

Improving Your Indoor Environment

Elizabeth Wiseman-Chase, GROW Commissioner

Did you know we spend about 90% of our time indoors?

Levels of air pollution indoors can be as high, and sometimes higher, than outdoor levels. Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) can affect anyone's health, but older adults, children, and people with health conditions like asthma and heart disease can be more vulnerable. Learn about indoor air pollution and the steps that you can take to improve your indoor environment.

Indoor Air and Health are Connected - Take Action

- Learn how reducing indoor contaminants may improve health. Tour the IAQ Demo House at <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/interactive-tour-indoor-air-quality-demo-house>
- Ventilate! When outdoor air quality and weather permit, open doors and windows. Run kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans when cooking and showering.
- Consider a high-efficiency air filter for your HVAC system and/ or a portable air cleaner that does not intentionally emit ozone.
- Control indoor moisture to prevent mold. Fix water leaks and keep humidity levels between 30-50% by ventilating or using a dehumidifier if necessary.
- Install and inspect carbon monoxide and smoke alarms.
- Declutter, wipe dust with a damp rag, and vacuum to help reduce asthma triggers, allergens, pests, and pollutants.
- If you rent, inform your landlord right away about indoor air quality or water concerns. You may also consult Environmental Law Institute's Indoor Air Quality Guide for Tenants at <https://www.eli.org/buildings/indoor-air-quality-guide-tenants-2017>

Vent Your Combustion Appliances

- Vent all combustion appliances to the outside. Combustion appliances like heaters, stoves, and dryers can produce dangerous pollutants in your indoor air. See: Literature Review on the Impacts of Residential Combustion Final Report July 2022 American Lung Association) at https://www.lung.org/getmedia/2786f983-d971-43ad-962b-8370c950cbd6/ICF_Impacts-of-Residential-Combustion_FINAL_071022.pdf
- Have your combustion appliances (like wood heaters and gas stoves) inspected annually and follow manufacturer instructions. Appliances that are

not working properly can produce dangerous pollutants like carbon monoxide.

- Never use a cooking stove to heat indoors and never use a fuel powered generator indoors, even during power outages.

Consider Outdoor Air Quality

- Learn about pollution in your community and check outdoor air quality at AirNow.gov. Outdoor air pollution can impact IAQ.
- Be smoke ready. Purchase air cleaners and extra filters before wildfires start and create a clean air room. see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8DqzogXcVg>
- During fires, check air quality at fire.airnow.gov or local news.

Reduce Chemical Pollution Indoors

- Minimize the indoor use of cleaners, pesticides, perfumes, and other household and personal chemical products.
- Use less toxic cleaning products like mild soap and water. Look for products with EPA's Safer Choice label.
- Follow product label instructions, don't mix chemicals, and ventilate when painting, cleaning, sanitizing or disinfecting.
- Use non-chemical methods like integrated pest management whenever possible to manage pests. Avoid using pesticide sprays and foggers.
- Avoid smoking or using e-cigarettes indoors. If you live in multi-unit housing, consider advocating for a smoke-free policy in your building.

Check for Lead and Radon

- Test for lead in your home or school if it was built before 1978 and consult with your child's healthcare provider for advice on blood lead testing. See: Cook County Public Health resources that may be available to you at <https://cookcountypublichealth.org/environmental-health/lead-poisoning/grant/>
- Test your home or school for radon and fix if needed. Homeowners and renters can get a free radon test kit at: <https://cookcountypublichealth.org/environmental-health/radon-test-kit-request/>
- Exposure to radon is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S.

Sources: US Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Law Institute, American Lung Association, Cook County Department of Public Health

For additional information email: ewchase@westchester-il.gov

Recipe of the Month

Welcome to 2025! This month's recipe works well for breakfast, a snack, and even a light dessert. This sweet, vegan treat is packed with flavor and takes only minutes to prepare. A great one to add to the weekly rotation.

Strawberry Chia Seed Pudding

makes about 6 servings

Ingredients

2 cups of frozen organic strawberries

¼ cup of white chia seeds

2 tablespoons of maple syrup

½ teaspoon of vanilla extract

1 can (13 ounce) of coconut milk

½ cup of non-dairy coconut milk

1 cup of fresh organic blueberries and/or sliced organic strawberries

Instructions

- Blend first 6 ingredients in a blender for 15 seconds, wait 3-4 minutes before blending for an additional 15 seconds.
- Refrigerate covered for 6 hours to overnight.
- Serve with fresh blueberries and/or sliced strawberries.

Each serving contains about 150 calories, 3g protein, 6g fiber, 12g carbohydrates (5g sugar), and 2g fat.

Source: Slightly modified recipe by Dreena Burton (online) and *The Vegan Starter Kit* (2018, by Neal D. Barnard, MD)

Submitted by Walt Wojcik, GROW

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.

Green Fact of the Month

"To produce a pound of steak, which provides us with 500 calories of food energy, takes 20,000 calories of fossil fuel, expended mainly in producing the crops fed to livestock." Lappe Diet for a Small Planet, p.10, 2021.