



PROFESSIONAL OFFICE BUILDING MANAGEMENT

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Use Interior Landscaping to Improve Indoor Air Quality

Most office building owners and managers know the value of landscaping outside of their buildings. But many don't know that landscaping the inside of their buildings is just as valuable. "Interior landscaping gives tenants and visitors a good first impression of your building and sets your building apart from lesser-quality buildings," says Michael Laney, senior property manager for the commercial office division of Colonial Properties Trust.

But the benefits of interior landscaping go beyond aesthetics. Studies have shown that interior landscaping can actually improve your building's indoor air quality (IAQ). "Plants in office buildings can improve occupants' health, both physically and psychologically," says David G. Liu, president of a Florida-based landscaping company and spokesperson for Plants at Work, an organization dedicated to promoting interior landscaping.

We'll explain how interior landscaping improves IAQ. And we'll tell you about other benefits of interior landscaping, why you should hire an interior landscaping contractor, how to find a contractor, and what factors to consider when planning your building's interior landscaping.

How Interior Landscaping Improves IAQ

According to studies by organizations such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the John C. Stennis Space Center's Environmental Research Laboratory, Texas A&M University, University of Surrey, and Washington State University, interior landscaping can improve your building's IAQ by:

Filtering air. Plants filter air in two ways. First, they absorb pollutants - like formaldehyde, benzene, and trichloroethylene, and microbes, such as anthrax and Ebola - into their leaves and send these pollutants to their roots, where the pollutants are converted into food. Second, through a process called transpiration, plants emit water vapors that create a pumping action that pulls dirty air down around their roots, where the pollutants are absorbed and converted into food.

Producing oxygen. Today's sealed, energy efficient buildings have less exchange of fresh outdoor air for stale indoor air. By producing oxygen, plants help freshen a building's indoor air.

Maintaining appropriate humidity level. Plants help keep an optimal humidity level for building maintenance and human comfort and health - and below levels that can cause mold and bacteria to grow. In fact, research has shown that plant-

filled rooms contain 50 percent to 60 percent fewer airborne molds and bacteria than rooms without plants.

POBM Says: Encourage your tenants to incorporate interior landscaping in their spaces. By using plants to improve IAQ in their spaces, your tenants can prevent so-called sick building syndrome - and reduce the number of sick days their employees take.

Additional Benefits of Interior Landscaping

Interior landscaping provides the following additional benefits for your building, tenants, and advisors:

Aesthetic benefits. "Interior landscaping is essential to creating an attractive and inviting environment at a building," says Laney. "Interior landscaping does the following:

- Accents and/or softens the architectural elements of a building, often made of such hard materials as marble and granite;
- Enhances the value of your building. In fact, one factor that typically sets "Class A" properties apart from other properties is the presence of interior landscaping; and
- Creates a favorable ambiance and adds to the appeal of your building," says Laney. According to studies by England's Oxford Brookes University, people perceive buildings with interior landscaping to be more

expensive-looking, welcoming, and relaxing.

Cost savings benefits. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, plants can decrease the indoor air temperature by as much as 10 degrees, thereby reducing the need for air conditioning. And according to the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, proper selection and placement of plants can lower heating and cooling costs by as much as 20 percent.

Hire an Interior Landscaping Contractor

If you don't properly select, install, and maintain your interior landscaping, your plants won't thrive. "Plus," Liu warns, "you'll have wasted money and your building will look worse than it did without plants. But unless you have an experienced and extensive in-house landscaping department, planning, installing, and maintaining your interior landscaping is best left to a professional interior landscaping contractor," he advises. Laney agrees.

"Ideally, you'll want to hire a landscaping contractor that specializes in *interior* landscaping as opposed to *exterior* landscaping, which is very different," notes Liu. He suggests getting references from managers of other office buildings or shopping centers with interior landscaping that you like.

"When interviewing a prospective contractor, ask him for references - and check those references," says Liu. Ask the references about the extent and the quality of the contractor's services, including its maintenance routine and responsiveness to problems. And visit buildings or shopping centers that the contractor has worked at, to evaluate their interior landscaping.

POBM Says: For a list of professional interior landscapers near you, as well as more information on the benefits of interior landscaping, contact Plants at Work at 1-800-347-9014 or visit its Web site at

www.plantsatwork.org.

Factors to Consider When Planning Interior Landscaping

When planning your interior landscaping with your interior landscaping contractor, there are several factors you should consider, including:

Cost. "First, you'll need to consider how much you can afford to spend," says Laney. Once you know your budget, you and your interior landscaping contractor will have a better idea of which types of plants and how many plants you can choose.

"When budgeting money for interior landscaping, keep in mind that you have installation costs as well as maintenance costs," says Liu. "The bulk of the costs are installation-related, but these are offset by the benefits and value that interior landscaping ultimately provides for your building," says Laney. "Also, if you're adding interior landscaping to an existing building, you may need to retrofit the building to provide adequate light and easy access to water," says Liu. So don't forget to include the cost of any necessary retrofitting.

"Buildings with limited budgets have two choices," says Liu. "The first is artificial or silk plants. Although good-quality silk plants can cost as much as - or more than - live plants, they don't require maintenance aside from occasional dusting," he explains. "But even the most lifelike artificial plants fall short of the real thing where the discriminating buyer is concerned," he warns. "And, of course, artificial plants won't improve your IAQ. The alternative is leasing plants. Leasing reduces the initial start-up costs of installing interior landscaping," he says.

Plant selection. You'll need to consider what types of plants to use. "Since your building's indoor environment is controlled, you have more options than with exterior landscaping, which is affected by the outdoor environment," says Liu. "This gives you the ability to use creative and innovative designs in your interior

landscaping," says Laney. So, even if your building is in, say, Anchorage, Alaska, you could use tropical plants in your interior landscaping. In fact, tropical plants are often an appropriate choice for interior landscaping because they thrive in exactly the same conditions as people do.

"But that doesn't mean there are no restrictions in selecting plants for your building," Liu warns. "You'll still need to consider factors like the amount of natural light in your building, and select plants that will thrive under your building's particular conditions. If you make poor decisions when selecting plants for your building, the plants may get sick or die," warns Liu. "And having no plants at all is better than having sick or dying plants," he says.

Placement. "You'll also need to consider where to place plants," says Liu. "You should put more durable plants in high-traffic areas or areas where the plants may be brushed by passersby," he suggests. "Also, you should place plants in the lobby and by elevator banks, where they can be easily seen and enjoyed by tenants and visitors," he adds. "And you should consider the effect you want to achieve," says Laney.

POBM Sources:

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