

TERRARIUM BASICS



Terrariums let you create self-contained indoor gardens that are easy to maintain. You can set up a basic one in less than an hour with a few, relatively inexpensive materials. Terrariums can be impressive hand-crafted gifts, too.

Plant Picks

You can choose from a wide range of plants, including small potted versions of houseplants such as croton, pothos, lucky bamboo, and creeping fig.

Spike mosses (*Selaginella spp.*) work as ground covers in terrariums. *S. uncinata* has metallic aquamarine foliage. The tight, chartreuse-yellow leaves of *S. kraussiana* 'Aurea' are attractive.

Polka dot plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachea*) adds color with its pink, red, or white-spotted leaves.

Compact and miniature ferns bring interesting textures to terrariums. Lemon button fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia* 'Duffii') and Korean rock fern (*Polystichum tsus-sense*) are especially well-suited choices.

Compact cultivars of Begonia, Fittonia, Pilea, and Peperomia help diversify the look of a terrarium.

Container Choices

You can use almost any clear container or glass jar with a wide enough opening to allow you to add plants. Goldfish bowls are a popular choice. You also can use large and thoroughly cleaned Mason or pickle jars. Clear, heavy plastic containers work, too, but most people find them less attractive than glass.

Closed containers hold humidity, so they're ideal for tropical plants and others that need moist conditions. Choose open containers for cactus and other plants that need drier conditions.

Essential Materials

To create a terrarium, you need: sheet moss; gravel, sea glass, or beach stones; activated charcoal (*found at nursery or pet stores*); and sterile potting mix without perlite or vermiculite. Tongs or cooking chopsticks can make it easier to place and adjust the plants inside the container.

Basic Steps

1. **Start** by putting a 2-inch layer of coarse gravel, sea glass, or beach stones on the bottom of the container.
2. **Add** a quarter- to a half-inch layer of activated charcoal on top of the gravel to prevent fungi from growing on the stones when they are wet.
3. **Spread** a layer of sheet moss over the stones and charcoal to keep your next layer of potting soil from mixing in with the charcoal and stones. The moss also adds visual interest to your terrarium.
4. **Cover** the gravel and charcoal with loose, potting mix. The base layer (gravel, moss, and soil) should take up one-quarter to one-third of the container.
5. **Before planting**, take time to design the plants' arrangement in the terrarium. Set larger plants near the center, with smaller plants around it.
6. **Using** your fingers or a large spoon to dig a hole in the potting mix for each plant. Place the plants in the holes and gently pat the soil down around it. To create a pleasing, asymmetrical design, set the tallest plant toward the back or off-center and space the other plants around it.
7. **Finish** your terrarium with a layer of bark chips or colored gravel. Add small figurines, seashells, toy ships, or other appropriately sized whimsical items to personalize your minigarden.



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Care and Maintenance

Terrariums don't require much more than occasional watering and trimming. Every couple of weeks, feel the soil to see if it's dry and needs water. You can use a small watering can or a little cup to slowly pour water down the inside surface of the container, so that it doesn't disturb the plants. Keep the water level just below the moss layer so that the soil doesn't stay saturated.

Check closed terrariums for condensation and take off the top at least once a month to air it out. **Leave the top off until the condensation disappears.** Do this if you added too much water, as well.

Pull off yellowing or damaged leaves and prune plants if they're growing too large. Don't fertilize terrarium plants because it can stimulate excessive growth and lead to a build-up of salts in the soil.

Periodically clean the glass both inside and out. If the glass is too dirty or foggy, less light will reach your plants. Use a damp piece of newsprint or a lint-free cloth to wipe it clean. Do not use harsh cleaning products on the inside of the terrarium because the chemicals in those cleansers may harm your plants.

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