

[ NATURAL ELEMENT ]

## A Room With a View

When you can't get outside, bring nature in to you. By Kim Mickenberg

**L**OOKING FOR A natural remedy to help you de-stress, focus, improve your mood, prevent colds, and live longer? Look outside.

### Light of My Life

PATIENTS IN RECOVERY rooms full of natural light take less pain medication, and, days after surgery, they report lower stress levels. Their hastened healing may be due to sunlight's ability to stimulate serotonin production, which helps regulate mood, sleep, and sex drive. Sunlight also increases vitamin D, which is believed to help prevent many chronic illnesses. And exposure to an hour of morning sunlight each day helps people fall asleep at night by regulating the melatonin cycle.

### Nice View

SOAKING UP THE sun isn't the only way to use your window: Don't forget to look out of it from time to time. Research shows that pausing to view scenes of nature actually helps us to refocus our attention, and people who sit near windows are healthier, happier, more tolerant, and more enthusiastic toward work. One study found that prisoners whose cells offered views of nature were sick 24 percent less frequently than others.

### Being Green

A LITTLE INDOOR plant life improves the atmosphere literally and figuratively. Raymond De Young, an environmental psy-



chologist at the University of Michigan, believes in the power of plants to bring peace to office politics. "I have one colleague who, whenever she's going into a very important meeting, places a small potted plant on the center of the table. She says it has a really calming effect on everyone around." Research shows that the more plants in an office, the happier the employees. Adding plants to the office does more than promote goodwill; it also promotes health. Plants in the office help reduce complaints of cough, hoarse throat, and fatigue.

### Water Your Pet

PET PLANTS CAN elicit the same kind of emotional connection that a pet animal does—lowering stress and feelings of loneliness, and extending longevity—sans Rover's shedding and barking. Bonus: Plants thrive in areas with large windows and lots of natural light, so keeping a plant happy and healthy means ensuring your own proximity to a window and sunlight.

### Help Nature Help You

IT'S EASY TO lose track of the world outside when you're buried in TPS reports. De Young advises sitting near a window and putting a small timer on your desk to remind you to take "micro-breaks," a quiet moment or two to "reflect and stare out the window, to bring your mind to a quieter place."

**KIM MICKENBERG** is an intern at *Psychology Today*.