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# The Health Reformer

## ***Common plants help reduce indoor air pollution***

Common indoor plants may provide a valuable weapon in the fight against rising levels of indoor air pollution. Those plants in your office or home are not only decorative, but NASA scientists are finding them to be surprisingly useful in absorbing potentially harmful gases and cleaning the air inside modern buildings.

NASA and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) have announced the findings of a 2-year study that suggest a sophisticated pollution-absorbing device: the common indoor plant may provide a natural way of helping combat "SICK BUILDING SYNDROME".

Research into the use of biological processes as a means of solving environmental problems, both on Earth and in space habitats, has been carried out for many years by Dr. Bill Wolverton, formerly a senior research scientist at NASA's John C. Stennis Space Center, Bay St. Louis, Miss.

Based on preliminary evaluations of the use of common indoor plants for indoor air purification and revitalization, ALCA joined NASA to fund a study using about a dozen popular varieties of ornamental plants to determine their effectiveness in removing several key pollutants associated with indoor air pollution. NASA research on indoor plants has found that living plants are so efficient at absorbing contaminants in the air that some will be launched into space as part of the biological life support system aboard future orbiting space stations.

...Each plant type was placed in sealed, Plexiglas chambers in which chemicals were injected. Philodendron, spider plant and the golden pothos were labeled the most effective in removing formaldehyde molecules. Flowering plants such as gerbera daisy and chrysanthemums were rated superior in removing benzene from the chamber atmosphere. Other good performers are Dracaena Massangeana, Spathiphyllum, and Golden Pothos. "Plants take substances out of the air through the tiny openings in their leaves," Wolverton said. "But research in our laboratories has determined that plant leaves, roots and soil bacteria are all important in removing trace levels of toxic vapors".

"Combining nature with technology can increase the effectiveness of plants in removing air pollutants," he said. "A living air cleaner is created by combining activated carbon and a fan with a potted plant. The roots of the plant grow right in the carbon and slowly

degrade the chemicals absorbed there," Wolverton explains.

NASA research has consistently shown that living, green and flowering plants can remove several toxic chemicals from the air in building interiors. You can use plants in your home or office to improve the quality of the air to make it a more pleasant place to live and work - where people feel better, perform better, any enjoy life more.

*Zone10.com*

## ***The health literacy skills of most adults in the US are low***

As many as 90 million American adults lack the reading and math skills needed to understand basic health information and navigate the U.S. health care system, according to a report issued Thursday by the Institute of Medicine [IOM].

The report's authors stressed that the problem goes beyond the problem of low general literacy skills among adults, extending from persons who do not speak English as a first language to educated individuals who have a hard time interpreting complicated medical advice from doctors.

The IOM defines health literacy as the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic information and services needed to make appropriate decisions regarding their health.

The problem affects virtually all areas of American health care, from misleading food labels and drug information to overly complicated informed consent agreements, writing instructions, and government forms that prevent many people from accessing needed public health services, according to the report.

The study also calls on American doctors to improve the way they communicate with patients and asks medical schools to make better communication a part of regular student training.

"In health there's such a very high dependency on understanding," said IOM president Harvey Feinberg, MD. "Every time there's a misunderstanding [between a doctor and a patient], there's a risk of life loss."

The report points to an increasingly complex health system that asks patients to decipher complicated information about multiple medications, surgical procedures, caloric intake, and a host of other issues. "These demands exceed

(Over, please)

the health literacy skills of most adults in the United States," it says.

Even those who read well have a hard time figuring out information from their insurers, doctors, or pharmacists, David A. Kindig, MD, chair of the IOM panel, tells WebMD. "They're still confronting the health care system with all its complexity," says Kindig, a professor emeritus of population health sciences at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine.

*By Todd Zwillich, WebMD Medical News*

Note: "The intricate names given medicines are used to cover up the matter, so that none will know what is given them as remedies unless they consult a dictionary.

....In regard to that which we can do for ourselves: There is a point that requires careful, thoughtful consideration. I must become acquainted with myself. I must be a learner always as to how to take care of [my body]... that I may preserve it in the very best condition of health. I must eat those things which will be for my very best good physically, and I must take special care to have my clothing such as will conduce to a healthful circulation of the blood. I must not deprive myself of exercise and air. I must get all the sunlight that it is possible for me to obtain. I must have wisdom to be a faithful guardian of my body. *Medical Ministry, pp. 228-230*

### **Christians preach conflicting Bible-inspired diets**

The Rev. George Malkmus often preaches about how he believes the world of proper eating began - or, in his opinion, began. "The Lord gave us everything we need in the Garden of Eden: fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds," the preacher-turned-diet adviser said in an interview at Hallelujah Acres, his North Carolina headquarters. "That's why we call the way we eat the 'Hallelujah Diet.' We celebrate its true creator."

