

How-To Build a Closed Terrarium

by Iris Thompson

Selecting your vessel and plants

1. Select a clear vessel for your terrarium- vase, aquarium, mason jar, etc. Consider size and shape. Do your plants have enough room to grow?
2. Select your plants. The idea is to find plants that will live on autopilot in warm and moist environments. Plants such as ferns, African violets, living mosses, ornamental grasses, and peperomias are neat selections.

Creating the layers of your terrarium

1. Add a foundational drainage layer to your vessel. Porous rocks or gravel at the bottom of the terrarium will capture any extra water in order to not overwater your plant roots. An addition of activated charcoal can also be added to this layer to help keep mold and unwanted smells at bay. Activated charcoal can often be bought in pet stores as it's usually added to fish aquariums.
2. Add a layer of soil, a few inches tall or enough to support the plant size you choose. A tropical substrate mix would be ideal. Bonsai potting soil is also a popular choice.
3. Add your plants. If the vessel is too tall and skinny, try using a chopstick to help dislodge and tap down soil. The process of planting is simple, but have fun playing with height and texture. Place your tallest plants in the center of a round vessel so that you'll be able to observe it from any side. Add shorter plants around them.
4. Hardscape and personal touches: Colored stones can be used to decorate the surface of your soil. Also, you can add little treasures that make your terrarium come alive!
5. Add a lid to cover your closed system. This will retain the water cycle of your terrarium.

Maintenance

1. Keep your terrarium in a place of consistent indirect sunlight. Some choose to keep their plants near a lamp.
2. Closed terrariums need little extra water. Stay observant of conditions and make changes or spray water if your plants are looking too dry. It's also a good idea to uncover the terrarium every once in a while to let in new carbon dioxide.