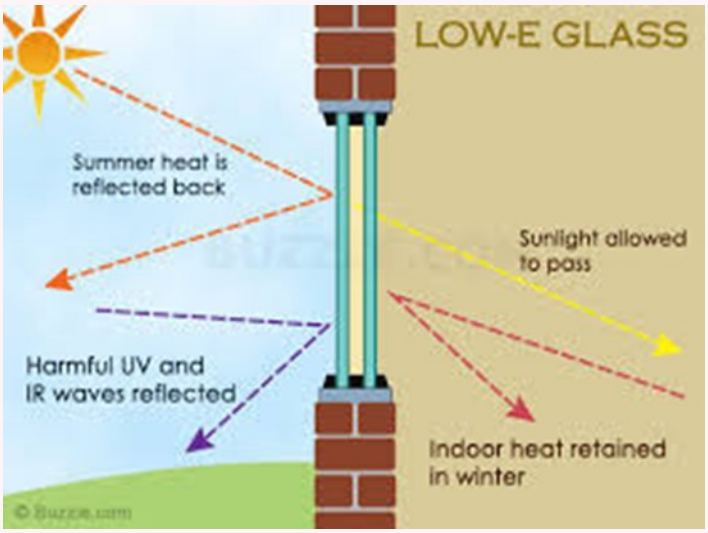
Let There Be Light

Terry Foster, MGV 2003



www.buzzie.com

The days are shorter, nights cooler and sometimes fog or a heavy dew starts the day. Fall has replaced our dry, toasty summer. Time for the parade of houseplants from my patio to take position in my south-facing living room windows.

A little while back, when replacing windows throughout our home, I was concerned about our selection of energy efficient, low emissivity (low-e) glass. I had heard (through the grapevine) that some energy—efficient glass blocks the light vital for the growth of houseplants. Deciding not to chance it, we opted out of the low-e glass for these living room windows.

I have since done some research. According to Luke Gustafson, with the University of Maryland Extension, though low-e glass reduces the amount of UV light that enters, it still allows violet, blue and red light to pass through. These are important for photosynthesis. Gustafson further points out that windows are rated by Visible Transmittance (VT), with a range of 0 (no light) to 1.0 (the amount of light if there was just an opening, with no glass and no framework). These ratings should be available from manufacturers when selecting windows. He concludes that window ratings are not as important to plant growth as orientation (the direction that the window faces) and the number of windows (or amount of window surface area) in a given room.

I tend to agree with Gustafson. I have, on occasion, tucked a plant or two against some of the low-e windows in my kitchen, and have observed no adverse effect. I believe that if I had chosen low-e glass for all my windows, my wintering houseplants would have been fine. Next time, I'll do my research first.

More information on energy ratings is available at:
http://energy.gov/energysaver/articles/energy-performance-ratings

Photo: Microsoft Clipart