



# Make a terrarium

Build a tiny table-top greenhouse.

First invented by accident in 1829, terrariums are like mini greenhouses used to house plants. They usually feature layers of soil and pebbles, which allow the plants' roots to drain, and charcoal, which keeps the terrarium fresh. Water in the plants naturally evaporates (turns into gas) through a process called transpiration. It's trapped, so it condenses back into liquid once it hits the sides of the container and drips back down to water the plant – as if it's raining inside. Terrariums are miniature ecosystems (communities of living things) that can last for years.

British doctor Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward accidentally invented the terrarium when he put a moth cocoon into a sealed glass bottle, with some moist soil and a fern, hoping it would hatch. A plant sprouted and survived inside the bottle for three years. Ward went on to create the Wardian case, a mini travelling greenhouse that changed how plants were transported. Botanists (people who study plants) could now send specimens back from around the world, without them dying on long journeys.

Terrariums are great for growing mosses and ferns, as well as tropical plants like begonias and African violets. Here's how to create your own:

## What you need

- A glass container with lid (any large jar will work)
- Old newspaper
- Small stones or pebbles
- Activated charcoal (available from garden centres)
- Soil
- Plants
- Spoon and/or tweezers
- Moss, sand and decorations



**1** Clean and dry the glass container and cover a work surface with paper. Add a layer of pebbles to the bottom of the container, about 2–3cm thick. Next add a thin layer of charcoal, then about 3cm of soil – or enough to let the plants' roots grow.



**2** Using the spoon or tweezers, make a small hole and carefully place the plant in it. Gently fill in and flatten the soil around it. Make sure your plant, or plants, are in the middle of the terrarium, not against the sides, so they have room to grow.



**3** If you're adding any moss to your terrarium, carefully sprinkle it over the soil. You can use sand or more stones to cover the soil. Decorate your terrarium if you want, (Lego figures work well). Add the lid to seal your miniature ecosystem.



**4** Keep your terrarium in a spot with plenty of natural light but not in direct sunlight. If the soil feels dry to touch you can spray it with water. If the glass of your terrarium gets foggy, remove the lid for a few hours to let it dry out, then replace.

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