

Flower Power - The Role of Flowers in the Home Environment

Most of us would probably agree that having fresh flowers close to us where we live or work makes us feel good.

Recent behavioural research, "The Home Ecology of Flowers Study", takes a close look at flowers and the important role they may play in our daily lives. Dr. Nancy Etcoff, a psychologist at Harvard Medical School studied the effect of the presence of flowers in the home on people's moods, feelings, and energy levels.

Of fifty-four participants, ages 25-60, half received a "control" home décor item, other than flowers, and the others received fresh flowers. Participants used a series of self-report measures for up to a week to permit the research team to know where they were and what they were doing at specific periods of the day and to record their emotions. Here are the three main findings:

1. Flowers affect compassion. Participants who lived with fresh cut flowers for up to a week felt an increase in feelings of compassion and kindness for others.
2. Flowers chase away anxieties at home. Overall, people felt less negative after being around flowers at home. They most often placed flowers in kitchens, eating areas, and living rooms and reported a desire to see flowers when they got up in the morning.
3. Living with flowers can provide a boost of energy, happiness and enthusiasm at work. People were more likely to report feeling happier and having more enthusiasm and energy at work when flowers were present in their home environments.

"As a psychologist, I'm particularly intrigued to find that people who live with flowers report fewer episodes of anxiety and depressed feelings," Etcoff says. "Our results suggest that flowers have a positive impact on our well being."

Dr. Nancy Etcoff is a faculty member of the Harvard Medical School and the Harvard University Mind/Brain/Behavior Initiative. At Harvard, she currently teaches a course entitled "The Science of Happiness."

For more information about flowers and research on their influence on health and well-being, take a look at the attractive and informative website of the Society of American Florists at www.aboutflowers.com

by Ann Kent, HTM, Registered Horticultural Therapist, www.catkingardens.ca

