieties multiply generously. *Pachystachys lutea* with its long golden-yellow bracts producing small white flowers always attracts attention, the Prayer Plant *Maranta* in its various forms loves shady spots and will produce runners that can be either left as ground cover or harvested for an indoor pot plant. Two others that make wonderful ground covers are the *Peperomias* and my personal favourite, *Saxifraga stolonifera* the 'Strawberry Geranium' or 'Mother of Thousands'.



Are you SURE you want the  
Bonsai back indoors?

Cartoon by Wendy Bishop

There are many alternatives to the old potted *Aspidistra* from which, in old crime stories, came the saying "Hiding behind the *Aspidistra*". That plant, left to its own devices, will take over a corner of your garden. ■

PERMACULTURE NORTH meets 3rd Monday evening each month in Lindfield. Contact 1300 887 145 or [info@permaculturenorth.org.au](mailto:info@permaculturenorth.org.au).