



# How Certain Smells Affect Our Brains

Closely tied to our memory function, our sense of smell is yet another form of non-verbal communication

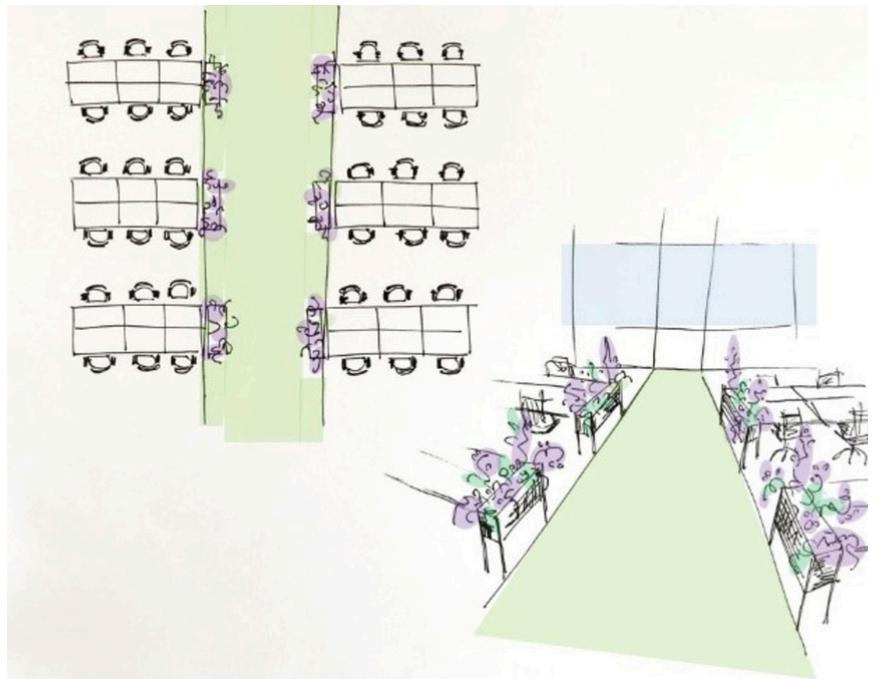
Cooking barbecue chicken at my house growing up was always an event—one that included laughter, games, and, you guessed it, fantastic food, i.e. my dad's secret barbecue recipe. And, if we were really lucky, it might even include homemade peach ice cream, seeing as I grew up in Georgia, aka the Peach State. Still to this day, when I cook barbecue—no matter how my day has gone—I can't help but smile.

Closely tied to our memory function, our sense of smell is yet another form of non-verbal communication that can have an impact on stress levels as employees come back to the workplace. Environmental psychologists even have some pretty interesting specifics on the power held within certain fragrances<sup>1</sup>:

- Lemon is known to help enhance creative performance
- Lavender can help us relax, and we're more likely to be more trusting of those around us
- Floral scents are known to boost our mood and can even help our brains when we're learning new material
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So, you can imagine, walking through the door to your clean offices and immediately encountering the smell of bleach or ammonia might pack an invisible yet incredibly powerful punch. While we may not be completely aware of the impact, the same environmental psychologists imagine that such harsh chemical smells will likely lead to negative 'emotional consequences' for employees in the office. In other words, it's not likely to enhance your mood or performance. I personally think barbecue chicken would be better, but the fire marshal might not be too pleased.

While the presence of odors from cleaning products will clearly 'demonstrate' one of the steps being taken to ensure the workplace is safe, it may also contribute to employee stress and discomfort. There are cleaners with more natural scents that will both remind employees that cleaning is taking place and, such as with a lavender scent, unconsciously elicit a less stressful response.



Using products with strong fragrances must be done cautiously as employees may have allergic reactions to some fragrances. And the negative, "*does Bill have to wear so much cologne?*" effect might also apply to strongly scented cleaning products. However, I wager that if his cologne smelled like my dad's barbecue, I bet no one would complain.

#### Sources

<https://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/psychology-design>

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