

A Greener View: Flowers proven to increase energy and comfort at home

by Jeff_Rugg

For all of you early risers who are looking for a morning pick-me-up, I have a botanical solution for you and it's not coffee.

A recent study by Nancy Etcoff, of Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, and her research team investigated the effects of flowers in the home environment on well-being. Fifty-four people, ages 25-60, were studied using a series of self-report measures allowing the research team to know where the person was, with whom and what they were doing when they experienced an emotion, both when flowers were and were not present.

Half of the participants received a control home decor item, other than flowers, to ensure study validity. After living with either flowers or the control for approximately one week, participants rated their feelings during specific periods of the day, recording emotions during each episode.

The overall study results showed that flowers positively impact people emotionally at home, causing them to feel less anxious and more compassionate. Participants even reported a boost of energy that lasted through the day. This result is in line with NASA's results on office plants, which found that plants make people feel better as well as help filter the room of toxic compounds in the air.

The next time you are at the store and see some flowers for sale, stop resisting the impulse to walk past and buy some. At the end of the week, toss them and buy some more. You can buy an orchid plant or other blooming plant for a better bargain; it will have flowers for weeks or even months. When it stops blooming just go get another one.

Q: In the article about building a wall without mortar, you said to put 6 inches of gravel in the trench. Is the purpose to keep the wall from sinking?

My wall will only be 1 foot high. Do I still need the gravel base?

A: Yes, you will still need a gravel base under the wall as well as some gravel or drainage material behind the wall stones. The gravel in the base provides a path for water to drain away from the wall. By being porous and open, it also helps prevent freezing and thawing from upsetting the wall stones.

By digging the trench for the wall's base, you uncover the roots and different soil types that aren't suitable for setting wall stones. The gravel in the trench then provides a smooth, flat and level base to place the wall stones. The bottom row of stones needs to be partially buried in the soil to stop them from moving and to make the wall look better. Walls that sit on top of the ground look strange and have less stability.

For a short wall like yours, a 6-inch gravel base could be necessary if there is a large uphill area that will be sending water in the wall's direction from either above or below the ground level. If it is a small area being retained, then it may be possible to only use 4 inches of gravel; however, I wouldn't go less than that.

Q: OK, even though my wall is not tall, it is on a slope. However, the wall is only 8-10 feet away from the house. While water will flow down the slope, it is only for a short distance.

I have already started the wall and I have partially buried the bottom row. The purpose of the wall is to level the ground for the 10 feet in front of the house. I just thought it would look better to have a level area.

Now that you know the details, do you still advise the gravel base? It seems like 6 inches is awful deep.

A: I think 4 inches should be fine. If the ground slopes along the wall's length, the trench and gravel base

should be stepped occasionally. The wall stones need to be level. As the bottom course of the stones starts to come out of the ground (because the ground is sloping away from being level), then the trench gets dug back down again in order for the bottom course of wall stones to remain partially buried. It is only in rare, typically artistically designed, instances that wall stones look OK if they aren't level and changing slope along with the ground.

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