Malkmus' diet is one of a batch of Bible-based eating plans flooding bookstores and health food stores. Last summer's "What Would Jesus Eat?," by Dr. Don Colbert, encourages eating non-animal-derived "living foods" and eschewing most "dead" or processed foods.

"The Weigh Down Diet" by Gwen Shamblin offers few food restrictions but encourages following "God's perfect boundaries of hunger and fullness."

Malkmus' diet - which draws, he says, from Genesis 1:29 - bans all animal products except for honey and promotes an 80 percent raw diet.

And there's the newest addition to the growing Christian health genre, Jordan S. Rubin's "The Maker's Diet." Drawn from the book of Leviticus, Rubin's diet encourages eating certain meat and dairy products and warns against an all-raw, vegan regimen.

"The healthiest diet is to consume meats, poultry, dairy, fruits and vegetables and to consume them in a form the body was designed for," Rubin said. He advises eating foods in their most organic and least-processed forms. Dairy, for instance, should not be pasteurized and defatted and pumped with hormones but rather taken as a yogurt drink derived from raw, fermented milk.

Meat or vegan? Raw or cooked? The abundance of allegedly godly guidance is enough to make the would-be dieter pray for divine intervention.

Elisabetta Politi, nutrition manager at Duke University's Diet and Fitness Center in Durham, hopes people don't take the proposed diets too seriously.

"I am just thinking of the safety of having unprocessed dairy products. From a public health perspective, it's undoable," Politi

said of Rubin's push for raw milk. "It's an extreme going back to an agriculture society that we are no longer."

There's nothing new about religious beliefs dictating what people put in their mouths. Some Jews keep kosher, while observant Muslims adhere to dietary requirements called halal. Generations of Catholics grew up not eating meat on Fridays.

But the new God-based diets target two specific audiences not generally thought of as compatible - evangelical Christians and what Politi calls the "back to nature" health buffs who gravitate toward an organic way of eating.

Rubin, a Messianic Jew, says he is a member of both clans. He peddles supplements and lifestyle products to the health food industry through his Garden of Life company. At the same time, he describes himself as a "biblical health coach."

"My ministry is to help change the health of this world one life at a time," he said.

Similar claims by Malkmus, Shamblin and others rankle those who see spinning the \$40 billion diet industry to a Christian audience as just another way of using God as a gimmick.

"It's not just cashing in," said Stephen Barrett, a Columbia University-trained psychologist and founder of the Internet site "Quackwatch."

"I think that the people who promote these things, they're here to save the world and they preach and they're the Messiah (of health). Their personalities and characters have all sorts of grandiosity" and little scientific basis, Barrett said.

Politi applauds the focus on healthy eating, but adds, "I don't think it has to be confused with God."

Mainstream nutritional or medical credentials are hard to come by in this crowd. Rubin says he holds degrees in naturopathic medicine and nutrition, but both involved unaccredited programs and his degrees couldn't be verified.

Malkmus, who said he is not currently affiliated with a specific church, has no formal scientific training. But he does employ a researcher who determined that the Hallelujah diet was deficient in vitamin B-12.

"This shocked me, that God's perfect eating plan could have a flaw," Malkmus said. "But we realized that fruits and vegetables back then were more nutritious because of the topsoil."

Barrett sees the 70-year-old Malkmus - who claims he healed his own colon cancer through diet but doesn't furnish medical records - as the best of a bad lot.

"Malkmus has a little more ethics than (others)," he said.

Malkmus's argument that people who ate a raw diet in biblical times lived an average of 912 years gets little more than a laugh from Barrett and Politi.

"It can't be scientifically tested or proven," Barrett said of the contention.

Rubin claims his diet cured his Crohn's disease and sells dietary supplements under the Garden of Life label

Politi says she is "just very, very wary of the supplement industry" because it's not regulated, the claims aren't scientifically proven and it's expensive.

Rubin also recently launched a line of "advanced hygiene" soaps and argues that The Maker's Diet is about more than just eating - it's a whole way of life.

"When God gave me this health message I knew it would have a major impact on the world," he said. "Just as the Bible is the best selling book in history, I see no reason why 'The Maker's Diet' can't be the best selling health book in history."

*By HOLLY HICKMAN, Associated Press, Copyright © 2004 The Beaufort Gazette*