

LET'S BE
AN
ALOE VERA



Caring for and enjoying plants can be a wonderful way to connect with the natural world. There is therapy in interacting with plants, and this can be another way of soothing ourselves in times of anxiety.

Biophilia

Biologist E. O. Wilson defines biophilia as our innate and genetically determined affinity with the natural world. Numerous scientific studies point to the same conclusion – plants make us happy and healthy. Coming in so many sizes, shapes and colours, plants and a little bit of imagination can bring life to our home and workplace, especially in rooms with harsh fluorescent lighting!

Benefits

It has been proven that a collection of at least five different species and sizes of plants in a room improves mood and health¹. Plant care can be a wonderful metaphor for self care. We see plants thrive when the conditions are right. People are no different! A study from the University of Technology Sydney shows that plants reduce anxiety by 37%, depression by 58% and lower anger and hostility by 44%.

With Australians commonly spending 90% or more of their time indoors², air quality is of great importance. By simply adding one medium-sized plant to a medium-sized room, air quality will improve by up to 25%.

By requiring your full attention, caring for plants will help you release endorphins which are known to be the happy chemicals. Stress levels are reduced and productivity increases. Sixty-six percent of Australians have reported feeling satisfied when looking after plants, while

1 Hes, D. (2020). *Plant Life Balance, Trend Report*. https://myplantlifebalance.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PLB_Trend_Report_2020.pdf

2 Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

58% experience better mood. Thirty-four percent of Australian plant carers feel more creative and 17% concentrate better.

What plant is best for an indoor space?

Some plants are more forgiving than others and will grow indoors with a minimum of TLC (tender loving care) but there is no such thing as a 'set and forget' plant. If you are a beginner, start with:

- **Aloe vera** is almost indestructible when kept in the right conditions. Lots of light and minimal water.
- **Peace lily** is low maintenance. It will grow and flower when placed in indirect light, and kept moist. No matter which variety you own, if it needs water, your plant will look very sad!
- **Snake plant** is one of the hardiest of all indoor plants when kept in the right conditions: it needs a lot of light and minimal water.
- **Prayer plant** will thrive with bright, indirect light in moist soil.
- **Succulents** are a great indoor addition and will only need a little water and good lighting.



These plants are hardy and will grow well with minimal care. As long as the light, moisture and feeding are right (avoid direct hot summer sun, occasionally spray the leaves with water), these plants will bring joy for many years. Once well established and filling a pot, they can be divided with each section over time becoming a new full grown plant which in turn can become a perfect gift.

There are Australian native plants that will successfully grow indoors. They may resonate more with us as they are part of where we live. Most occur naturally in temperate or tropical rainforests. They are used to filter light and moisture and will happily grow in pots outdoors.

These can be brought inside for a week or two but will need to be returned to their outdoor setting. They will not be happy inside for longer than that.



Meditative Drawing

Materials needed:

Wind, quiet and space to move (barefoot if safe)

This is an outdoor physical expression activity

Creative writing

This activity is done with any plant of your liking. Find a name for it, starting with the same letter as your first name.

You are about to write a love letter to your plant. You will thank it for all the goodness it brings in your life. If you live in an apartment or in a drought affected area, it might be the only greenery you have in your immediate surrounding...how precious!

Your plant's presence is life itself and every time you look at it, it reminds you to be still within, to become present, to acknowledge the joys as much as the hardships that are paving your journey. Write all the goodness that your plant makes you aware of. Detail all the benefits and joys you get from being in its presence. Once you have finished writing the letter, read it out loud to your plant.

Observe

When was the last time you showed gratitude and love towards yourself, the way you just did when writing the letter to your plant? You are not much different from it: you too need care, healthy food, quiet and sunlight to thrive. Each time you see your plant, remember to look after yourself as well as you look after "her".

Tea making

Recipe

Infuse the thyme leaves in boiling water for at least 5 minutes (then thyme leaves can either be left in or removed). Add the juice of half a lemon and for extra flavour, plunge the peel in the tea. If you do so, only use a non-treated/organic fruit. Slightly sweeten the tea by adding a teaspoon of maple syrup.

Open your senses

While making your tea, observe the texture and aroma of each ingredient. Do they feel warm, cold? Are they dry, grainy, soft? Place the thyme leaves in the boiling water and observe how after floating they slowly sink in. How long does it take for the leaves to release their colour, their scent? Follow the same process when using the lemon juice. Observe how it gently colours and blurs the water. Can you smell the lemony flavour? Finally, add the maple syrup, stir slowly and look how it dissolves into the tea.

