



Getting Back-to-Nature with Terrariums

By Sally Bair
Feature Writer

The winter season is an ideal time to take stock of your house plants and perhaps add new interest to your greenery by creating your own terrarium.

Terrariums are enjoying tremendous popularity this year, and with a little ingenuity you can put to use some of those unusual glass containers you have been saving and make yourself an interesting back-to-nature project which the whole family will enjoy. They also make an ideal gift for shut-ins because they require little attention.

According to Miss Judith Levine, floriculture teacher at Brownstown Vocational Technical School, terrariums offer "the perfect environment, and the perfect humidity" in which plants can flourish. "And," adds one of her students, "Everybody thinks they're interesting."

Miss Levine says there are three basic kinds of terrariums. There is the woodland terrarium which can be created from "anything that grows in a wooded area." She suggests using such things as crow's foot, moss, likens, partridge or tea berries, and says the fall and "middle spring" are the best times to bring back your treasures from the woods to plant in a terrarium.

The second basic type is the tropical terrarium, which is made with greenhouse plants. The possibilities are really wide open, but a few suggestions for plant material made by Miss Levine include watermelon or ripple leaf peperomia, creeping fig, wandering jew, nerve plant, club moss, bird nest fern, begonia, ivy, miniature African violets, dracaena, or tropical prayer plants.

The third type is a desert terrarium, which would use cacti, succulents as plant material. Miss Levine says, "Any plant which can stand a little moisture" would be a good choice. She added that cacti require more water than most people thing.

Plants can be mixed in a terrarium at will as long as they have the same basic requirements for light and temperature. Miss Levine cautions, "You can't mix oranges and apples."

Materials you will need for your terrarium include the container, gravel or perlite, charcoal, the soil mixture and the plant materials.

For the woodland terrarium, Miss Levine says, "It's best to find the soil around the plants." This can be mixed with one third sand to improve drainage. The sand used in these soil mixtures should not be too fine like seashore sand or it will pack too solidly. Perlite can be substituted for the sand.

In the tropical terrarium, the soil mixture should be one third garden soil; one third humus or leaf mold - purchased or found in the woods; and one third sand or perlite. She



Here are some of the materials needed to create your terrarium: glass containers, variety of plant

materials, and drainage materials - charcoal, gravel and perlite.

cautions that if you use your own garden soil instead of purchasing it, the soil must be sterilized. To sterilize soil, spread it on a baking pan in a 200 degree oven, baking it about half hour or until it reaches 180 degrees in the center. Another way of telling when it is sterilized is to bake a potato simultaneously and when the potato is done the soil is finished.

For the desert environment, the soil mixture should be one quarter fine garden soil, one quarter humus and one half sand or perlite.

Your imagination is the limit when you're choosing the container. Miss Levine suggests looking in housewares departments instead of garden centers if you're buying because the variety is greater. She also says, "Stay away from darker glass because plants need all kinds of light and some kinds will be filtered out by colored glass."

Fishbowls, aquariums, apothecary jars, glass cookie jars, the new decorative storage units and even some lucite and plastic containers make interesting terrariums. You may want to choose the container with the final result in mind. For instance, an apothecary jar makes an excellent container for a single plant, while the larger containers require a variety of plant material. With the new interest in bottle cutting, Miss Levine suggests that you may want to make your own container.

The inevitable question arises about terrariums in a bottle. Miss Levine says, "They're best left to professionals." It requires a great deal of patience and maneuvering to assemble a bottle terrarium, and to do it you need tools like slender grabbers, forceps, long scissors and a long handled spoon or one attached to a long stick for tamping the soil.

Miss Levine says she likes to "use accessories to create a natural setting." She suggests using rocks, seashells, ceramic ornaments, snail shells, figurines, deer, mushrooms, turtles and the like to add interest.

The first step in the actual assembly of your terrarium is to clean the container. Miss Levine says, "Clean the container well with a commercial glass cleaner or very hot water, because it's very difficult to clean later."

Now line the bottom of the container with a layer of drainage material. The material should be either gravel or perlite - up to two inches. Miss Levine suggests adding charcoal - a little will do the job of preventing the soil from souring, but a thin layer will create more interest in the terrarium.

Next the soil mix is added. Miss Levine notes that netting can be placed between the perlite and the soil so it doesn't

mix.

If you're making a sizable terrarium, Miss Levine suggests that you may want to sketch your ideas on paper before beginning the actual work in the terrarium. She suggests adding hills, valleys, paths and lakes (out of a plastic container lid) to keep the effect as natural as possible. She also

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Before inserting the plant in the terrarium, gently knock soil from the roots.



A single miniature African violet in an apothecary jar would make a lovely gift.