

# DIY office plants prove to be a false economy

By Bernadette Iddles- Corporate Plants

Whilst the movement towards DIY office plants seems like a good idea and exposes more people to a green environment, it does create some challenges and issues for plantscapers as well as their clients. However, there are also opportunities to be had from turning a bad experience into a positive one for the client.

**P**lants, as a last minute addition to and office development or refurbishment, often means they are not integrated into the design but merely dropped in where they fit.

DIY office plants often suffer from the lack of professional advice, not just on plant selection and positioning, but on suitable pots and planters, maintenance requirements and even the water tightness of installations. This can lead to plants performing poorly, or even

dying, water leaks on carpets, pest and disease outbreaks and an overall negative connotation about plants in the workplace.

A recent job where our business moved a client from DIY office plants to an interior plantscaping service highlighted some of the issues.

#### The client

Upon refurbishment of their offices, staff suggested that they would like plants in

their work environment. Therefore, the client ensured the office fitout included planter boxes on top of tambour units that ran through the centre of the main, open plan workspace. These planter boxes were tar sealed for waterproofing and built to cover the Tambour units.

Unfortunately, the planter boxes were only 150mm deep. Had they consulted with a professional interior plantscaper, specifications for the size and depth for industry standard pots would have been



A sleek and stylish design with healthy plants can be achieved using a professional interior plantscaper

provided and would have included the addition of mulch plates to suspend the pots within the unit. This lack of input meant that smaller plants, that did not fill the planter boxes, were used and the complete unit had to be filled with potting mix.

Plant selection was left to a few interested staff members who chose *Spathiphyllum* because they looked nice and were told that they would be fine indoors. Sadly, this choice later proved to be unsuitable due to the high light and temperature conditions of the well-lit office.

## **an opportunity also exists to provide paid advice and consultation**

No one had considered the use of mulch of any kind. A staff roster was drawn up for weekly watering, however no quantity of water was specified.

The early enthusiasm of the staff members to enjoy the benefits in their workplace soon became lost as watering became a guessing game of how much and how often. Not all staff members followed the strict roster and a large outbreak of *Sciarid* fly (fungus gnats) made their workplace uncomfortable rather than productive.

By the time Corporate Plants were called in for advice and a solution to the problem, any thoughts of the benefits of plants were gone and the DIY experiment had failed.

### **The solution**

Corporate Plants' solution was to prove the economics and benefits of a well-designed and maintained plant display, within the limitations of the existing planter boxes. This was achieved by:

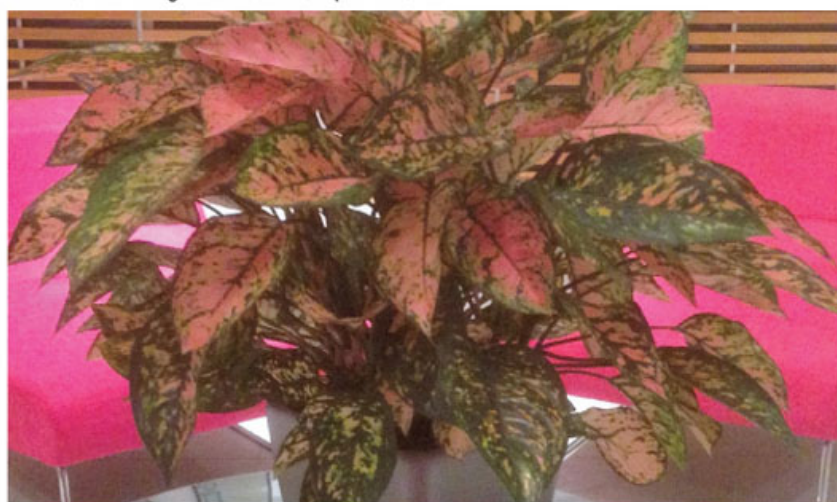
- removal of the existing mix of *Spathiphyllum* varieties, and replacement with more suitable plants which tolerate warm temperatures and high light conditions - *Sansevieria robusta*
- replacing existing cheap, outdoor potting mix with a custom blend



A big fail for the DIY experiment



Water schedule- good intentions – poor result



Colour matching provides impact

lightweight indoor mix. The addition of mulch plates were suggested (instead of planting into indoor mix) which allows for pots to be suspended, however, budget constraints plus the shallow depth of the planter boxes were limiting factors.

- using recycled rubber mulch to top and finish the planting to aid water management and provide a nicer aesthetic.
- scheduling a maintenance program at a competitive price which turned out to be 10% less than the client estimated they had spent over the previous 12 months in lost staff hours, replacement plant purchases and fly spray to treat the Sciarid flies!

## there are also opportunities to be had from turning a bad experience into a positive one

The end result proved to be a favourable situation. Staff members were able to enjoy the plants rather than seeing them as a chore and commented on how much they liked the new display. Importantly, the false economy of poorly planned DIY office plants was exposed.

### The lessons

Whilst DIY office plants remain the choice of some workplaces, when the true cost of poor planter choices, inappropriate plant selection, time spent by employees trying to maintain plants and the cost of replacement plants at retail cost is explained, clients quickly realise a plant hire contract is justifiable.

An opportunity also exists to provide paid advice and consultation to those clients still intent on DIY office plants. There may also be the offer of a contract to supply and install planters and plants, as well as providing a maintenance schedule to guide those who will be carrying out the maintenance rather than leaving them to guess what is required. You may also offer a three month 'check-up' visit whereby you can provide value to the client answering questions their staff may have.

The false economy can be discussed with potential clients at the consultation stage. This is the perfect opportunity to explain the benefits of using a professional Interior Plantscaper rather than relying on the short term good will of staff that are usually trained as specialists in another field.

Use client examples where they sought advice at the beginning of the project. Explain the benefits of using mulch plates so beds did not have to be filled with mix and suitable plant selection.

One such client saw the benefits of upfront advice and planning using industry specification. Their office refurbishment included custom-built planters made to hold industry standard 200mm pots. Planters were integrated

into the new desk end storage units, made water-tight and allowed for maximum plant visibility for the entire workspace so additional floor plants were not needed. The construction budget allowed for the custom planters and to an ongoing maintenance contract rather than DIY which meant staff enjoyed plants as a positive from the very beginning.

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Advice and planning pays off. Office refurbishment, including custom built planters made to hold industry standard pots results in a positive outcome.



The Solution – *Sansevieria robusta*