

TERRARIUMS

How to build your Terrarium

TYPES:

Terrariums fall into two categories:

Open: can tolerate some direct sunlight. However, too much sun may burn leaves that are in direct contact with the sides of the container.

Closed: can also be an open terrarium to which a cover has been added. Closed terrariums should be placed where they will receive bright light, but no direct sunlight. If placed in direct sunlight, the temperature inside the container rises considerably and will cook the plants.

SELECTION:

Plants: Before choosing a container, you must decide what you want to grow in your terrarium. All plants in a terrarium should have similar light, moisture and other environmental needs. If you want to grow sun loving plants in natural light, use an open terrarium. If you want to grow plants that require high humidity, the container should be closed.

Container: There are 4 important requirements to consider when creating a terrarium:

1. The container must be glass or another clear substance through which light can pass.
2. There must be a large enough opening to allow for the placement of soil and plants.
3. Plants selected for a terrarium must have similar environmental needs.
4. To prevent bacteria from growing, terrariums must be thoroughly cleaned before use.

COMPONENTS:

Drainage: A terrarium does not have drainage holes; therefore you must supply a drainage layer to prevent damage to plant roots. Crushed gravel works well. You want to use 1 to 4 inches of gravel, depending on the height of the container. Generally, the combined depth of the gravel, charcoal and soil should equal about 1/3 of the height of the container.

Charcoal: On top of the drainage layer, place a thin layer of charcoal. This layer will help keep the soil fresh.

Soil: The kind of soil used will depend on the type of plants you want to grow (Cactus and succulent soil vs. potting soil.) Use soil deep enough that you can create a “hole” where you want to place the root ball of the plants. For example: if you are adding a fern to the terrarium that has a 4” root ball, you will need at least 4” of soil in the terrarium.

Landscaping and planting: Remember that plants grow! It’s better to choose slow growing plants and not to overwater. Make sure any necessary pruning is done prior to placing the plants into the terrarium. Also, make sure plants are free of insects and disease. Place largest plants in the terrarium first. Then add smaller plants. Groundcovers should be added last. Remember that you are creating a miniature landscape. Don’t forget to have fun and add figurines, pretty stones, bark or anything else you want.

MAINTENANCE:

Heat: Closed glass containers trap and hold heat, so it is important that terrariums not be placed above radiators or in direct sunlight.

Light: A newly planted terrarium should be placed in shade for about a week. Then adjust light according to the requirements of the plants. Most terrariums do better in indirect or filtered light rather than direct sunlight. Artificial light can also be used.

Too much sun- Leaves wilt and develop burned spots. Move terrarium to a shadier spot.

Too little light- Plants develop tall thin stems that are weak and unable to hold up leaves. Leaves are pale and fragile. Increase amount of light slowly.

Moisture:

Open Terrarium:

For plants that like moist soil, the top soil should feel barely moist before you add water.

For cactus and succulents, touch below the soil surface. It should only be slightly damp.

Closed Terrarium: These should rarely need water and there should only be occasional clouding.

Too dry: leaves will wilt and look pale. Moss becomes brown or faded. Add a little water and mist leaves.

Too much water: Excessive water encourages the growth of molds and causes plant delay. If terrarium walls have more than 25% condensation, remove the cover until walls clear. You may have to do this more than once.

Plant Growth: Terrarium plants should be scaled to the size of the container. As plants grow, prune back those that show signs of over crowding. Clip and remove dead leaves. Replace dead plants and plants that become too big.

Molds and Mildew: The presence of mold and mildew indicates that one of three things is wrong. Container may contain too much water. Air circulation may be poor. Or you may be using plants that do not do well in closed terrariums. Remove infected plants immediately. Correct the environment by letting the terrarium dry out or increasing air circulation.

Insects/Pests: Cut out infected areas and spray with insecticide.

Cleanliness: Keep container clean. Remove moisture or dust from the glass. Remove algae, which may form a green coating on the glass. Keep leaves free from dust and dirt. Remove dead leaves and blossoms promptly to prevent growth of fungi.

Tools: Long handled shovel or plastic spoon, plunger, small paint brush - to clean leaves of dirt, tweezers or chopsticks, sponge paintbrush - to clean sides of terrarium, funnel or plastic spoon - for sand placement in desert terrariums.

SOME PLANT CHOICES:

Recommended plants for Low light terrariums:

Ferns
Mosses
Baby Tears
Hypoestes
Ivy
Peperomia
Sansevieria
Schefflera

Recommended plants for high light terrariums:

Cacti
Succulents, including jade, aloe, burro's tail, earth stars, echeveria, haworthia, and sedum.

These plants should be planted in open terrariums because desert plants require dry soil and low humidity. They also need warm temps and long periods of bright light.

How to care for your Terrarium

For a Closed Terrarium: Place in indirect light or under normal house lighting. Do not place in direct sunlight or it will cause heat to build up too quickly and cause damage to your plants.

Check the terrarium for the appearance of condensation on the glass. A certain amount of moisture on the glass is normal and means that the climate of your terrarium is in balance. If large water droplets appear on the glass, the container should be left open for awhile to let excess moisture evaporate. An indication that water is needed is an absence of condensation. When necessary, add a small amount of water, using a spray bottle. Do not pour water into the terrarium.

Plants tend to grow very slowly in a closed terrarium. Occasionally, you may need to prune some overgrown leaves. No fertilization is necessary.

For an Open Terrarium: Care for an open terrarium is similar to that for a closed terrarium, except plants may need watered once every week. Plants tend to grow a little faster, so you may need to prune more often. As with closed terrariums, no fertilization is necessary.

For Cactus or Succulent Terrarium: Cactus or succulents need to be in an open terrarium; a closed terrarium is too humid and could rot your plants. Plants should be watered using a spray bottle once a week.

HAPPY GARDENING!