

Terrarium care

You should place your terrarium in an area with bright light conditions but not receiving any direct sunlight. If, over time, you see the plants inside the terrarium leaning towards the sunlight, it is likely the light conditions are not bright enough. Loss of variegation is due to low light, too. Yellowing leaves indicate too much light.

Whereas open terrariums can tolerate some direct sunlight, this heats up the container and the rootzone, and beyond a certain point it is harmful to the plants. Any direct sunlight is likely to damage plants in a closed terrarium as it heats up the air inside and scorches any leaves touching the glass.

Often you may see drops of water on the glass surface inside your closed terrarium, especially after watering. In this case open the container for a day or two. In any case, it is a good idea to open the container for a day or two after watering or from time to time to allow fresh air inside the closed terrarium which will help plant growth.

Lightly water the terrarium once the soil looks like it has dried out. You can use the colour of the soil and of the pebbles as your guide. When they have a dark brown colour, they are full of moisture; when they are light brown it is time to consider watering. Water slowly around the plants. Using the stream mode of a mister or heavy misting is a good way to water, making sure the water does not go directly down to the drainage layer.



Recommended Products



Houseplant Focus
Suitable for all indoor houseplants.



Organic Houseplant Focus
This is the organic option for thriving terrariums, naturally.



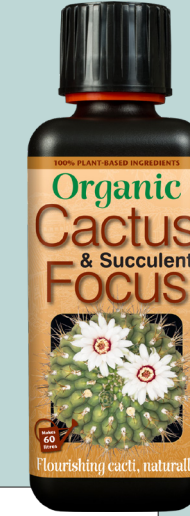
Terrarium Focus Repotting Mix
Ideal both for open and closed terrariums.



BetterGrow Clay Pebbles
Medium grade pebbles (8–16 mm), the ideal material for the drainage layer in terrariums.




Cactus & Succulent Focus
Balanced nutrient solution for cacti and succulents, or terrariums with cacti or succulents. It contains all the necessary macro- and micro-nutrients, as well as organic plant extracts such as humic and fulvic acids.



Organic Cactus & Succulent Focus
The organic option for all cacti and succulents. Ideal for terrariums with cacti or succulents.



Terrarium Activated Carbon (charcoal)
Lightweight and highly absorbent, it has oxygen added to increase porosity and surface area. It draws out organic chemicals and bacteria for a clean, odour-free terrarium.

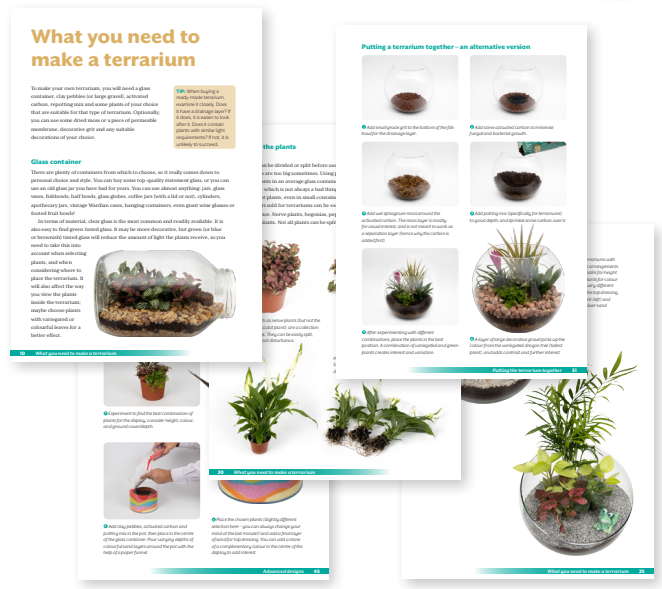


SB Plant Invigorator
A great contact insecticide for use with all plants. It will control most common houseplant pests including mealybugs, spider mites, whitefly and aphids.

Further reading

Terrariums – A Beginner's Guide is a detailed, step-by-step guide on how to make your own unique terrarium, or how to buy one wisely – the result of experience, continuous experimentation and extensive research.

This book communicates all the necessary information in a way which is easy to understand, with over 120 purpose-taken pictures and plenty of inspiration and ideas. The only book you need to create and maintain your own piece of horticultural art.



Other products from Growth Technology



The Growth Technology Promise

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Making the Most of Your Terrariums & Bottle Gardens

By **Dr Manos Kanellos**, plant physiologist and author



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Making a terrarium

What you need

To make your own terrarium, you will need a glass container, clay pebbles (or large gravel), activated carbon, repotting mix, and some plants of your choice that are suitable for that type of terrarium. Optionally, you can use some dried moss or a piece of permeable membrane, decorative grit and any suitable decorations of your choice.

A glass container

There are plenty of containers from which to choose, so it really comes down to personal choice. When choosing a glass container, consider the plants you want to use, and the available depth for planting – a minimum of 5 cm is required, with 6 to 8 cm ideal for planting. Also, containers with a small opening, which you cannot fit your hand in, will be significantly more difficult to plant up.

Clay pebbles

These will be used to create a drainage layer at the bottom of the container. The function of this layer is to ensure that excess water doesn't stay in the soil, which can cause root rot.



What is a terrarium or bottle garden?

