

What are your plants in? Plus tropicals in Holland and bad news for air purifiers



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# TROPICAL TOPICS

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What Are Your Plants In?  
Style Over Substance  
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Not Such Great Cleaners?

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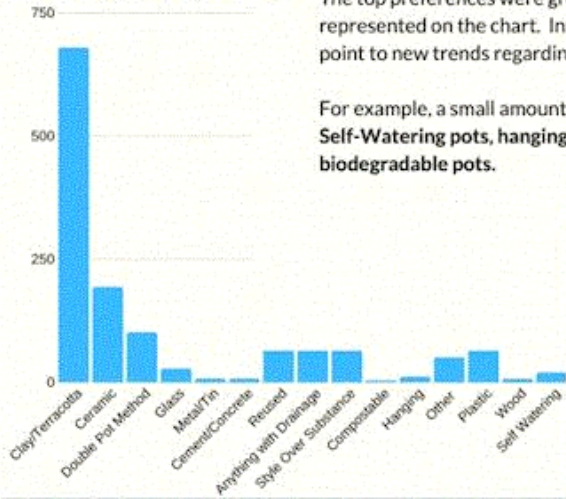
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## What Are Your Plants In?

This week I took a second look at the 2020 Houseplant Report conducted by GrowIt! and in partnership with TPIE. And you know what? It's not all about houseplants! It contains some really informative data on those things you sell your indoor plants in, i.e. pots and containers. Let's break down some of the info in this infographic:

### WHAT KINDS OF POTS DO YOU PREFER TO PUT YOUR HOUSEPLANTS IN?



The top preferences were grouped into the following categories represented on the chart. Interestingly, a few smaller categories may point to new trends regarding pots that users are open to.

For example, a small amount of responses pointed to a preference in Self-Watering pots, hanging planters, glass pots, and compostable or biodegradable pots.

From the responses, it was clear that although Clay/Terracotta was the most popular kind of pot mentioned, drainage was as important as the type of pot itself, and was mentioned in many comments after naming their favorite type of containers. Some people didn't care about the type of pot at all, and just listed "anything with drainage".

Clay/terracotta is by far the pot material of choice in this survey, followed by ceramic and the "double pot method," which is simply placing the plant in its original pot within a different outer pot. "Reused," "anything with drainage" and "style over substance" were the next biggest

categories into which the respondents' replies fit. These first two seem to denote a *laissez faire* attitude to the plant's outerwear, in my opinion, while the third response is all about the style.



## Style Over Substance

For folks fitting in the “style over substance” category, the Houseplant Report hypothesizes that the users have a preference for form over function. (And if that’s the case, I wonder if these plant owners are 100% in when it comes to proper plant care.) “It’s important to watch items like pottery, dishware and home goods to know what looks are in for containers,” the report reads. “Containers are the transition piece between the plants and the room.”



If you don’t have your glasses on and can’t read the small print on the graph, other responses for pot preferences were glass, plastic, wood, cement/concrete, compostable, hanging and self-watering. What does all this say to me? Well, retailers, you need to stock ceramic pots, most definitely. But do indeed offer a range of other options (maybe in lesser quantities) of materials you wouldn’t necessarily use as houseplant containers yourself. And for you growers, feel free to grow in just about anything—odds are your plants are either going to be repotted and covered up

by whatever the consumer fancies herself.

Check out the 2020 Houseplant Report for yourself [HERE](#) and then [let me know](#) how you interpret all the pot and container statistics. And maybe I'll see you checking out some containers at some pot exhibitors at [TPIE](#) this coming January 22-24.



## Tropicals in Holland

*Bossman Beytes was in the Netherlands two weeks ago specifically to visit Trade Fair Aalsmeer, which he calls “the biggest little show” in Dutch horticulture. It features Dutch growers who are members of the FloraHolland Auction, along with breeders and other suppliers that serve those members. I asked him to keep his eyes peeled for tropical trends, and he obliged with the following:*

**Terrariums everywhere.** True to the 2020 Houseplant Report results about containers, terrariums (or containers made of glass) were showing their popularity. They may seem old-fashioned to those of us who've been around, but they conveniently combine three things consumers love: green plants, glassware and low maintenance. No repurposed aquariums here, today's terrariums showcase cool plants in interesting glass containers of every shape and size.





One vendor offered kits; another created terrarium lamps, giving consumers four benefits in one attractive package!



**The next “it” plant?** I didn’t spot it ... unless it was this blue fern, *Phlebodium aureum*. I saw several cultivars, including this one, Davana, and Blue Star. It’s a type of hare’s foot fern with eye-catching bluish-green foliage (#bluestarfern on Instagram). But mostly, monstera continues to rule, especially variegated versions, with *P. peperomioides* widely available and fiddleleaf fig still top dog among large houseplants.



**Smit Kwekerij (that's Dutch for "nursery")** grows the "Eden Collection," which offers hundreds of beautifully branded foliage plants ([www.edencollection.nl](http://www.edencollection.nl)). They showed one I've seen a few times: "ant plant," a collection of "myrmecophytes"—succulents that have bulbous bases filled with corridors in which ants live (when in the wild, that is; you don't have to worry about ants moving in when it's in your kitchen window). They're most cool when you cut away half the base, as Smit did with this one, so you can see the system of tubes. This one is *Hydnophytum papuanum*. Another myrmecophyte is *Myrmecodia beccarii*. Eden calls them both "Maze."



One more note about the Eden Collection: It's big enough to build an entire department around, as I saw at a local garden center, De Bosrand. They had three bench-taped tables filled with pots and baskets, plus the accessories for them on each endcap.



*Thanks, Boss!*



## Not Such Great Cleaners After All?

Recently the *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology* published an article called "[Potted plants do not improve indoor air quality: a review and analysis of reported VOC removal efficiencies.](#)"

Long story short, it's a review of previously published studies on how plants clean air—we've been told for decades that plants remove all sorts of volatile organic compounds from the air and this study was meant to dive a little deeper. The authors did so by converting the results into something called "clean air delivery rates," or CADR. Their conclusion? You would need 10 to 1,000 plants per square meter in a building to remove the same amount of VOC air pollutants as a normal building's ventilation system does through air exchange. Yikes! That's a lotta plants.

But that previous research from NASA in 1989 isn't completely debunked. Plants do indeed "clean" the air, just not as efficiently as we were under the impression. The original research was conducted in a vacuum chamber—not your typical living quarters in the least. In a nutshell, indoor plants won't be replacing the fresh air exchange systems in buildings anytime soon.

The authors of the new study, Bryan E. Cummings and Michael S. Waring of Drexel University in Philadelphia, write that "Future experiments should shift the focus from potted plants' (in)abilities to passively clean indoor air, and instead investigate VOC uptake mechanisms, alternative biofiltration technologies, biophilic productivity and well-being benefits, or negative impacts of other plant-sourced emissions, which must be assessed by rigorous field work accounting for important indoor processes."

The good news? According to the GrowIt! Houseplant Report, respondents weren't necessarily looking for plants to purify their indoor air, so maybe it's not all that important to houseplant purchasers. Bad news? The article is already being referenced all over the internet and the social channels. And if folks are anything like I think they are, they're only reading the headlines (like this *Newsweek* headline, "[Your Houseplants Aren't Actually Improving the Air Quality in Your Home,](#)" and not the actual article.

How will you counter the folks who say the green industry has been pulling their leg about air purification claims and houseplant benefits? What's your defense? Weigh in with your game plan [HERE](#).

Suggestions, comments, questions or news to share? Just drop me a line at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen".

**Ellen Wells**  
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