

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 10

Terrariums

Discovery of Terrariums

Terrariums have been used for holding plants since the 1800's, when Nathaniel Ward, a doctor from London, England, began experimenting with growing plants indoors. He found that they grew faster in closed containers. His discovery led to "Wardian cases," as terrariums were then called.

Plants to Use

Almost any plant will do well in a terrarium; some good examples are baby's tears, begonia, creeping fig, dracaena, English ivy, fern, maranta and philodendron.

Containers

A terrarium can be made with any clear container; the only requirement is that it be watertight. Glass is the best choice, since plastic can discolour in time. The container must be large enough to accommodate the plants and any other materials placed in the terrarium.

A terrarium can be either closed or open. Jars, bottles, and aquariums are some of the more common containers used. Other terrariums can be bought or made from acrylic plastic, leaded glass and stained glass. These are more elaborate and much more decorative, although expensive.

Creation of a Terrarium

After deciding what container you are going to use, you can create the growing medium. There are special soils for terrariums although regular potting mix will do. Use only sterilized mixtures. To create the terrarium, first place a ½" layer of small gravel in the

bottom of the container. Then sprinkle some activated charcoal on top of the gravel. Evenly place 1- 4" of soil on top of these layers. If the soil clumps, you could add some perlite or vermiculite to the soil to lighten the mixture. Moisten the soil before planting.

Landscaping of the Terrarium

While the plants are still in their pots, determine their placement in the container. Arrange and rearrange them on a counter top as they would appear in the container.

Make a hole for the first plant, one near the centre. Knock it out of its pot, shake off the excess soil, and set it into the hole. Mound soil around the roots, and press down firmly. Continue with the rest of the plants, working toward the walls of the container.

Before watering, clean off the inside of the jar with a soft brush. Dust soil off the leaves and stems of plants. Add decorative stones, driftwood, gravel or bark if desired.

Care of the Terrarium

After planting the terrarium, the first thing to do is water. Water only lightly, about 3-4 ounces. Use a turkey baster for awkward places. Put your newly planted terrarium in medium light for the first week; then move it to an area that receives indirect light, not full sun.

Water the terrarium when the soil is dry. This will be approximately every month for a covered container. Open terrariums should be checked every week.

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