Observe

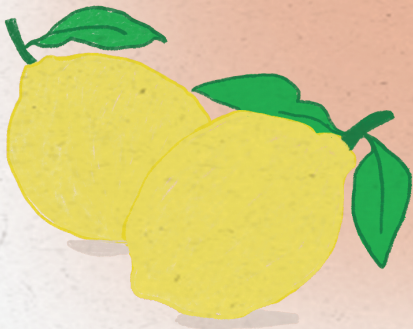
Do the aromas reach you immediately or do they reveal themselves slowly? Which one do you smell at the nostril level? Which one do you smell deeper in your sinuses, in your throat? When pouring tea in your cup, how does the water sound? Is it soothing, joyful, neutral?

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is great for the lungs and throat. It is antimicrobial, antioxidant, and an expectorant. There are many types of thyme. Use the right one as not all are considered medicinal. Lemon is an antioxidant, supports weight loss, improves skin quality, aids digestion, and freshens the breath. Citric acid found in lemon (and some other fruits), increases the absorption of nutrients, and can break down or reduce the production of kidney stones.

Maple syrup contains antioxidants. It is considered to be anti-inflammatory, may assist the skin, and is a better alternative to sugar due to its lower glycemic index.

Herbal Tea Recipe

- * 1 TSP DRIED THYME LEAVES
- * 1 TSP MAPLE SYRUP (OR TO TASTE)
- * 1/2 LEMON SQUEEZED
- * 1 CUP BOILING WATER



To make this tea even more stress relieving, add ½ tsp of lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), chamomile (*Chamomilla matricaria*) or lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*).

Tasting & drawing activity

You are about to draw/paint in your journal. Revisit each step until you finish your tea. Either space out your drawings or work towards a composition.

- Smell the tea: distinguish each ingredient from one another, associate a corresponding colour, draw/paint its intensity, the overall change of sensation in your body.
- Hold the cup: how does the heat emanate and feel in your hand, on your face? Draw or paint the sensation.
- Take a sip: bring your attention to the feeling of the mug on your lips, the hot water on your tongue, your palate, down your throat, in your stomach. Use another colour if needed, and draw/paint the overall sensation.



Journaling

Looking at the creative writing and tea making activities, notice how such simple words and moments of silent observation bring spaciousness, calm.

More opportunities around plants and tea making exist in our everyday life. Let's make the most out of it.

Place a reminder in your schedule to put some time aside every week (or every day!) to care for your plants and yourself. This can include spraying the leaves of your plants, watering or dusting, playing music or singing to them, reading out loud your love letter, writing a new one, etc.

If you grow your own thyme, mint or any herb to use in decoction, these caring moments can become part of a larger self-care ritual.

In your journal, write ideas for sharing these activities with your family, friends, co-workers or the Community. For example, host a tea ceremony for your friends. Use this quiet time together to find peace and stillness¹.

You could also create an evening routine in which each member of your family tells 'their plant,' one thing they have been grateful for during the day. This can include anything grand or small, from the nice dinner you prepared, a kind word they received, the clothes that keep them warm, or even the comfortable bed that awaits them.

¹ For ideas on how to run a tea ceremony, check Cha Dao's *The way of the tea* website.

Activity for Children

Materials needed:
Wind, quiet and space to move (barefoot if safe)
This is an outdoor physical expression activity.

Activity

This activity will encourage children to build the habit of looking after themselves and others. They will also learn to create a melody and add words to it. The plant used in this activity acts as a self-care symbol. Just like us, plants love water and music! In 1962, an Indian botanist found that playing music to plants improves their growth by 20%. By watering and singing caring words to their plants, children build self-care skills and compassion.

Step 1 - Song Writing

Ask the children what are the kind and encouraging words they would love to be told and write them down: “you are strong and beautiful”, “I love you so much”, “you are kind and generous”, “you make me happy, I love being around you”... The sentences don’t need to rhyme or be of any specific length. These words will form the bulk of the song.



Step 2 - Humming

Hum using the sound A, and feel the vibration in your belly. Using the sound O, feel your vibration in the torso and hum the sound M to feel the vibration in your head. Go up and down (like a very slow siren), and hum the three letters in any order until a melody appears. You can also use a soothing melody children like to listen to.

Step 3 - Singing

Now, adding your words to the melody, children murmur the song to the glass of water they hold. They can visualise all the goodness they sing entering the water.

Step 4 - More Talking

After a few minutes singing, invite the children to slowly drink a mouthful of water. Ask them to visualise how all the goodness filters little by little through their body. Share this moment of gratitude with the plant, and give it some of that water too. If they wish, they can sing a little more. Week after week, observe together how the plant grows. Show some empathy and notice if the soil is dry or too wet, if the plants look happy or sad. Does it need more light or more shade? What about the plant carers, do they feel like the plant? Do they need some special attention, some compassion?

