

Growing Cheer



Helleborus
Photo courtesy of Skagit Gardens

Indoor plants erase the winter blues

By Phyllis Gricus

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**Paper White
Narcissus
Grand Soleil**

There's no better way to brighten your home in winter—along with your mood—than with plants. In addition to bringing color and living energy to your home, they bring real health benefits.

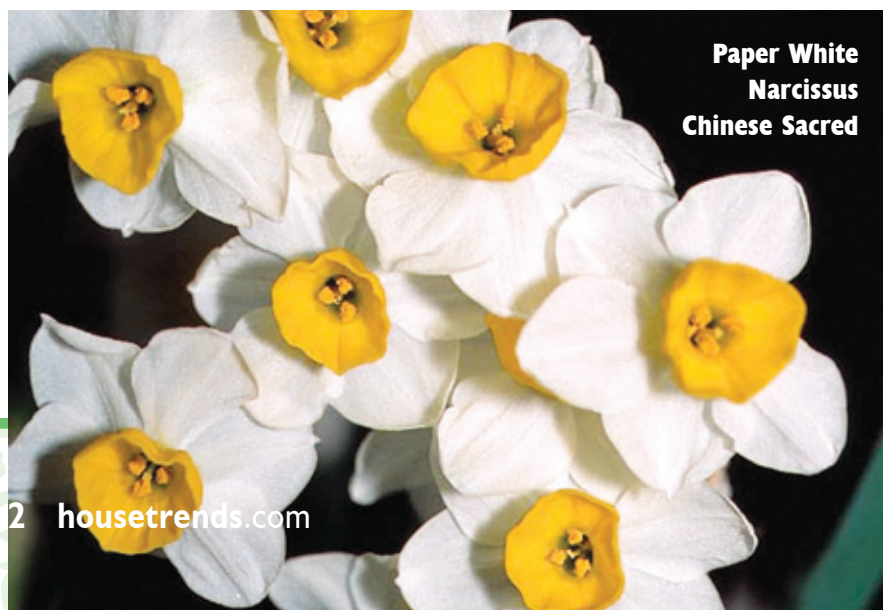
Studies have shown that indoor plants improve air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide and emitting essential oxygen. They also help reduce the levels of airborne chemical pollutants. Indoor plants are natural humidifiers, and increased humidity reduces the occurrence of coughs and other cold-related illness.

Most of us don't need scientific studies to recognize that the aesthetic benefits of foliage, fragrance and color contribute to a feeling of well being, making us feel calmer, more optimistic and hopeful—hopeful that our impulse to garden can be satisfied even in winter!

So here's a list of cheer for you to grow this winter:



**Paper White
Narcissus Inbal**



**Paper White
Narcissus
Chinese Sacred**

Bulbs to beat the blahs

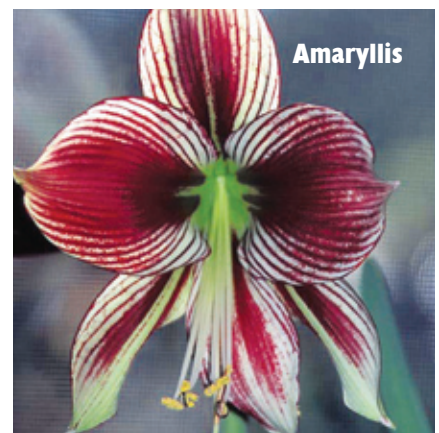
Some of my cherished indoor blooms are grown from bulbs. Paper White Narcissus (Tazetta Daffodil) and Amaryllis (Hippeeastrum) are two that do not require a pre-cooling before blooming, which makes them some of the easiest bulbs to bring into bloom.

While some people find the Paper White's musky aroma overpowering, there's no disputing the delicate beauty of the blooms. The white Narcissus Ziva variety is the most commonly found variety. However, there are some varieties with yellow petals and a softer, pleasant fragrance that can be ordered from specialty bulb shops.

Amaryllis has large lily-shaped, brightly colored flowers on tall stems that bloom for about seven to ten weeks. In Amaryllis, bulb size matters: the larger bulbs produce more flowering stems than smaller ones. Amaryllis is available in many beautiful varieties and various shades of red, white, pink, salmon and orange, including multi-colored ones.

Plan for a profusion of blooms throughout the winter season by potting bulbs up every two weeks.

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Photos this spread courtesy of
Brent and Becky's Bulbs





Cyclamen



Kalanchoe



Begonia Penny Lahn



Begonia Tangier



Helleborus

Photo courtesy of Skagit Gardens

Winter bloomers

While winter-flowering begonias (Rhizomatous Begonias) are mostly grown for their interesting and distinctive foliage, they produce lovely sprays of flowers ranging in color from white to pink in late winter. They're easy to maintain indoors in bright filtered light if kept lightly moist and lightly fertilized. Varieties to grow include Penny Lahn and Tangier.

Cyclamen's heart-shaped leaves—an integral part of its charm—and butterfly blossoms make it a winter time favorite. Cyclamen flourishes in chilly temperatures—ideally no warmer than 65° F—with indirect or filtered bright light, and moist but well-drained, soil. Place plants on a saucer full of pebbles and water to maintain humidity and fertilize them every two weeks. Florist cyclamen (*C. persicum*) is the most widely available. If your house is warm, try the new Metis miniature hybrids, which promise prolific blooms even in less than ideal conditions.

When days are short and indoor conditions are dry, the Kalanchoe burst with star-shaped flowers ranging from yellow, red, and orange to apricot hues. The most popular variety is Kalanchoe blossfeldiana. It blooms from late fall to early spring with clusters of long-lasting florets. This charmer is ideal for homes where the temperature is about 70° F during the day and cooler at night.

Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger* 'Jacob') is a favorite, long-lived perennial ground cover that has bunches of upward facing pure white flowers—a must-have for a part-shade spot in your garden. Available in garden centers now, they can be admired for a few weeks indoors, adding a touch of floral elegance to your holiday celebrations, then planted in your garden for years of blooms in the depth of winter.

Be happy; plant something today! 🌱