



Make a Haven From Those Wintertime Blahs

If you're sick of icy roads, icy sidewalks and icy parking lots, why not create a small haven from winter that you can enjoy from your fireside chair? Terrariums are Lilliputian landscapes that are challenging and fun to construct. They also provide hours of fun and enjoyment as you watch their growth and development.

Terrariums can be constructed in a wide variety of containers: wide-mouth bottles placed on their sides, giant brandy snifters, fish bowls and old fish tanks are all good containers. If you're slightly masochistic you might want to try using a small-mouthed bottle which requires special tools for positioning the plants. If you use a bottle lying on its side, you will need to build a wooden rest to keep it from rolling.

Ideally, once you water your terrarium, a mini-rain forest cycle will be created and you won't need to worry about watering. Here's how it works. Water will be taken up by the roots and then given off by the leaves in transpiration. The moisture then condenses on the container walls. When enough moisture condenses it drips down into the soil, starting the process again.

Most closed-lid terrariums won't need to be watered. Wide-mouthed containers like brandy snifters, will need to be watered occasionally. If your container fogs up, it's too wet. Take the cover off, and allow it to dry out for a day or two. The moisture level is just about right when beads of water collect on the inside walls of the container.

Once you've selected a container, take it with you when you buy plants. Sizes can be deceiving, and you'll want to start with plants that have room to grow. Choose plants that will tolerate high humidity and combine different colors, shapes, sizes and textures. Some suitable plants include coleus, creeping fig, English ivy, baby's tears, prayer plant, artillery plant, dwarf African violet and club moss (see chart at end of article).

Mosses can also be used as ground covers.

Start by placing up to an inch of natural-colored pebbles in the bottom of the container. Next add a soilless potting mix that has been mixed with one-third vermiculite or perlite. This will lighten and aerate the soil. Be sure the layer of soil is deep enough to contain the roots of the plants. If the container is deep enough, you can add some hills and valleys to your mini-landscape.

Before planting, arrange your landscape outside the container to find a pleasing combination. Then add any decorative rocks or pieces of driftwood. Next move your plants into the container. In general, it's easier to put in the tallest plants first, then the shorter ones and then the ground covers.

For planting tools use tweezers, kitchen tongs, chopsticks, knitting needles or a coat hanger with a hook bent on the end. A dinner fork taped to a stick makes a good tool for digging planting holes. A knitting needle with a cork stuck in the end is a good tool for pressing the soil into place. Try not to have foliage pressing up against the sides of the container or decay may become a problem.

After planting, water the plants lightly and place your terrarium in bright, indirect light. Then kick back in your chair and enjoy the view of green things poking up through the soil. You can almost smell spring coming!

Plants suitable for Tropical Terrariums

<i>Aglaonema commutatum</i>	Chinese evergreen
<i>Begonia boweri</i>	Miniature begonias
<i>Chamaedorea elegans</i>	Neanthe bella, parlor palm
<i>Cissus antarctica</i> 'Minima'	Dwarf kangaroo ivy
<i>Coffea arabica</i>	Arabian coffee plant
<i>Cordyline terminalis minima</i> 'Baby Ti'	Dwarf ti plant
<i>Cryptanthus bivittatus minor</i>	Dwarf rose-stripe earth star
<i>Dizygotheca elegantissima</i>	False aralia

<i>Dracaena sanderana</i>	Belgian evergreen
<i>Dracaena surculosa</i>	Gold dust dracaena
<i>Ficus diversifolia</i>	Mistletoe fig
<i>Ficus pumila 'Minima'</i>	Dwarf creeping fig
<i>Fittonia verschaffeltii</i>	Mosaic plant
<i>Maranta leuconeura kerchoveana</i>	Prayer plant
<i>Nephrolepis exaltata cvs.</i>	Boston fern
<i>Peperomia sandersii</i>	Watermelon peperomia
<i>Pilea cadierei 'Minima'</i>	Aluminum plant
<i>Pilea depressa</i>	Miniature pilea
<i>Pilea microphylla</i>	Artillary plant
<i>Pilea nummulariifolia</i>	Creeping Charlie
<i>Pteris spp.</i>	Brake or table ferns
<i>Saintpaulia cvs.</i>	Miniature African violets
<i>Selaginella</i>	Club moss, moss fern
<i>Selaginella kraussiana</i>	Creeping club moss
<i>Selaginella emmeliana</i>	Sweat plant
<i>Sinningia pusilla</i> (and other miniature cvs.)	Miniature gloxinias
<i>Syngonium</i>	Arrowhead vine, Nephthytis

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