

Green Ideas for a Long Winter

BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES column from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

Nature restores. Taking a walk outdoors after too much time on our many screens—phones, computers, televisions—can go a long ways toward clearing our minds and changing our moods. Last spring when we first experienced the isolation and other constraints of covid, we were heading into spring and were able to get out more. We had things to do in our yards and could be outdoors safely and comfortably alone or distanced with friends.

This fall and winter may require a little more creativity and flexibility to get our “nature fix.” Here’s a few suggestions to be a little greener indoors and get us more connected to nature outdoors.



Indoors:

- Some of the best houseplants are philodendron, hoya, jade, asparagus fern, airplane or spider plant, aloe, rubber plant. There’s even air plants that don’t require soil.
- Other plants that can do well inside are things you may have already brought inside—succulents, geraniums, begonias or herbs like rosemary and parsley. They may not make it through the winter but they’re wonderful greenery, and in some cases taste-boosters.
- Mirrors can be placed to increase the light that indoor plants receive by placing them where sunlight lands and placing plants where that light is reflected, usually 45 degree angles from sun to mirror to plants.
- Some plants are easy to propagate indoors—airplane or spider plant, African violets, succulents, etc. It takes patience but watching and helping something grow is always a good thing. Check online guides for specifics.
- Use good lightweight potting soil and pots with drainage.
- Overwatering is one of the easiest ways to kill potted plants so check soil several inches deep before watering.
- Windows are important when we’re stuck inside. As much as possible, try to improve the view and the interest by putting birdfeeders and interesting plants or structures where they are visible from indoors (to feed birds but not squirrels, use safflower seed).
- Keep it guilt-free. If you kill some plants, no problem... that’s what compost piles are for.

Outdoors in yards or on small patios or decks:

- Bring in the birds with birdfeeders and birdbaths. Having plants or structures at varying heights offers birds a wide range of options for shelter and roosting and, for us, great opportunities for watching them. Evergreens or prickly plants keep them even more protected from predators.
- It doesn’t have to be Christmas to add evergreens to our yards; clip off some junipers that need pruning, put them in a container or tree stand where they’re most visible. The more levels in your yard, the more there is for you to look at and the more birds and other wildlife they will draw.
- Twinkle lights aren’t just for Christmas, and well-placed solar lights make it more inviting to get outdoors or bring the outdoors in.
- Add structures for more visual elements in the yard. Even a half-buried old barrel hoop looks great covered with snow. Keep structures natural with twigs, stones or other elements that fit into the natural environment.
- When there’s snow or wet soil, pay attention to tracks to see what’s been visiting your yard; most likely you’re feeding a lot more critters than you realize. If we can’t have friends at our table, we can at least spread the table for outdoor visitors.

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CUTLINE:

To purify air indoors, the very common airplane or spider plant “removed more than 95 percent of toxic agents from the air,” according to a Clean Air Study done by NASA. It’s also generous in propagating itself, with abundant shoots that can be cut and placed in water indefinitely or potted once roots have formed.