

# Patty's Plants January Newsletter Happy New Year

TERRARIUMS AND  
MINIATURE GARDENING

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## The Miniature Gardens

Coming up with a topic for this January's Newsletter that I haven't already written about was becoming increasingly difficult. I was starting to stress out just a little bit with the New Year approaching quickly. As many of you know I like to get this out the last week of the previous month. So finally it hit me. I was cleaning up an old terrarium which was completely overgrown and I was actually having fun with it. That's it, I said to myself. I'll do it on terrariums and miniature gardening. I just mentioned it to one of my customers and she thought it would be really fun. What better project this time of year here in WI. It's too early for seed starting so why not start a mini garden, once planted, terrari-

ums virtually take care of themselves. You can also create a miniature garden in a shallow container like an old enamel pan or box. This one might take a bit more care, which I will help you with in this newsletter. So put the cookie cutters away and find that old glass cookie jar. Let's have fun!

*Happy New Year!*



*The Wardian Case, mid 1800's*

*Patty*

### 175 Year Old Hobby

Dr. Nathaniel Ward published a book called "On the Growth of Plants in Closely Glazed Cases" in 1842. He started experimenting with seeds in sealed glass containers, called "Wardian Cases". He expected the seeds to die in the closed container but to his surprise they started to germinate and grow with little care. So the 'Terrarium' was born.

## Terrarium Container Choices

Terrariums actually recycle their own moisture. So technically a closed terrarium could take care of itself for months. Now if you're not really into houseplants but enjoy outdoor gardening and miss that, something like this could be the perfect solution for you. Any clear container will work as long



as you choose the correct plants to put in it. An old glass cookie jar, large brandy snifter, a fish bowl, the aquarium that's been moved out in the garage. (We have a few of those), a giant pickle jar. The possibilities are endless. You can find many of these at your local resale shops or goodwill stores.

Re-purposing, recycling are one of our favorites here at Patty's.

## Supplies Needed

**Plants.** There many plants that do well in terrariums. You must choose the ones that fit the size of the container. Plants that have a low and/or compact growth habit are best. Most plants recommended for terrariums are moisture-loving types which never become to large. Choose plants with similar requirements for water, light, and temperature. Slower growing plants require less trimming. Miniature flowering plants fit very well into terrarium arrangements. Your local garden shop should be able to help you pick the correct plants for your new mini garden.

**Media.** The growing media must be well draining, and high in organic matter. I would recommend a good organic potting soil with worm castings in it for natural nutrients.

**Tools.** There are only a few tools that are necessary for planting a terrarium. Long sticks (chop sticks) are used



Tools needed

to dig holes, move items, and support plants while they are being planted. If the hole on the terrarium is small, try putting a cork on the end of a chop stick or skewer to pat down the soil. Small scissors will help in pruning plants before they are planted. A large spoon or ladel can be used to put the drainage material (pebbles) and soil in the container. A mister or spray bottle will be helpful for watering the terrarium.

**Accents.** Rocks, pebbles, and other natural materials are fun accents in terrariums. Bark, sticks, wood, or ceramic figures are other possible choices. Avoid too many accessories, or those with vivid, unnatural colors you don't want to take away from the natural garden look. Oh, what the heck, there are no rules, if you would like to put large bright colored objects in it go ahead. It's your garden. A large marble would look fun in it, just like a mini gazing ball.

## Preparing and Planting

Start by placing pebbles or pea gravel in the bottom inch of the container. You can top that with a small amount of or activated charcoal to prevent the soil from getting sour smelling. There must be proper drainage to prevent root rot. Add more drainage material if the container is larger, as much as 3 to 4 inches. Add a piece of landscape fabric or mesh material between the rock layer and soil. This will keep the soil from sinking down into the drainage level. You could

also use long fibered sphagnum between the layers. Next add the soil and the plants. Use your imagination making your mini landscape. You can add hills and walls then add the appropriate plants. Add stones, driftwood, toy dinosaurs, mini tea sets and fairies. Water lightly and place a cover on it. Never put the terrarium in full hot sun. Filtered light would be best.

## Maintenance

Occasionally the terrarium will build up to much condensation. When this happens the cover will need to be opened up for fresh air circulation. It shouldn't be so wet that the plants start to rot or there's mold growing in it. If it is an open air terrarium you will have to check it for water more often than one that has a cover. When the plants



This has to much condensation

start to grow to large, they will need to either be pruned or replaced.

Top dress with worm castings if the plants look like they need fertilizing or use a weak solution of a good organic fertilizer. It shouldn't need fertilizing to often, the point is to keep the plants stunted.

## Choosing the Plants

Choose plants that you like or find attractive. Some plants work better than others but part of the fun is finding out what does and doesn't work. Here are some of my choices:

**Palm Neanthe Bella** Low light and grows slowly - hardy.

**Sellaginella Moss** Makes nice groundcover

**Scottish Moss** Very hardy and good looking.

**Pothos** Medium Light , nice shaped leaves

**Button Fern** nice slow growing fern.

**Carnivorous** - Sundew, Venus Fly Trap and Pitcher plants add a nice exotic look and love humidity.

**Miniature African Violets** Adds nice color.



Open Air Terrarium at Patty's

**Pileas**— friendship, aluminum, waffle plant, baby tears.

**Pteris-Table Ferns**— add nice soft texture, some with variegated leaves.

**Helxine soleirolii-English Baby Tears**-Excellent ground cover.

**Fittonia verchaffeltii-Nerve Plant**-Brightly colored pink or white veins.

**Hypoestes phyllostachya- Pink Polka Dot Plant**-Pinch back for bushiness.

**Peperonias**-Watermelon, Ripple, Variegated— Can dry slightly, low light.

There are many more to choose from. We will carry some of these terrarium plants at Patty's.



Hypoestes phyllostachya- Pink Polka Dot Plant

## The Miniature Landscape Garden

This is a garden where your imagination comes in to play. It could be an interesting conversation piece or a garden you could change slightly for every holiday.

In a mini garden like this, it is important to use compact, slow growing plants. Herbs can work well in a miniature



garden. You will be able to trim them for daily use thus keeping the garden from getting over grown. You should look for plants that have similar light and water requirements if they are to be planted together in one garden. Figure out where or what kind of room you have first to determine the size your garden will be.

## Containers for Miniature Landscapes

Use any type of shallow container you might find laying around the house. It could be an old enamelware baking pan, a shallow basket with a liner, a roasting pan or even an old wooden soda crate. A bonsai container would also be perfect. One problem with some these containers are that they don't



Mini Garden Picture from: gardenfreshliving.com

have drainage holes. You could drill holes in the containers or use a layer of pea gravel, then charcoal in the bottom for a drainage area.

(Follow the instructions in preparing the terrarium before adding soil)