

CREATING A TERRARIUM

Terrariums are decorative glass containers that hold plants and the medium they grow in, such as soil, moss or sand. Other than these essentials, the contents of your terrarium are up to you, limited only by the space available.



My terrarium in the bedroom window box.



Ready to begin, all components assembled: even though the terrarium will live indoors, I find it easier to work with plants and dirt out on the patio table.

There are many shapes and sizes of transparent glass vessels that you can choose from when creating these miniature indoor gardens. The most traditional style of terrarium has a wide, flat base and a lid (which helps control humidity levels inside). But open-top versions are also common. Home decorating, garden, and craft stores offer a variety of styles, including hanging glass bubbles. Thrifty gardeners also enjoy re-purposing bottles, vases, pitchers and mason jars as terrariums.

When selecting a vessel, consider if it will be difficult to place the plants and decorations inside: bottles with a narrow opening can be tricky to work with.

I bought my container, which is 8 inches wide and 11 inches tall, at a thrift store. There wasn't a lid, but I found a glass plate that fits the top fairly well.



A semi-tropical scene. The lid keeps moisture in the soil from evaporating quickly.

The next decision is to determine the style of environment you want the container to have. An arid desert terrarium might feature cacti and other succulents, and could thrive in brighter areas of a house. Or a tropical scene can be created by choosing ferns and orchids, which require humid conditions in indirect light. So, observe lighting and temperature ranges of areas indoors where the terrarium could be placed. Also consider whether you prefer low-maintenance, hardy plants or if you're willing to work with those that have challenging care requirements, such as specific fertilizers.

Small plants that will grow slowly and are known to do well indoors are the wisest options. You can purchase them, take cuttings from larger plants you already own, or transplant tiny plants from your garden.

Since my container would be placed in a sunny east-facing window box, and the lid could keep the soil and air inside fairly damp, I wanted to create a semi-tropical environment.

I planned to use three varieties of plants: an offshoot from a large fern, rooted cuttings of tradescantia, and a wild plant with little rounded leaves that grows in my yard.



Low-maintenance plants.

Having decided on the style of my little indoor garden, I then researched methods of construction. There are differing strategies for which materials

should be included in the planting base, and for the order that each component should be added. I chose one of the fairly common approaches that uses layers of pebbles, sand, activated charcoal, and organic potting soil.



Then I started acquiring materials for the base layers,

while deciding on the decorative elements. At first I imagined building an elaborate scene to surround my plants: seashell towers, a multi-leveled path and a bridge made of bark. But I eventually went with simple ornaments of

moss, figurines, polished glass and stones, and a few seashells.

Most garden stores carry the necessary items, but I saved money by picking up sand and shells at the beach, and by using glass baubles and plastic turtle figurines that I already owned. I gathered a bit of live moss



from my lawn. Activated charcoal and a ceramic castle

were purchased at an aquarium pet shop. The polished pebbles and potting soil are from the dollar store.

When assembling this style of terrarium, first make sure the sides of the glass are free of

dust and streaks. Then pour pebbles in as a base layer (pieces of polished glass and/or small shells also work nicely). This helps with drainage.

The next layers are sand, and charcoal (which is optional, but may prevent fungus and bacteria).





Then add soil. An appropriate mix for most non-desert containers will be high in organic matter, and might contain amendments for moisture retention or air circulation. The height of your plants and length of their roots will determine how many inches of soil to use.

The terrarium is now ready for foliage. Dig holes according to root depth with a small

pointed trowel or a spoon. Place the plants gently, holding by the leaves rather than the delicate stems. Keep in mind that if plants touch the edges or top of the terrarium and it is placed in bright sun, the leaves can burn.



While we could consider a miniature garden landscape to be complete at this stage, other decorative elements are often added. For mine, I placed moss around the plants, then added the seashells, rocks and figurines.



Watering is now required. Trickle a bit near the base of each plant, and onto any living moss. If you keep a lid on the terrarium, it can be self-sustaining for weeks: lack of evaporation keeps moisture in the soil and on the sides of the glass.

Some plants may not transplant well, and will need to be replaced. Others might thrive, and need to be trimmed back eventually to keep them at an ideal size for the enclosure.

But in general, terrariums are easy to care for. I have found mine to be an attractive way to add garden appeal to my indoor environment.