



## Creating Dish Gardens

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A dish garden is a miniature landscape in an open, shallow container. Ceramic dishes ([Figure 1](#)), milk cartons, jars, cans and hollowed-out logs make good containers. Provide drainage by punching holes in the bottom of soft containers or drilling holes in ceramic dishes. If this is not practical, provide internal drainage by placing a thin layer (1/2 to 1-1/2 inches) of pea-size gravel or charcoal in the bottom of the container ([Figure 2](#)). Cover the drainage layer with charcoal to prevent odors and a piece of synthetic fabric (nylon stocking or fiberglass drapery) to prevent soil from settling into it and destroying its ability to drain ([Figure 3](#)). Cover the drainage layer with 2 to 4 inches of soil mix (1 part peat to 1 part sand), depending on the depth of the container ([Figure 4](#)).



Figure 1. Shallow ceramic pots make good dish garden containers.



Figure 2. Place a 1/2- to 1-and-1/2-inch layer of pea-size gravel or charcoal in the bottom of the container.



Figure 3. Cover the pea-size gravel with a piece of synthetic fabric.



Figure 4. Cover the gravel layer with 2 to 4 inches of soil mix.

Select and arrange plants in a pleasing design. Choose your plants according to where the garden will be placed in the home. If the garden is to be displayed in a low-light area, choose foliage plants such as snake plant, parlor palm, jade plant, Chinese evergreen and birdsnest sansevieria. Plants for medium light areas are schefflera, grape ivy, dracaena, philodendrons, dieffenbachia and pothos. Dwarf African violets also do well as a dish garden.

Arrange plants according to how the dish garden is to be viewed. If it is placed on a table and viewed from all sides, the largest plants should be planted near the center ([Figure 5](#)). When viewed from one or two sides, the tallest plants should be placed in the background.



Figure 5. Plant the largest plants in the center of dish gardens that will be viewed from all sides.

Set plants in holes only as deep as they were growing in their containers and firm the soil around the roots. Water just enough to moisten the soil. With a little care your dish garden will become a beautiful decoration for your home ([Figure 6](#)).



Figure 6. With proper care, a dish garden should provide years of enjoyment.

## Making a Desert Dish Garden

A desert dish garden is a miniature landscape made with plants called succulents. Succulents are plants that survive hot, dry climates because of their ability to store water in their stems and leaves during rainy periods. They lose moisture more slowly than most other plants because their leaves and stems have protective coverings of wax or hairs. Their ability to survive drought conditions for long periods of time make them excellent plants for a dish garden.

The most popular succulents used in desert dish gardens are cacti. Other succulents that can be used in a desert dish garden are aloes, jade plants, agaves, euphorbias and echeverias.

Any dish, pan or tray which is at least 2 inches deep can be used. If the dish does not have a drainage hole, provide internal drainage by placing a thin layer of pea-size gravel in the bottom of the container. Fill the container to within 1/4 inch of the top with a soil mixture of 2 parts sand and 1 part peat.

Choose succulents of different sizes and shapes and move them on top of the soil until you find an interesting design. If the dish garden is to be viewed from all sides, place taller plants in the center and smaller ones along the sides. If the garden is to be viewed from one side, place taller plants in the back and smaller ones toward the front, so that all plants can be seen well. Scoop out soil to set plants in holes and press the soil firmly around the roots. Place a layer of sand or small pebbles on the soil surface to keep leaves and stems dry. Pieces of wood, rocks, and/or figurines can be added for interest.

Water the garden and place it in a location where it will receive some sunlight. Do not water again until the soil becomes dry. Overwatering will increase the chances of root and stem rot, and eventual death of the plants in your desert dish garden.

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