

Front Lines

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Building Gets LEED Credit for Indoor Plants

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The Ecology and Environment (E&E) Headquarters in Lancaster, New York, was recently awarded Platinum LEED Certification in part through the use of indoor plants.

Credit for the use of live plants indoors was given under LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), a third-party rating system offered through the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). Points were awarded in the category of Innovation in Operation and Maintenance, under LEED for Existing Buildings 2.0.

The specific credit was for the Biophilic Connection to plant life found in this building, which supports the argument that human beings need to feel connected to the natural environment in order to enjoy a sense of psychological, physical and social well-being. Biophilia directly confronts the issue of aesthetics and our evolved sense of beauty.

The patterns, forms, textures and colors of nature provide abundant models that can be used in building and product design to enhance their aesthetic appeal, not just their functionality and efficiency. Incorporating this natural sense of beauty into this building made it not only greener in the environmental sense, but also greener in a human sense.

Key points cited in the submittal were live plants' ability to filter volatile organic compounds (VOCs), uptake carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, and release fresh oxygen into the atmosphere.

Unlike Australia's Green Star green building rating system, the current USGBC LEED system doesn't yet offer a specified direct credit for including live plants. Within the current LEED section titled "Innovation in Design," it's possible for plants to be part of a specially developed use.

For more information on the health and environmental benefits of indoor plants, visit www.gpgb.org. **GP**