

How to Make a Terrarium



This mini open-air tabletop garden is a fun and easy way to add a little greenery to any indoor space. All the supplies are available at your local garden store and it only takes 20 minutes to create.

What You Need

-) a clear glass vessel
-) small pebbles
-) succulent and cactus potting soil
-) succulents and cacti in various shapes and sizes
-) white sand
-) a spoon

Follow These Steps

1. Start with a medium-sized, clear glass open-top container. You can use anything that strikes your fancy—a vase, a cleaned-out pasta jar, a fish bowl, or a special terrarium bowl.
2. Fill the bottom of the vessel with a 1 1/2-inch layer of small rocks to collect the water drainage.
3. Add a layer of potting soil made for succulents and cacti. It should be deep enough for the plants to root to, about 2 1/2 inches.
4. Remove the largest plant from its container and dust excess soil off the roots. Using the end of a spoon, make a hole in the soil big enough for the roots and nestle the plant inside, tamping the soil down firmly to hold it in place. Plan for approximately 1 plant per inch of container diameter.
Tip: Use a paper towel to transplant prickly cacti to avoid pricking your fingers.
5. Continue planting the rest of the succulents, working from largest to smallest. It's easiest to start at the back of the container and work your way forward.
Tip: Play around with the arrangement—mixing up the types of plants, colors, and sizes to make it more visually pleasing.
6. Once the plants are arranged, add about a 1/4-inch layer of white sand around the plants.
7. Finish with some landscaping. Place a few additional pebbles here and there to complete the look.
Tip: Succulents like direct sunlight every day. Lightly water the base every two weeks or once the soil dries out.

Create a Closed-Lid Terrarium



Image courtesy of Melissa Caughey

Even in the middle of winter, a terrarium brings beautiful green color and life indoors.

Terrariums are a great way to bring plants indoors. Sometimes, houseplants have a difficult time inside as the colder months approach because the heat that warms our homes tends to dry out the air. The indoor humidity often becomes too low for many houseplants. They dry out quickly and if not closely tended to, can perish. Creating a terrarium allows you to not only control the humidity but also create a small, charmingly self-contained environment.

The possibilities are endless when creating your very own terrarium. Try picking up a glass apothecary jar at one of the large home décor chain stores. Some plants that do well in the high-humidity environment of terrariums include ferns, African violets, Venus flytraps, starfish plants, air plants, baby's tears, fittonia, golden clubmoss, and strawberry begonia. The only plants that will not do well in a terrarium with a lid are succulents. They will rot from too much moisture.

I chose to decorate this terrarium with a small clay Japanese pagoda covered in lanterns and a tiny clay bridge.

The decorative accent possibilities are endless. Other ideas include a mini fairy garden, or even adding some tiny figurines from the local hobby/train store. Here is how I created this Zen terrarium.

Supplies:

-) 1 large glass apothecary jar with lid
-) Newspaper
-) Miniature decorative items
-) Good quality potting soil-I recommend using one for African violets
-) Activated charcoal
-) Aquarium gravel
-) Assorted plants for the terrarium -- I used a fittonia, a maidenhair fern, a selaginella and a pteris.
-) Small dry paint brush

Assembly:

-) Spread out some newspaper in your work area.
-) Wash and dry out the apothecary jar and lid.
-) Add 1-2 inches of aquarium gravel to the bottom of the apothecary jar to help with drainage.
-) Next, add a thin 1-inch layer of charcoal. This helps to keep the soil fresh.
-) On top of the charcoal, add your potting soil to a few inches deep to accommodate your plants' root balls. With a landscape in mind, plant your plants into the soil. I created a dry river bed with extra aquarium gravel and placed the little bridge over the stones. You can add some larger river stones as well to look like large boulders.
-) With the dry paint brush, clean off any dirt or debris from the inside glass and then off of the plant leaves.
-) Water the terrarium with just a few tablespoons of water. Replace the cover and enjoy. If you find that the terrarium becomes too steamed up with condensation on the glass, simply remove the lid and allow the extra moisture to evaporate. The watering needs of the terrarium will be low, so be sure not to over water your new little garden. A place with filtered light is best. Keep out of direct sunlight.

Common Terrarium Mistakes

Terrariums are incredibly easy to make and maintain. However, there are some pitfalls that you want to avoid.

Too much light - It is easy to roast plants living in terrariums. The glass can act like a magnifier and burn your plants. Temperatures can get really hot inside your jar and before you know it, your terrarium can get as steaming as a sauna. Most plants just can't take this kind of heat, so it is best to keep terrariums out of direct sun.

Too little light - Most plants need some light to survive. While there are lots of great low-light plants, there is almost no such thing as a no-light plant. While you can use grow lights or fluorescent lights, placement near a window also works well. Just so your plants are getting some light.

Too Close to Radiators - The heat of a radiator can kill your plants quickly. Think of how fast a car with the windows closed sitting in the sun can get hot. If you put your terrarium on or near a radiator that is what conditions will be like inside your jar and most plants won't like that.

Letting plants get scraggly - Keep an eye on your terrarium plants and when they get leggy, prune them back. To keep plants small you can also root prune them. You don't want the plants to touch the glass.

Leaving dying plants - If a plant is looking bad in your terrarium, get rid of it fast or remove dead or dying leaves. If the plant is diseased, take it out immediately as it can infect other plants. If a plant is just plain ugly, it can ruin the look of your whole terrarium so take that out too. Simply dig the plant out with a small shovel, terrarium tool or long spoon, being careful not to disturb the roots of other plants (as much as you can). Replace the plant with one of a similar size and light requirement, making sure to surround the roots with soil, leaving no air pockets.

Dirty glass - Every once in awhile you will want to clean the glass of your terrarium both inside and out. I use a damp piece of newsprint or a lint-free cloth. Do not use any harsh cleaning products on the inside of the terrarium because it may present a danger to your plants.

Over watering - It is easy to over-water terrariums. One way to prevent it is to use a spray bottle instead of pouring water. It is easier to lightly water if you spray. If you do over water, try to absorb any extra with a paper towel. Leave the top off of your terrarium until it has dried out.

Over fertilizing - Most terrariums do not need any fertilizer at all. Because you want to keep your plants small, you shouldn't feed them, which will cause new growth and the plants will quickly outgrow their confined space.

Choosing the wrong plants - While it is possible to grow almost anything in a terrarium, it is important to choose plants that will thrive in the type of terrarium you are creating. If you are making a closed terrarium, choose plants that like to be moist. Also, make sure to choose plants for the amount of light they will be exposed to. Low or medium light plants generally work best, but make sure if you get a medium light plant, you are actually giving it that light level.

Growing succulents in closed terrariums - Succulents generally thrive high light and low moisture environments. If you put them in a closed terrarium, it is usually far too humid for most to thrive. You can solve this dilemma by simply creating a glass dish garden without a top. Note that even a large jar will be too humid - you want air to be able to circulate around your succulents.