

Terrariums

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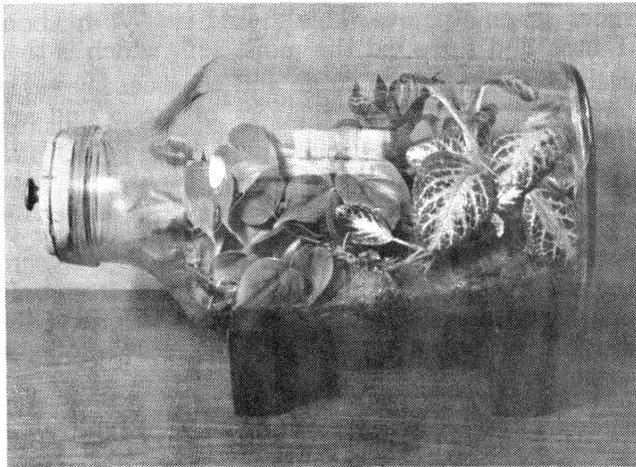
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A terrarium is an attractive miniature garden in a clear glass container. It is easy to assemble and will grow luxuriantly for many months with very little attention. The main purpose of a terrarium is to create a small woodland scene. It is a practical and inexpensive way to bring some of the outdoors into the home for enjoyment during the winter.

CONTAINERS FOR TERRARIUMS

Terrariums might be called miniature, self-operating greenhouses. The basic structural feature is a glass container which can be closed to retain a humid environment. The moisture condenses on the glass and is returned to the soil and plants to be used again.

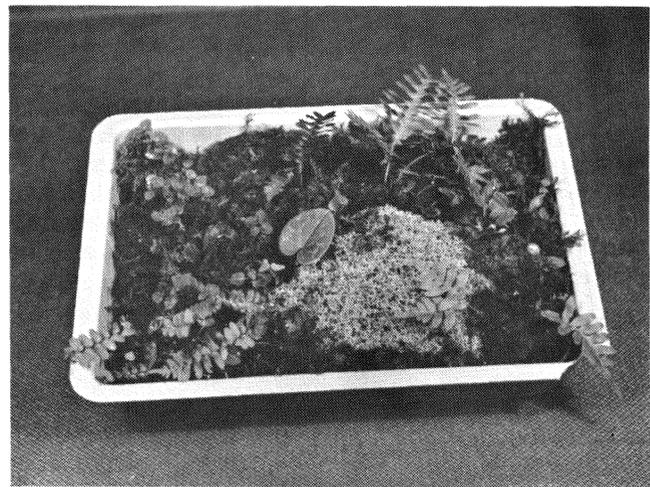
Many types of clear glass containers may be used. The most attractive are large brandy glasses, goldfish bowls, glass covered candy jars, and small or medium-sized rectangular aquariums. A piece of clear glass or plastic is needed as a cover to retain a humid atmosphere. Large screw-capped jars with metal or plastic covers may also be used.



Terrarium in a 5-gallon wide-mouth jar. This container could also be used in a vertical position with tall, slender plants like Sansevieria.

PLANTS FOR THE TERRARIUM

Mosses, ferns, and small seedling evergreens are the most common plant materials used in making a terrarium. These may be secured from a woodland area near your residence. British soldiers and reindeer moss are easy to find in the fall, but they may deteriorate rapidly if the conditions in your terrarium are too moist. Collect only a minimum amount of material because you need only a few healthy specimens for each terrarium.



A tray of plants from the woods to use in assembling a terrarium.

Other wild plants which you may find useful are the liverleaf (*Hepatica*), partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), sweat plant (*Selaginella emmeliana*), violets, and wintergreen. The mottled leaves of the rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*) and the wild ginger (*Asarum shuttleworthi*) will add interesting contrast among green plants and moss.

Miniature foliage house plants may be used effectively in a terrarium. Some of the best are African-boxwood (*Myrsine africana*), artillery plant

(*Pilea microphylla*), babytears (*Helxine soleioli*), begonia, bertolonia, boxwood, creeping fig (*Ficus*), dracena, English ivy (*Hedera helix*), ferns, Josephs-coat (*Alternanthera*), maranta (*Calathea*), palms, mosaic or nerve plant (*Fittonia*), peperomia, snake plant (*Sansevieria*), sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), and Venus fly trap (*Dionaea muscipula*).

