

How to Improve Indoor Air Quality in Winter



Plants can improve indoor air quality by helping to remove harmful irritants from the air.

Homes tend to be stuffer in autumn and winter. As temperatures outside dip, windows are closed and air quality inside homes can suffer.

Poor indoor air quality can not only be uncomfortable, causing residents to experience headaches, dry eyes and nasal congestion, but also can be unhealthy. According to the American Lung Association, poor indoor air quality can cause or contribute to the development of infections, lung cancer and chronic lung diseases, such as asthma.

Though it's not feasible or healthy to open windows when temperatures outside dip to near or below freezing, there are steps everyone can take to improve the indoor air quality in their homes.

- Add to your décor with plants. Plants provide both aesthetic and practical appeal to a home's interior. Houseplants can clean and purify the air in a home, helping to remove formaldehyde, benzene and other toxins that can make indoor air unhealthy to breathe. Benzene is an irritant that can cause dizziness, headache, nausea, and blurred vision, among other side effects. Formaldehyde, which is often found in homes thanks to its widespread use in a range of products, can cause watery eyes, nausea and wheezing.
- Watch what you are lighting up. Many homeowners know that smoking indoors drastically reduces indoor air quality, putting even nonsmokers at heightened risk of developing various respiratory ailments. Homeowners concerned about the indoor air quality in their homes should ban smoking inside, no matter how low temperatures dip outside. In addition, homeowners with wood-burning stoves and fireplaces should be especially diligent maintaining these features, as they can release harmful soot and smoke if they are not taken care of. Some people may also be allergic to incense and scented candles, so keep a watchful eye on residents and guests whenever you light candles or sticks of incense. If any symptoms of allergies appear, avoid lighting any more candles or incense, waiting until you can open the windows if you want to light any again.
- Purchase an air purifier. Air purifiers are beneficial year-round, helping to remove allergens and particles from a home. High-efficiency particulate air filters, known as HEPA filters, are extremely effective at removing airborne particulates from the air inside your home.
- Pay attention to pets. Like their owners, pets tend to spend more time indoors during the winter. That means more fur and pet dander, the skin flakes in an animal's fur or hair that can trigger allergic reactions, is likely in your home during the winter than in the summer. To combat this, bathe your pets regularly in the winter, making sure to wash the animal's bedding in hot water on a weekly basis

as well.

- Open the windows when possible. Winter does not typically provide many opportunities to open the windows, but you might get a few chances to let some fresh air in through the windows during winter. Make the most of these opportunities, and when possible crack the windows when you're cleaning so dust and other particles that kick up have a path outside of your home.

Clean interior air should be a year-round priority, but homeowners may have to go the extra mile to keep their homes' interior air clean when winter arrives.

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Create More Closet Space Without Major Renovations

Closet space is at a premium in many homes and apartments. Many older homes were not built to accommodate large wardrobes, while rental properties are often designed to maximize living space at the expense of storage.

Closets vary depending on the size of the home, but many tend to be a minimum of 24 inches deep so they can store garments without the clothes brushing against the walls. Bedroom and hallway closets can be four feet in length or more. Walk-in closets are the largest options, but such spaces tend to only be available in modern homes or custom-built properties.

It is not always practical or possible to undergo renovations to create more closet space. Apart from moving to a new residence, homeowners or renters must evaluate the space they have and make some more efficient choices in how they utilize available areas.

Clear out clutter

The first step to more closet space is to eliminate unused items. Clothing that no longer fits or items that can be stored elsewhere should be removed from the closet. Donate as much as possible. Some organizations will even pick up donations at your convenience.

Upgrade hangers and rods

Replace existing hangers with slimmer, more uniform alternatives that more easily fit into your closet. In addition, remove empty hangers, which are likely just taking up

space.

Consider dual closet rods if space will allow them. Hang the second rod below an area reserved for shorter clothing to achieve a two-tiered design. Grouping short items together also can free up valuable floor space.

Stack taller

Many closets are as tall as the ceilings of the rooms where they're located. However, the upper area may go unused because if it is not easy to reach. Install shelving above the closet rod with small swing-out style cabinet doors to offer access. In such areas, store seasonal items that you won't need to reach for each day. Keep a step stool close by for easy accessibility.

In small rooms, homeowners may want to find another way to utilize vertical space. A loft bed, which raises the bed up to a level where it might be on the top bunk of a bunk bed, will free up plenty of storage space beneath the bed. This can be turned into a floor closet.

Create storage for small items

Bookends, bins, boxes and drawers can be used to contain items that don't easily conform to closets. These may be purses, scarves, ties, and more. Don't overlook the possibilities of hanging items on the wall inside the closet or on the back of closet doors.

When finishing closet makeovers, be sure to install lighting inside the closet so items are more visible.

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