



Gardening Indoors With Terrariums

terrariums: variations on a theme

They're back! If you remember terrariums last time around in just about any old pickle jar, fishbowl, or discarded lizard tank, it's time to take another look. Yes, they're back – but with a sleek, sophisticated look that will enhance any room in the house! There are two types of terrariums – open and closed. Open terrariums are great because the high sides of the glass provide the same higher humidity for the plants found in the more traditional closed terrariums; they are both easier to create and easier to maintain. While it is true that an open terrarium requires more frequent watering, the danger of disease build-up is greatly reduced compared to a closed terrarium. The closed terrarium is a little more challenging to set up and will take some experimentation to get to a balancing point of just the right amount of humidity. But it can be a great learning opportunity to view the water cycle in action and, if set up properly, will eventually become self-sustaining and will require little maintenance.

a few considerations...

If one spends a little time shopping, interesting glass containers can be found in many shapes and sizes. Try to choose one with clear, non-tinted glass and without bubbles which can obstruct the view. Most terrariums benefit from strong indirect light, so clarity and lack of distortion are best for the plants also.

The best plants for your terrarium are those that are naturally small and slow-growing. Faster growing plants will need more pruning and may at some point need to be removed from the terrarium. If, however, you wish to have lush growth right away, this may be the route to take – when the plant(s) become too large, simply remove and replace with others. Your houseplant collection will grow and your terrarium will continue to evolve!

Terrariums should not be in direct sun. Strong indirect light is best, but some available plants may be adaptable to lower light. The selection of terrarium plants will also vary somewhat in moisture needs. Strive to choose a group of plants which all have similar light and moisture requirements and maintenance duties will be lightened.

The design process for a terrarium is simple. You will need one vertical element, several rounded elements, and several which creep and spread. The size of your container will dictate how many of each type to choose. When in doubt, choose less! Don't forget the embellishments! You may wish to go to the yard to hunt for rocks, twigs, bark and seedpods to use as decorations. Perhaps the shells and pebbles or trinkets and collectibles which you have brought home from vacation will find a place in your terrarium, making it a more personal statement. You might also search thrift shops, garage sales, or even your own house for ceramic or metal figures of gnomes, mushrooms, frogs or snails to accessorize your plants – it's a matter of personal taste. The décor of your terrarium could also be switched out to reflect holidays, seasons, or even family birthdays!

time to go shopping!

Consider going with a friend and sharing the cost of bulk supplies and tools. Creating terrariums side-by-side with friends can also be quite inspiring! Some of these things you'll need to buy, some you can make, others you might already have on hand:

- Glass Container
 - Pebbles, Gravel or Soil Perfector™
 - Charcoal
 - Cactus Potting Mix
 - Sheet Moss and/or Soil Topper
 - Funnel made of stiff paper
 - Tamper made of Champagne cork stuck onto a long bamboo stick
 - Spoon fastened to a long stick
 - Long tongs and/or chopsticks
 - Coffee filters (or Sheet Moss)
 - Turkey baster
 - Mister
- and, of course...
THE PLANTS!

terrariums step by step:

Clean your container. Use glass cleaner now because you won't be able to use it once the plants are in place. Don't forget to remove any price tags or stickers *before* you start filling up your terrarium!

Create the bed. The soil layers are one of the most important steps in ensuring success with a terrarium. If you prefer *not* to see the soil layers you can line the sides with sheet moss before starting the soil building process. Rinsed gravel or pebbles should be placed on the bottom of the container. Next, cover the gravel with a layer of rinsed charcoal. Then place a layer of sheet moss or a large coffee filter over the charcoal layer to prevent soil from washing into the drainage area below. Necessary quantities of each material will vary, depending on the size of your terrarium.

Add the soil. Use a high-quality cactus potting mix. It should be moistened prior to adding to the terrarium, preferably using distilled water. Make a large funnel out of stiff paper to use as you add the soil mix. The soil layer depth should be appropriate for the size and scale of the terrarium and the size of your plant's root ball. Use your tamping tool to smooth and level the soil and then wipe off any dust or marks on the glass.

Prepare plants and accessories. Arrange your plants and accessories outside of the terrarium prior to placing them inside. Experiment until you are sure you like the arrangement. Tip the plants from their pots, removing extra soil, loosening roots and even trimming them if needed. If you only have a shallow stratum of soil in your terrarium, you may prefer to spread the root ball horizontally like a pancake to minimize depth but keep root integrity.

Add plants and accessories. Using your spoon tool and following your design, scoop shallow holes in the soil mix, being careful not to dig too deeply and tear the coffee filter. Use tongs or chopsticks to lower the plants to the soil. You might wish to wrap each plant in a paper cone to gently drop them in place. Reach inside and nestle the plants in, making sure they are firmly placed in the soil layer. Tamp down the terrarium soil floor to make it firm around and between the plants. Rotate the terrarium and look at it from different angles to make sure it pleases you. Add your accent items, making sure that they can be seen.

Clean the glass one final time. You might wish to use a mister and then dry the glass with a sponge paintbrush. You can spray glass cleaner on the outside but do not spray it inside as it could damage the plants.

Leave the lid off for the first week or so until the plants absorb excess moisture as they begin to root in. Experiment with leaving the lid on for short periods until you find the humidity balance point for your home environment.

maintenance:

- Remember to rotate the terrarium regularly. Supplemental light can be useful for terrariums.
- Fertilizing should be minimal due to the confines of the container, but may be necessary on occasion, especially with flowering plants. As a terrarium ages it will be more critical to fertilize.
- From time to time you may want to open a closed terrarium and vent for a half-day. This could also be the time that you remove old, dead leaves, trim up straggling plants, mist with a little dilute fertilizer, and clean up the glass.

some of our favorite terrarium plants:

Creeping/Low	Mounding/Medium	Upright/Tall Plants
<i>Acorus gram</i> - Sweet Flag	<i>Begonia</i> - mini varieties	<i>Alternanthera fic</i> 'Snow Queen'
<i>Codonanthe dev</i> 'Paula'	<i>Carex hach</i> 'Evergold' - Sedge, mini varieties	<i>Begonia par</i> - Maple-leaf Begonia
<i>Cymbalaria acq</i> - Dwarf Kenilworth Ivy	<i>Chlorophytum com</i> 'Bonnie' - mini Spider Plant	<i>Breynia dis</i> - Hawaiian Snowbush
<i>Eleocharis aci</i> - Needle Spikerush	Ferns - various mini varieties	<i>Ficus salicaria</i> - Willow-leaf Fig
<i>Ficus pumila</i> - Creeping Fig	<i>Hemigraphis</i> - Waffle Plant	<i>Lonicera nit</i> - Box Honeysuckle
<i>Fittonia</i> - Net Plant	<i>Hypoestes</i> - Polka-Dot Plant	<i>Nashia ina</i> - Bahama Berry
<i>Hedera helix</i> - Ivy, mini varieties	<i>Malphighis cocc</i> - Singapore Holly	<i>Chamaedorea ele/Neanthe bella</i> - Parlor Palm
<i>Peperomia</i> - mini varieties	<i>Ophiopogon jap</i> - Mini Mondo Grass	<i>Pseuderanthemum</i> - Flame-leaf Ivy
<i>Pilea glauca</i> - Friendship Plant	<i>Saintpaulia</i> - African Violet mini varieties	<i>Syngonium</i> - Arrowhead Plant
<i>Soleirolia sol</i> - Baby's Tears	<i>Selaginella</i> - Spike Moss	<i>Thymus cap</i> - Cone-head Thyme