



Bucks Country Gardens

A Basic Guide to Terrariums

WHAT IS A TERRARIUM?

A terrarium is a transparent container, tightly fitted with an adjustable glass cover, in which plants are grown in earth instead of water. It is known also as a fernery, Wardian case, bottle garden, crystal garden, and glass garden. Terrariums may be bought in any number of sizes and shapes, or made at home by fitting pieces, of glass, cut to the proper size, to a planting pan. The edges may be bound together with silk adhesive binding. Glass aquariums, fish globes, cracker and candy jars – in fact, just about any glass receptacle with a tight-fitting top – can be used.

The tight cover is to prevent the loss of interior humidity, as the terrarium actually answers the purpose of a miniature greenhouse. The uses of terrariums are many: house decorations, centerpieces, table gardens, as well as nature study and scientific observation for the professional gardener.

BUILDING YOUR TERRARIUM

The size of the case you use for your terrarium will limit the choice of the materials, but of more importance are the requirements of the plants. You can produce natural scenes that may be copied from the woods, using stones for large boulders, a lichen-covered stick for a log, and a seedling evergreen for a tree. Colorful effects are obtained by the addition of bits of tree-growing fungi, twigs with incrustated growing plants, and low-growing flowering plants to force into bloom. Artificial furnishings should be used with discretion. Sand and large pebbles may be used instead of moss as the drainage layer, with a little charcoal for sweetening. Above this, spread an inch or more of topsoil.

Tropical plants with their wealth of color and love of heat and moisture are ideally suited to terrarium culture. Some satisfactory kinds include: Saintpaulia, small-leaved begonias, *Dracaena sanderiana*, creeping fig, selaginella, various ferns and small-leaved ferns such as the maidenhair and *Pellaea viridis*. Other plants that may be used include: dwarf ivy, young plants of boxwood, variegated-leaf forms of euonymus Primula, and more. In all cases select small or young plants, as they are better proportions for an attractive terrarium.

THE CARE OF YOUR TERRARIUM

Terrariums may be kept in cooler rooms or sun-porches, requiring very little care. Watering must be done in moderation, perhaps once in ten days unless the rooms are excessively hot. No water must be left standing around the roots or the soil will become sour and soggy. If mold appears, increase the ventilation and it will disappear. If the lid fits very tightly, and the terrarium is given plenty of water, it may be left for a number of weeks without attention, as the moisture will condense on the cool glass and drip back into the garden.

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