

Terrariums and Aquariums

Terrariums

Containers

Terrariums can be made in many types of containers. Plastic peanut butter jars or similar clear plastic storage jars, clear plastic deli containers, or clear 2-3 liter pop bottles can all be used for small terrariums. Larger terrariums can be constructed in glass aquariums or plastic animal cages. To make it easy to set-up and maintain, containers should have a large removable lid. A screen or glass lid for a glass aquarium works well.

Soil

Any good potting soil can be used. Local soils may also be used. Collecting local soil for the terrarium can add a little extra in the form of seeds and creatures collected with the soil. A mixture of 1/2 potting soil and 1/2 local soil usually works well. In larger terrariums, it is helpful to add a layer of small gravel, such as aquarium gravel, to the bottom of the terrarium before adding the soil. The gravel will allow extra water to drain from the soil.

The size of the container will determine the amount of soil. Smaller containers should be filled with about 1/3 with soil. Larger containers should have 4-6 inches of soil added. Soil should be damp but not wet before adding it to the terrariums.

Plants

Many types of plants can be use in terrariums. The type of plants you choose will depend on what kind of light is available. If grow-lights are used, sun-loving plants such as grasses and alfalfa can be grown. If only ambient room light is available, shade loving plants will do better. Violets, strawberries and many kinds of houseplants will grow well in most room light.

Plants may either be started by planting seeds or transplanting already established plants. A good method is to collect some local plants, such as violets or strawberries, and transplanting them. This will give a quick start to the terrarium. Then plant some seeds that will begin to grow and may be used as a food source by creatures that are added. Students may want to collect some seeds from local weeds and other plants to sow in their terrariums. To plant seeds, scatter them on the surface of the soil and then cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil.

Water

The soil in the terrarium should be kept moist but not muddy. If the terrarium is not vented, very little water should need to be added. If a screen lid is used, regular watering will need to be done. Watering the terrarium with a spray bottle is easy and will leave water drops on the leaves of plants that can be used by any creatures that call the terrarium home.

Other

Adding small stones and sticks can add interest to terrariums and will give creatures a place to hid and climb. Allow students to collect items to place in their terrariums. Leaf litter is also good to have in the terrarium. Many creatures, such as pill bugs, worms, and snails, will hide in the litter. Students will be able to observe the litter decompose as it is eaten by these small creatures.

Aquariums

Aquariums can also be large or small and can be used to provide a home for many interesting creatures.

Pond

If you are close to a pond, or other natural, wet environment, it is simple to collect enough water and organisms to set up a pond aquarium in the classroom. About a gallon of water is sufficient. Be sure to get some of the mud off the bottom and some of the local aquatic plants and algae. If possible, collect water snails, minnows or other creatures for your aquarium. Additional water may be needed as water in the aquarium evaporates. Untreated well or spring water can be added directly to the aquarium. If tap water is being used, let it sit for 24 hours to allow the chlorine to dissipate before adding it to the aquarium.