

THE HOME YOU OWN

## The case for talking to your houseplants

Research into whether the human voice helps plants isn't conclusive. Even so, there are compelling reasons that chatting up your potted pals is good for them — and you.

By Stacey Colino

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Plants don't interrupt when you're speaking. They don't argue or ask difficult questions. And regardless of whether they're actually listening, research has shown them [to be a calming presence](#). It's no wonder, then, that so many of us talk to ours.

In a 2022 [survey by trees.com](#), 50 percent of the 1,250 respondents reported talking to their plants and/or trees. When asked why, 65 percent said they believe it [helps them grow](#). The research, however, isn't definitive about this point. While studies have found that vibrations caused by sound do affect plants, the jury's still out on whether the human voice offers any specific benefit.

For many plant owners, though, the science is beside the point. Marquis Matson, co-founder of the blog [the Indoor Nursery](#), says she talks to her plants every day because "it feels nice. ... I think plants get a sense of community from my talking to them and that keeps them going."

"One thing humans are really good at is anthropomorphizing — we talk to all kinds of things that aren't human, like our dogs and cats," says Cindy McPherson Frantz, a professor of psychology

and environmental studies at Oberlin College in Ohio. “We’re hardwired to project a sentient mind, intentionality, or feelings onto other beings or objects — and to want to connect to things outside ourselves. [Plants can fulfill that need.](#)”

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### ‘Sound absolutely matters’

On the plant side of the equation, a [study in a 2003 issue of the journal Ultrasonics](#) investigated the effects of classical music and the sounds of birds, insects and water on the growth of Chinese cabbage and cucumber. The conclusion? Both forms of sound exposure increased the vegetables’ growth.

In a 2015 study published in the International Journal of Integrative Sciences, Innovation and Technology, researchers exposed marigold and chickpea plants to light Indian music as well as to traffic noise: They found that both types of plants [grew and developed better](#) — gaining increased height, a greater number of leaves, and a healthier look — after being exposed to the music for four hours per day, but not to the traffic sounds.

“Plants definitely respond to vibrations in their environment — which can cause plants to grow differently and become more resistant to falling over,” says Heidi Appel, a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Toledo in Ohio. “Those vibrations can come from airborne sounds or insects moving on the plants themselves. And plants will respond differently to tones and music than to silence.” Still, she points out: “While sound absolutely matters to plants, we don’t know if talking to them makes them grow differently.”

Despite the lack of studies and evidence about the benefits of talking to your plants, there is at least one theoretical perk: “If we identify with a living organism that we’re tasked with taking care of, we’re going to [take better care of it](#),” Appel says.

For example, if talking to your plants helps you feel more connected to them, you [might water, dust and prune them](#) more regularly and take other measures to care for them and help them thrive.

### ‘Plants don’t judge’

Regardless of whether talking to the plants helps *them*, does it help us, as human beings? In that same 2022 *trees.com* survey, 62 percent of the participants who reported chatting up their greenery said they did so because it helped their own mental health. They may have been onto something: Plenty of research shows that taking care of plants is beneficial to our well-being.

One [study in a 2018 issue of the journal HortScience](#) found that transplanting plants reduced mental stress and anxiety in young adults. And regularly spending an hour gardening has been found to improve mood and reduce stress among healthy women, according to a [study in a 2022 issue of PLoS One](#).

Stefan Bucur of Lewisville, Tex., says that he and his wife, Maegan, regularly talk to their plants. “Taking care of plants and interacting with them can be a mindful and calming practice, and talking to them enhances this experience,” says Bucur, founder and owner of [Rhythm of the Home](#), a home improvement website. “In addition, talking to plants can help us practice gratitude and appreciation.”

While there isn’t published research on whether talking to plants is therapeutic for people, there are plausible reasons it might be, experts say. For one thing, it may come to us naturally. “As humans, we often speak to what we’re caring for — it’s built in,” says Patricia Hasbach, a psychotherapist with Northwest EcoTherapy in Eugene, Ore., and author of “Grounded: A

Guided Journal to Help You Reconnect With the Power of Nature — and Yourself. ” “It helps us be very present or mindful.”

For another thing, it can be a way of expressing thoughts and feelings out loud, in an effort to make sense of them. “I think of talking to plants as a way of talking to ourselves,” says Kenneth R. Yeager, a social worker and director of the Stress Trauma and Resilience Program at Ohio State University. “As we’re talking to our plants, we’re talking to ourselves — and formalizing our thought process.” In other words, talking to the flora in your home can be a way of tuning in to the ways you talk to yourself (a.k.a., your self-talk) and exploring how you’re thinking about something. “Putting our thoughts and feelings into words is somewhat therapeutic,” Frantz says. Talking to your plants is also a relatively low-risk proposition. “You might not want to do it in front of someone else,” says Elizabeth Diehl, director of therapeutic horticulture at the Wilmot Botanical Gardens College of Medicine at the University of Florida. However, when you talk to your plants, they are, quite literally, a captive audience. “Plants don’t judge,” Diehl says. “You can be who you want to be and say what you want to say — and they’re happy just for you to be taking care of them.”

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