

Your Own Little World: Create a Terrarium

By Virginia Johnson, CRRL Staff

Whether it's filled with mossy rocks and ferns or sands and cactus, a terrarium is an amazingly fun way to learn more about nature. With a terrarium in your room, something of the outdoors can always be inside.

Terrariums that feature plants (not animals!) lock water inside to keep the soil moist. When the plants transpire, they let out water vapor. When the soil gets warm, it lets out water vapor. All this vapor collects against the top and falls back as rain.

You will need:

- A small bag of gardening soil
- A small bag of pebbles or sand
- A small bag of gardening charcoal, available at garden shops or online
- A piece of nylon fabric
- A clear container that can be sealed to keep in the moisture. If you don't have a seal, plastic wrap and a rubber band will work.
- Plants and decorations such as smooth stones and figurines
- Anti-bacterial soap

Choose the Right Plants

You'll want to use little plants for your aquarium—not corn that's as high as an elephant's eye. The kind that grow in forest shade work well. Some favorite choices are wild strawberries, violets, and small ferns. Add a tiny china animal or gnome to finish the fairy tale forest look.

Some people prefer to have their terrariums filled with sweet-scented herbs. Sweet woodruff and a low-growing mint are nice additions. Feel free to mix and match. Any small plants are worth trying.

Critters

First off, make sure you are not adding any harmful stowaway critters with your plants and soil. Little bugs like to eat plants. While that's interesting to watch, it will definitely cut down on your plants' life expectancy. Now as to deciding to put a cocoon or a frog in there, you will need to learn all you can about taking care of them first so as to give them a good life and not a cruel and painful one.

Planting Your Aquarium

Begin by washing the container with anti-bacterial soap, rinsing it, and drying it thoroughly. Then take your container, and fill the bottom with about 1/2 inch of sand or pebbles. Next add 1/4 inch of crushed gardening charcoal. That first layer draws the extra water away from the plants so they won't get too moist and start rotting. The charcoal cuts down the normal but slightly nasty smells that can come along as the plants grow. Cut the nylon fabric to cover the charcoal. It, too, will help with drainage.

Now it's timeto add the soil (about four to five inches). Carefully add your plants, and seal. Keep your terrarium in a sunny place, but NOT in direct sunlight, as it's too much of a good thing and will burn the leaves.

Problems?

Too Cloudy?—if, after a while, the sides of the terrarium get very cloudy with too much moisture, just unseal the top for a while to let the moisture out.

Wilted?—if the plants start to wilt, add just a *little* water and reseal.

These instructions were adapted from [an article](#) on the Canadian Gardening Web site.

Learn More about Terrariums in the Library and on the Web

In the Library

[Aquariums and Terrariums](#) by Ray Broekel

Photographs and text describe marine life displayed in public saltwater and freshwater aquariums. Includes instructions on how to set up, stock, and maintain your own aquariums and terrariums.

A New True Book

[Pet Bugs: A Kid's Guide to Catching and Keeping Touchable Insects](#) Sally Kneidel

In *Pet Bugs*, Sally Kneidel shows you how to catch and keep crickets, mantises, click beetles, and many more kinds of insects. She'll also give you a close-up view of how insects interact with one another and with their environment.

[Pets in a Jar: Collecting and Caring for Small Wild Animals](#) by Seymour Simon

Suggestions for collecting and keeping as pets such small animals as snails, toads, worms, ants, butterflies, and starfish.

[The Terrarium: Setting Up and Maintaining a Terrarium Made Easy: Expert Advice for First-time Terrarium Owners](#) by Harald Jes

Here are detailed instructions for designing, building, and maintaining a home terrarium. Also included are instructions for maintaining terrarium plant life plus advice on caring for frogs, lizards, snakes and other animals appropriate for terrarium.

[The World of Terrariums](#) by Charles L. Wilson

Describes each step in the designing, building, and care of a terrarium.

On the Web

[Build Your Own Dagobah Terrarium](#)

www.starwars.com/kids/activity/crafts/f20051116/index.html

Like Star Wars? Build a terrarium inspired by the movies.

[Building Reptile Terrariums for Kids](#)

ezinearticles.com/?Building-Reptile-Terrariums-For-Kids&id=382313

Important! A terrarium that's home to a reptile should NOT BE SEALED AIRTIGHT.

There must be good ventilation so the poor creature can breathe. In this article, you will learn how to use a lot of the same principles to build a home for your reptile.

[Make a Cool Terrarium!](#)

www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids/trythis/trythis_terrarium.html

National Geographic Kids has complete instructions for an awesome terrarium, similar to the one described in this article. You may need to go to a gardening supply store to find some of the pieces.