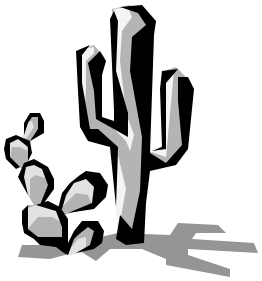
Put Some Water In the Air - Humidify

What Is Humidity?

Have you been waking up with a dry throat or a hacking cough? Do you have sinus congestion? Are your houseplants looking wilted? As Jack Frost and Old Man Winter replace the Muses of Summer, we respond by closing doors and windows and cranking up our furnaces or room heaters. Whether we heat with gas, oil, coal, wood, or electricity, as the air heats up, the humidity or water carried in the air in our rooms falls, often to a point actually drier than the Sahara Desert (less than 10 – 15 percent).



Relative humidity is the moisture expressed as a percentage of the air's moisture holding capacity at any particular temperature.

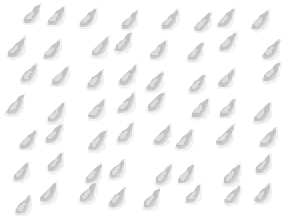
Why Is It Important?

Human beings (and most plants) work best when the humidity in the air is between 30 and 60 percent. If exposed to very dry air, our skin and mucous membranes, especially the lining of our respiratory systems, tend to dry out, and the normal mucous gets sticky and thick. This results in decreased ability to fight infections—without normal drainage, sinuses, middle ears, and air passages may more easily become infected. In dry air, many people also get headaches, have trouble concentrating or trouble sleeping.

Trays and Pans

How can we put water back into our air? Some furnaces have built-in humidifiers or simple water receptacles, which should be filled regularly. Deep trays or pans of water can be placed on floor or wall registers if they can be shielded from small children and walking feet. Water trays can heated on hot plates or kitchen stove burners (they should not be put on electric space heaters for reasons of safety).

Humidifiers - Vaporizers



Humidifiers put a cool mist into the air and are an excellent solution to the problem. Their main drawbacks are the mild humming noise and the initial expense ($70 to $150 for console models). Small humidifiers can be purchased at drug and discount stores for less than $20. Caution: over humidifying (above 40-50 percent) can cause damage within your walls or to window sills from condensation run-down. Condensation can lead to mold growth, which activates allergies.

Vaporizers put out hot steam, and will humidify single rooms. They are quieter and less expensive than humidifiers. Disadvantages are the danger of burns and of furniture damage, and their limited capacity as compared to a large humidifier.

Humidifiers, vaporizers, and their filters should be CLEANED and disinfected regularly to prevent the breeding of bacteria and fungi. Specific solutions may be added to prevent growth of germs.

Whatever method you choose, humidifying your air will help soothe a scratchy throat, calm a dry hacking cough, make it easier to breath if your nose is stuffy, and it can even help prevent these problems.