



A Lang diesel employee talked to one of the many visitors to the 2008 Better Home and Living Show.

Plants teach life lessons

LAWRENCE – Jennifer Smith admits that she still has trouble handling the “lull” in late winter, even though she’s fully employed as an educator and horticulture pro.

Smith finished this year’s gardening catalogs weeks ago. She’s completed her landscape to-do list for the year and started raising earthworms indoors in a bin she built from scratch. Smith is beginning to suspect, however, that a different kind of work she’s been trying may prove to be the most interesting.

“We learn lessons in life from all kinds of things,” said Smith, who is a horticulturist with Kansas State University Research and Extension. “If we gardeners would pause now and then to think about it, though, we might realize plants can teach us, too. We’d just have to pay attention ... or remember.”

She listed some lessons that have occurred to her in recent weeks’ musings:

- Use your support systems. The soil you’re growing from can be great support. But, if you stretch yourself a little too thin or climb too quickly, don’t hesitate to get extra help – i.e., a stake or trellis.
- Eat the right vitamins, nutrients. People and plants both look and feel better when their basic nutritional needs are being met. So, if you’re feeling a little droopy or off-color,

check your fertilizer/diet.

- Stay healthy to make it easier to fend off pests. Tomato plants are a spider mite magnet, but the healthiest plants are best able to withstand the attacks. Whether plant or person, being unhealthy really raises your odds for further and more severe problems.

- Shake off the dust once in awhile. When the dust gets thick enough, plants have trouble breathing. The same seems to be true for people. Have you ever met an interesting person whom you could classify as a dust collector?

- You don’t have to be a prize-winning cultivator if you’re being the best that you can be. That’s proven by every peace lily in the corner of a room. Just glimpsing its lovely flowers makes people feel good and perhaps smile. At the same time, the peace lily is one of the best air-cleaning plants around.

- Real is better than fake. Real plants do everything from produce oxygen to filter pollutants from water. Research shows real plants also help people relax and feel better. They can reduce pain and help us heal faster. And, fortunately, caring people who are genuine – real – can produce similar benefits.

- Grow and bloom. It’s a fact: When a plant stops growing (learning?), it has started to die.

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