A terrarium is a collection of small or miniature plants, grown in a transparent glass container with no drainage. This lack of drainage is what makes terrariums special in terms of putting them together and caring for them. A terrarium is your own miniature indoor garden that can provide lots of enjoyment and year-round interest.

Activated carbon

Activated carbon (or charcoal) is a form of carbon that is processed so that it has more pores. It will significantly improve the overall growing conditions and help fight off bacterial and fungi growth, reducing the chance of diseases.

Potting mix

It is best to use a specialist peat-free compost for terrariums, but houseplant-labelled potting mix, or a cactus mix if you are making a desert terrarium are good, too. Mix one teaspoonful of activated carbon per litre of potting mix to further minimise the risk of any fungal or bacterial growth in the terrarium.

Plants

Firstly, consider the location and light and decide on the type of terrarium you want. If the location does not receive any direct sunlight you can go for any type of terrarium and if it is bright enough a terrarium with cacti or succulents is also an option.

Secondly, remember to combine plants with similar light, temperature and moisture requirements: a display which mixes cacti and ferns will not last very long!

Thirdly, bear in mind the size of the glass container you want, and choose plants that are of an appropriate size. Ideally, you won't want any leaves touching the sides of your container.

Top dressing

After all your plants are arranged in the glass, you can top dress the terrarium with a layer of decorative material. You can use grit, sand, brightly coloured or horticultural sand, aquarium gravel, dried moss, river pebbles, crushed marble, glitter or even coloured glass chips. Although not essential, such a layer can add contrast, colour and layers of visual interest. Additionally, decorations can brighten up a terrarium and give it a personal touch.

Tools

Your best tools for making a terrarium are your hands, but if you cannot get your hand into the terrarium you will need to use small tools to position the items. Chopsticks or bamboo skewers can be move anything that needs moving within the terrarium.

Selecting plants

Choose plants that are small enough for your glass vessel. You won't want any greenery touching the sides of your container and making your terrarium feel cramped (unless this is the style you like).

Plants that do well with humidity such as ferns, nerve plants, baby's tears, golden clubmoss, peperomias and strawberry begonias will thrive in a closed terrarium. Cacti and succulents will not do well in a closed terrarium. Most plants will do well in an open terrarium.

Mini houseplants suitable for terrariums, clockwise from left:

- Variegated peperomia
- Panda plant
- Parlour palm
- Peace lily
- String of pearls
- White variegated polka dot plant
- Pink nerve plant



A collection of miniature plants suitable for terrariums, clockwise from rear left:

- Peperomia
- Mini green dragon tree
- Mini variegated dragon tree
- Red polka dot plant
- Variegated dracaena
- White polka dot plant
- Green inch plant
- Peperomia
- Mini valley plant



Putting the terrarium together

You need to consider how the terrarium will be displayed. Will it have a front and back? Or will it be seen from every angle? This will determine where the taller plants should go, i.e. at the back or at the centre. It is good to place the plants in the container before you start and see how they would look best together. There are no rules – play around with the arrangement and have fun!

Step 1: Create the drainage layer. Cover the bottom of the container with a layer of about 1–2 cm of clay pebbles or large gravel.

Step 2: Optionally, add a layer of dried moss or a permeable membrane. Both can be beneficial, but neither is necessary.

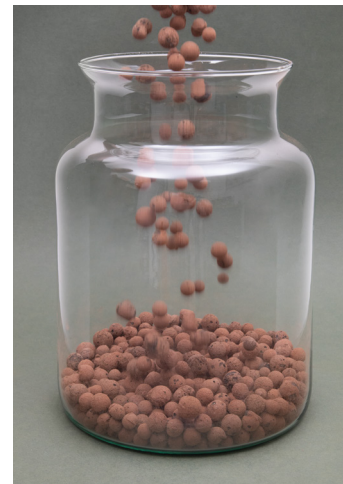
Step 3: Add some activated carbon. About one teaspoonful per two litres of soil.

Step 4: Add a layer of terrarium potting mix, deep enough for your plants to root into. Generally, this layer needs to be about 3–4 cm, but it can be more if the container has enough depth.

Step 5: Prepare the plants. Take them out of their pots and remove any soil you can without disturbing the roots. Cacti and succulents are best re-potted on the dry side, but most other plants are best planted after they have been watered the day before. Split any plants you want to, so you can accommodate a bigger variety in the terrarium. Pinch the ones that you can so you will get bushy, compact growth.

Step 6: Planting. Play around with the placement of your plants outside the glass to see how they look best together. Move them around until they complement each other. Place the plants inside the container before you start to do a final check.

For each plant dig a small hole into the soil to accommodate its root ball. Nestle the plant into the soil – do not worry about making it very sturdy; the decorative grit will help secure plants in their position. If you are not using decorative grit, you can always add some compost on top when all the plants are in place.



You could display this as an open or closed terrarium, as the plants chosen are suitable for high humidity environments



Step 7: Top dressing – add a layer of decorative grit if you wish. A good technique is to pour the grit towards the glass (with your hand or a large spoon) and use a chopstick to move it towards and between the plants.

Watering

If you used well-watered plants, it is best not to water the terrarium for about a week or so.

A partially open terrarium in the shape of a fishbowl. It is designed to be viewed from any angle, with a palm at its centre surrounded by nerve plants of various colours. The white grit adds interest and contrast.



You can opt to add some personality to your terrarium with miniature gnomes, large stones or other decorative items.

