

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 29

Terrariums

History

Terrariums originated in the Victorian era when explorers would bring back exotic plants from their travels to their European homelands. The exotic plants could not survive the harsh climate and, therefore, could not be grown outdoors.

Special cases made of glass were constructed to grow and cultivate the treasured exotic plants. Over time, the evolution of the terrarium continued and peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, when they became a fashionable conversation piece for the home. These home-style terrariums are enclosed units with little or no ventilation and provide an attractive display for small plants.

Description

A terrarium is a collection of plants grown in a container, which is enclosed or ventilated. The enclosed terrarium is an excellent place to grow plants that require high humidity, and the open-style terrarium is best suited for growing cacti and succulents, which require dry conditions.

Containers

A wide variety of containers can be used, such as clear glass or plastic, as long as the material will admit light for plant growth and viewing. Fish tanks, large bottles, pickle jars and brandy snifters make attractive displays. If the container doesn't come with a lid, a sheet of clear plastic or glass will work fine.

Construction

The first step in constructing your garden is to clean the container, then place a 1.5-cm layer

of small gravel on the bottom. Sprinkle a layer of activated charcoal on top of the gravel, to reduce odor; both are available at your local pet store. Add 5 cm of well-drained potting soil. Next, install the plants. Don't over plant; leave room for the plants to grow, and don't let the plants touch the sides of the container.

When using a bottle with a narrow mouth, a couple of special tools are required: a kitchen funnel is needed to direct the soil into the bottle, and chopsticks may be used to dig holes for planting.

Plants

Plants that are best suited for terrariums are moisture-loving types that never grow large. The selection is nearly unlimited; choose plants that require the same light, temperature and watering requirements.

Miniature flowering plants, such as African violets and geraniums, add a lot of color to a terrarium. The following plants are suitable for a terrarium environment: flame violet, fittonia, baby's tears, prayer plant, sensitive plant, wandering Jew, small ferns and mosses.

Care

A well-constructed terrarium will need little watering because the plants recycle the moisture inside the container. If the container is not fully sealed, 2-3 tablespoons of water will be required once a month. Terrariums demand little attention and will grow on their own for many enjoyable years.

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