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Bring earthy elements inside to stimulate your decor

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For many of us, nature has an undeniable appeal. The sky, the water, the fresh air, the green grass – each on its own has the power to calm, comfort and inspire. Combined they create a sure source of rejuvenation. So, why not bring the best of the great outdoors into your apartment and emulate some of that majesty indoors?

Shaker Heights-based interior designer Christine Haught (www.christinehaught.com) said creating a natural world inside begins with introducing those earthy elements that stimulate our senses.

Color

The sun, the sea, the sky and the earth are all about color, Haught said. Yellows, oranges, blues and greens are the backdrop to a lighthearted and fun earthy décor. For good measure, sprinkle in some pink and purple to represent floral colors.

"Don't forget a gray or straw or sand and neutrals to help your colors pop!" she said.

If you can't paint the walls of your apartment, buy colorful artwork and accessories, such as throw pillows and a large area rug. Go for turquoise place mats in a white kitchen or pair your indigo sofa with yellow curtains. Another great idea for a bold colorful effect is to paint a piece of furniture to match the spring sky or a deep ocean blue.

Plants

The mere presence of plants helps bring life to your indoor living spaces. There is a large variety of houseplants that is easy to care for and will thrive even in low light. If you are lucky enough to have a sunny window, Haught said a container herb garden can add a natural element and provide homegrown ingredients for cooking.

"Place the container garden in a window or on an indoor window sill so you can see it from inside and also pick herbs to cook with all throughout the warm summer months," she said.

For a pop of color with your plantscape decor, display fresh flowers lilies or tulips on the kitchen table or maybe a beautiful live orchid on your entry table.

Water

Water elements not only look great, fountains and water gardens also provide soothing sounds that enhance any living space. Renters today have a wide range of options when it comes to incorporating water features into their decor from decorative bowls and table-top bubblers that are perfect for a living room to large wall-mounted fountains that work nicely on a patio or deck. And they don't have to be rustic, rock-like structures. Some include glass and are more contemporary.

Haught said outdoor fountains should be visible from inside: "This will help you feel connected to the fluidity and coolness of the aqua marine life."

Accessories

Seashells, pebbles, driftwood, feathers and other elements of nature you've picked up on vacation or just

hiking the metroparks can bring natural beauty into your apartment. As an added bonus, they also will inspire memories about your favorite spots. Place large shells on your desk, use driftwood as a bookend or fill a glass bowl with pebbles. Keep it simple.

"Think white, coastal, driftwood, easy and relaxing," Haught said. "Again, add a few pops of colors, such as candles or pillows in flower tones."

Not big on pink or purple? Anything "citrusy" delivers a striking burst of color as well. Fill a turquoise bowl with bright yellow lemons, orange tangerines or green limes for a standout centerpiece. Introduce these saturated colors in tableware or vases.

Using different accessories in shades of the same color will create a cohesive space for your earth-inspired look and help bring the power and beauty of nature into your apartment.

These easy-care plants do more than just add color to apartments

Plants are ideal for bringing the outside in and adding color and texture to your apartment. But, they have another benefit as well. Studies have shown some plants help remove harmful chemicals from the air.

As an added plus, many of the known pollution-busting plants don't need lots of care or direct sunlight.

Plants that thrive in low-light spaces are ultra-efficient at capturing light, which also means that they must be very efficient in processing the carbon dioxide necessary for photosynthesis. Because of this fact, they have greater potential to absorb other airborne gases, including potentially harmful ones.

Spider plants. Spider plants are wonderful houseplants for renters, since caring for them is simple and most of the time only downright neglect will kill them. The long leaves grow from the center of the plant and are usually green at the edges with a white stripe down the middle. Some varieties have white edges and a green central stripe.

Peace Lilies. The Peace Lily is one of the most popular houseplants because of how easy it is to grow. Thriving in lower light areas makes this plant work almost anywhere and its dropping leaves tell you when to water. The plant has glossy, pointed and oval leaves that emerge from the soil. White flowers periodically appear adding color and interest.

Snake plant. The Snake plant, a.k.a. Mother-In-Law's Tongue, is perfect for those without a green thumb. It is one of the hardest to kill. A Snake plant contains heavy, sword-like leaves which shoot up from the base of the dirt. Please note: this plant is toxic when eaten so it's not recommended if you share your apartment with pets or kids!

Philodendrons. Philodendrons are among the most tolerant and durable of all house plants. There are many different species of Philodendrons, each possessing its own leaf size, shape or color. What they all have in common is their ability to survive neglect and adverse conditions.

Pothos. Pothos is often called Devil's Ivy. These tough, adaptable plants are extremely decorative – the glossy leaves are available in solid green or variegated with white, yellow or lighter green – and not very demanding. This makes them a great plant for busy renters or new plant owners.

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