Terrariums date back to Victorian times and are once again becoming fashionable in home décor. Terrariums are versatile and suitable for all ages and gardening knowledge. Whether it's creating a bold and beautiful statement piece, a fun fairy garden for children, or a Mason jar project for a gift the options are endless.

Choosing the right terrarium

There is no limit to what you can use as a terrarium. If it's glass and has an opening to plant into you can probably use it. There are purpose-made terrariums that come in many shapes and sizes and they usually have wide openings making it easy to plant into. Vases, jars, bottles and aquariums can all be used. Before planting make sure the container is clean.

Plant selection

Choosing the right plants is an important step. This selection depends on what you want to create, where the terrarium is going to be placed and the size of your terrarium.

For closed-top terrariums choose plants that will stay small, prefer shade and can handle high humidity. For this type of terrarium, ferns and mosses can create a lush-looking terrarium, but for something a little different, consider Hypoestes, Pileas, baby's tears, African violets and small peace lilies, just to name a few.

Open-top terrariums can be a bit more diverse as they don't hold the humidity and can dry out better between watering's. Cacti and succulents make beautiful desert scenes and can be placed in full sun. Alternatively, creating a swamp scene with carnivorous plants and mosses is fun and interesting.

Placement

All plants need light, but direct sunlight will be magnified and can cause burning on delicate plants. A position with filtered light is best to keep your terrarium looking its best. The exception is cacti, succulents and carnivorous plants; they prefer a full-sun position.

Materials you will need

Oderings Potting Mix – Potting mix is nice and light and offers good drainage, great for houseplants.

Gravel or Small Stones – This is used at the bottom of your terrarium to create some drainage. Pebbles are also nice on top of the soil for a decorative look, especially for a desert scene.

Activated Charcoal – This is used to keep soil fresh within the terrarium.

Decorations – Anything you like, depending on what you want to create: shells, rocks, small branches, tiny gnomes and small kid's toys; it's entirely up to your imagination.

Tools – You may require some small tools on long handles if you have a small opening to plant into. I sometimes use chopsticks, which are excellent for placements through small openings. Alternatively a long pair of tongs works well for lowering in plants or for avoiding prickles on cacti.

Step-by-step guide to creating a terrarium

Step 1: Add stones and charcoal. Mix these two together and fill to about 5cm from the bottom. This is for drainage purposes. If you are filling a deep terrarium create layers of different stones for an attractive look; have a go with different size stones, sands and colours.

Step 2: Add potting mix. There should be a layer of about 10cm for most plants. It could be less for shallow-rooted plants such as cacti. Make sure you press it down firmly to get rid of pockets of air.

Step 3: Plant plants. Dig small holes, tease out the roots gently and plant carefully. Press down gently to secure each plant in place.

Step 4: Add decorations: moss, pebbles, toys or other ornaments.

Step 5: Lightly water plants in. Remember there is nowhere for the water to go, so don't go too heavy handed on the watering.

Step 6: Clean any soil from the outside and you're all done. Only thing left is to enjoy the new addition to your home.

Carnivorous terrariums

If you want to make a terrarium with carnivorous plants, sphagnum moss should be used instead of potting mix and no stones will be required for drainage.
Most carnivorous plants live in swamp-like conditions. Open-top terrariums are preferred because this will still allow the carnivorous plant to feed on the insects it attracts to itself. This type of terrarium will require more frequent watering than others to keep the swamp alive. Pitcher plants look amazing in tall glass vases while Venus fly traps look great in round fishbowls.

Maintenance

Watering – If your terrarium is open you will need to water it about once a week. If it's a closed-top, airtight terrarium, it won't require frequent watering. Cacti and succulents should be watered only about once a month.

Air – If your terrarium is airtight it should be allowed to have an air-out once a fortnight. Just take the top off for a couple of hours or leave a small opening with a stone under the lid for the day.

Keep it tidy – make sure any weeds, excess moss, sick plants, yellow leaves and old flowers are removed as soon as possible. This will keep your terrarium happy and healthy.

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