Most flowering plants are not suitable for the humid atmosphere of a terrarium, but miniature types of the following may be used quite successfully: African-violet, wax begonia, gloxinia, orchid, and *Callopsi volkensii* which has a small flower resembling a callalily.

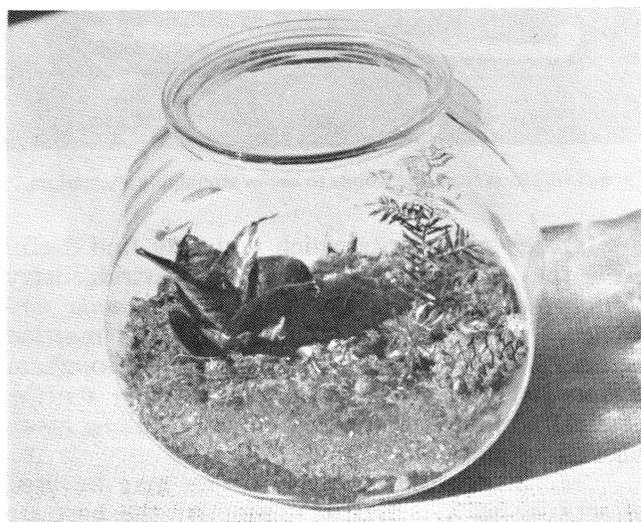
Herbs such as chives, parsley, and thyme may be used in a large terrarium planted in an aquarium.

Cacti and other succulents such as crassula, hen-and-chickens, echeveria, and sedum are suitable for dish gardens with sandy soil, but not for closed containers.

ACCESSORY ITEMS

Rocks of various sizes will be needed as boulders, cliffs, or exposed ledges in the woodland scene you develop in your terrarium. Lichen-covered rocks are ideal.

Small hemlock or pine cones, acorns, and empty snail shells may be used to give a natural effect. A small, distorted piece of driftwood will serve as an old stump. A shiny, concave shell; small mirror; or piece of aluminum foil may represent a pool of water. Small stones or coarse sand may be scattered in a narrow band to form a path.



Fish bowls or aquariums may be used as containers for terrariums.

Figurines, miniature animals, and pottery items detract from the natural beauty of the terrarium, and usually should not be used. These may be appropriate, if a formal scene is being created.

ASSEMBLE SOIL AND SUPPLIES

Assemble all the supplies you will need before the actual planting is started. These supplies should include gravel or small stones for drainage, crushed charcoal as a purifier and sweetener, and a soil mixture composed of equal parts of loam, sand, and shredded peat moss. In preparing the soil mixture, add ½ cup of crushed charcoal per quart, and 1 level teaspoon of 5-10-5 fertilizer. Sterilization of the soil mixture is not necessary, if you watch for and control any weeds or insects which appear.

A small dowel or iced-tea spoon will be needed to make holes in the soil into which the roots of the plants will be inserted. The same utensils may be used to move the soil back around the plant, and press it firmly over the roots.

If the container has a small opening, long-handled tongs will be needed to place the plants in the desired location. A long dowel or slender stick may be used to cover the roots with soil.

THE PLANTING OPERATION

The container for your terrarium should be washed with soapy water or detergent until it is sparkling clean. Wipe until it is thoroughly dry to reduce the possibility of dirt's sticking to the glass.

Place a ½-inch layer of small stones in the bottom of the container. Add a ¼-inch layer of crushed charcoal and shake the container until the charcoal settles into the drainage material. Line the lower part of the container above the stones with moss, green side out. This should extend up about 1 inch and surround the moist soil, which is then placed on top of the stone and charcoal layers. In large containers, deeper layers of stone and soil mixture may be used, but their combined depth should not exceed 20 percent of the height of the container.

