

Interiors

Home-grown

Live plants can make more of a statement than cut-flower arrangements in the home, says Ian Drummond

There is a curious disconnection between gardens and indoor flower arrangements. Traditionally, each of them has appealed to people with contrasting psychologies. Where the outdoor gardener must allow for the influence of external forces – weather, fauna and competing flora – the flower-arranger works in a controlled environment, bending nature to the aesthetic of the still life. Chalk and cheese, you might think.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Just as the modernists believed in blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, so I believe it's possible to bring the garden into the home.

I'm not talking about the Aspidistras and asparagus ferns that once collected dust in the houses of our great-grandparents' house, nor the mournful rubber plants that lurked in 1980s homes. No, what I'm interested in is using plants, rather than cut flowers, as if they were sculpture. They are the most difficult kind of sculpture because they grow, changing colour and shape. Sometimes they smell good, sometimes bad. But that is what makes their presence so exciting. Stasis is dull.

Fortunately, an increasing number of people seem to share this view. In 2010, indoor gardening received mainstream recognition when our firm Indoor Garden Design won a silver-gilt medal for its interior garden at the Chelsea Flower Show. Given that the company is 36 years old (I've been there for 19 of them), you can see that it's taken a while for our philosophy to be appreciated. Suddenly, we have found ourselves in demand – at London Fashion Week, Harrods, Selfridges, the Baftas and the annual Sir Elton John Aids Foundation's White Tie & Tiara Ball.

These events need an extravagant approach. When we collaborated with the



Eye-catchers Clockwise from main: a herb garden with thyme, lemon thyme, rosemary, oregano and sage planted in squares; three Vanda orchids hung from wires; Cycas revoluta in a lined driftwood cubis planter, topped with moss; Tillandsia cyanea

James Royall



designer Kinder Aggugini at London Fashion Week, we created a "living corsage" using mini-orchids. These were clipped on to handbags, worn on coats and even in the hair, and were quite a conversation piece.

For the Baftas, we went with lush tropical planting interwoven with vibrant colours, making use of plants such as Strelitzia (Birds of Paradise), Clivia and Phoenix and Kentia palms. The White Tie Ball demanded that we allow a little chaos into the mix. As befits Lady Gaga, who performed at the ball, we created a pathway strewn with broken cutlery, crockery and crushed glass, with luscious masses of white foxgloves breaking through them.

Of course, unless you're Lady Gaga, domestic interior design needs the theatri-

cality ratcheted down a notch or two. But I still believe that plants have a pivotal role to play. Not only is their presence soothing and uplifting but the hidden health benefits are far-reaching. According to research at Washington State University, they can improve air-quality by eliminating toxins and even reduce dust in a room by one-fifth.

Getting plants to look good in a room means playing with colour and form, and making sure the container is appropriate to the plants. It should be as beautiful as they are. Physical conditions such as heat, draughts and sunlight will affect growth. The



wrong conditions – or the wrong air-conditioning – will kill a plant.

Once you know the palette of plants from which you want to choose (for inspiration see www.flowercouncil.org), the creativity begins. Think about creating a landscape: devise plant groupings and visual displays using the same type of plant or families of plants. Crucially, open up spaces with plants by using them as "eye-catchers" in under-used areas. Don't just assign them to window sills and hallways. They can dangle down windows or sit in herby swathes in the kitchen where their scent will complement cooking. Somnolent plants such as Asplenium (ferns), and sexy ones such as orchids, can be massed in bathrooms.

In the 1950s song "Design for Living", Flanders and Swann satirised the idea of interior garden design: "We're terribly house and garden," they declared. "At last we've got the chance / the garden's full of furniture . . . / and the house is full of plants." It remains a much-loved lampoon but, more than half a century later, perhaps the idea no longer seems quite so absurd.

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