The soil should have an uneven surface to form hills and valleys, or be piled higher toward the back, if the terrarium is to be viewed from only one side. Insert one or more rocks to create the illusion of boulders or cliffs in your woodland scene.

ARRANGEMENT OF PLANTS

Before inserting plants in the terrarium, arrange them in an attractive composition outside the container. Use taller seedling trees or plants as accent features, and complement them with low rosette types. Do not use too many plants. They should appear to be uncrowded in a miniature greenhouse, with plenty of space above and around them. Create a well-composed woodland scene. Add interest with contrasting colors and forms of foliage.

Insert the specimen plants and seedling evergreens first. Unless the container is quite large, only one or two will be needed. Then plant dwarf ferns or ground cover, and fill the remaining space with moss. The leaves of plants in the terrarium should not touch the glass. Allow the stones to protrude and serve as natural accent features.

If space permits, you may include in your terrarium small lichen-covered rocks, cones, or acorns to create a natural scene. Do not clutter your terrarium with too many plants or accessories. Create a simple design with plenty of exposed rocks and moss as ground cover.

After the planting is completed, remove loose dirt from plant leaves with a small paintbrush. Water the plants lightly with mist from a bulb type sprayer. Dirt on the inside of the glass may be removed with a small piece of paper or paper towel wrapped around the end of a slender stick. To retain moisture, cover the terrarium with a piece of glass or plastic film.

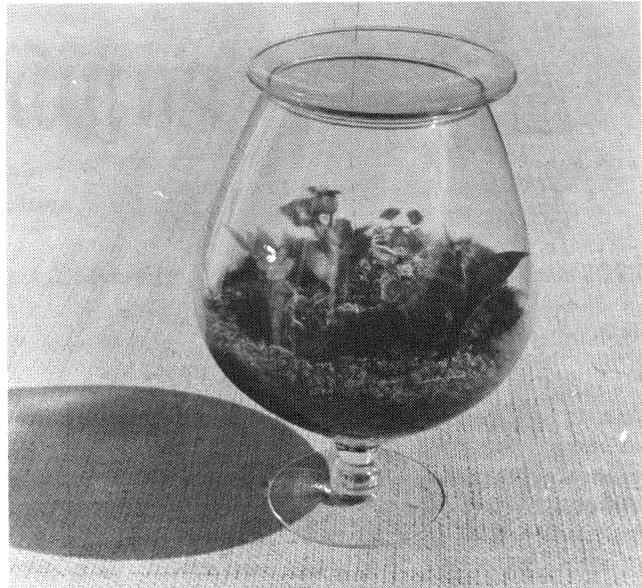
SINGLE PLANT TERRARIUMS AND VIVARIUMS

A special type of terrarium may be assembled by growing a single plant surrounded by moss, in a brandy glass or round fish bowl. Dwarf types of African-violets, begonias, or gloxinias may be used.

You can convert your terrarium into a vivarium by introducing salamanders, lizards, chameleons, turtles, snails, or tree frogs. If this is done, you will need a wire mesh cover to prevent the escape of your pets, because a small opening will be needed for air circulation.

THE CARE OF A TERRARIUM

The plants will grow best in the terrarium if it is located in bright light, but not in the sun. Direct sunlight will cause the air to become too hot and will burn the leaves of your plants. Turn the container regularly to encourage uniform growth. A room temperature of about 70° F, is satisfactory.



A small attractive terrarium in a brandy glass.

Water the terrarium only often enough to keep the soil moist. Apply water as a mist from a bulb sprayer when the soil surface becomes dry, and there is no evidence of free moisture in the drainage material. When moisture collects as small beads on the inside of the glass, the plants have adequate water. If the entire surface becomes fogged, the cover should be opened slightly to allow the excess water to evaporate.

The plants in a terrarium will grow for long periods without additional nutrients. Maintain slow but green growth. Plants receiving too much fertilizer will soon outgrow their limited space. If plants lose their dark green color, add liquid house plant fertilizer at monthly intervals at half the recommended strength.

As the plants grow in your terrarium, they will need to be trimmed and trained occasionally to retain the desired form. Dead leaves and flowers should be removed because they will rot and become unsightly.

