

# terrific TERRARIUMS



Turn unwanted household items and furniture into gardens under glass

**M**ost of you will have a bit of decorating debris lying around. Items that are gathering dust in the garage or roof – too good to throw away but not something you want in your home. Before you put them out on the kerb or take them to a charity shop, consider upcycling them into a terrarium. Here, an unused fish tank and unloved coffee table turn into fab feature pieces.



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## BUILD THE LAYERS

The two most important ingredients for a successful terrarium are the growing medium and plant selection. This growing medium formula is the same for any size terrarium, so in this case both our fish tank and coffee table will have the same mix.

**DRAINAGE** This lower layer drains and stores excess moisture, reducing the negative impact on plants growing in a container without drainage holes. Here, fired clay balls are used instead of gravel or pebbles, as they are suited for hydroponics and aquaponics, are porous and assist with humidity levels.

**SPHAGNUM MOSS** This next layer absorbs excess moisture and is a barrier between the growing medium and drainage layers.

**CHARCOAL** This layer helps absorb any toxins that may impact the health of your plants, or odours that may build up in the terrarium.

**GROWING MEDIUM** This will house your plants. Choosing an appropriate medium is crucial for the health of your plants. We created a mix consisting of peat moss and coarse sand for grit and water-holding capacity. Perlite can also be added to help aeration.

**DECORATIVE** You can add one or more top layers of decorative material such as sand, coloured stones, cat's eye marbles or seashells harvested sustainably.



# EASY STEPS TO YOUR AQUARIUM TERRARIUM



## Gather your supplies

- Rectangular fish tank
  - Fired clay balls
  - Sphagnum moss
  - Horticultural charcoal
    - Potting mix
  - Moss, plants, driftwood
  - **Box frame** 185 x 42mm primed pine
  - **Backing** 9mm MDF
    - 19mm pine dowel
  - **Trim** 92 x 18mm primed pine
  - Fluorescent light with cord

## You'll also need

White vinegar; lint-free cloths; bucket; spray bottle; tie-wire; spirit level; PVA; drill; screws; circular saw; chisel; hammer; nails; wood filler; black paint; paint gear; tape; 19mm spade bit; corner brackets; 20mm angle brackets

## Here's how

**STEP 1** Clean your fish tank with white vinegar and a lint-free cloth.

**STEP 2** Create a base layer of fired clay balls in the fish tank. The layers of growing media will be visible when the tank is on display so, for visual interest, make an undulating line with the balls.

**STEP 3** Soak sphagnum moss in a bucket of water then, working with a handful at a time, squeeze out excess moisture and spread a layer about 20-30mm deep over clay balls.

**STEP 4** Pour a thin layer of horticultural charcoal over the sphagnum moss.

**STEP 5** Scoop potting mix over the charcoal layer to about 150mm deep. Use a mix formulated for the type of plants or make your own. Here a mix of peat moss, coarse sand and perlite is used.

**STEP 6** Arrange plants in their pots on top of the potting mix layer. When you are happy with how the arrangement looks, start planting. Working from one end of the fish

tank, make a planting hole, remove plant from pot and place in hole. Backfill with potting mix and firm down to secure plant in place.

**STEP 7** Spray the plants with water to moisten the mix and help create humidity in the terrarium.

## GROW UNDER LIGHT

If you have room in the budget, it's best to include a grow light. This is a light that creates a likeness to sunlight for indoor plants and can be found to suit any style terrarium or indoor plant set-up. A fluoro tube with a cord and plug is ideal, as you can set it up anywhere with access to a powerpoint. You can find specialist fluorescent tubes that mimic natural daylight at hardware stores.

## EASY STEPS TO YOUR AQUARIUM TERRARIUM *continued...*

**STEP 8** Attach tillandsias to pieces of driftwood with tie-wire. 'Plant' the driftwood in the mix layer to create 'trees'.

**STEP 9** Pull moss apart and position pieces around plants on top of the mix layer.

**STEP 10** Measure the fish tank and build a box frame that will fit around it, leaving a bit of space above the tank for the grow light. Cut timber to length and butt together at the corners, then glue and screw together to secure. Use circular saw and sharp chisel to create a rebate in the back edge of the frame for the backing board. Place backing board in rebate and nail. Fill screw holes and gaps between timber, then undercoat and paint black.

**STEP 11** Mark the location of the box frame on the wall with tape, checking for level. Find the location of the wall studs behind the plaster on the wall, then transfer these to the corresponding positions on the back edges of the top and bottom of the frame. Use a 19mm spade bit to drill 60mm deep holes in the frame at each point. Glue and tap 100mm long lengths of dowel halfway into the holes.

**STEP 12** Drill 19mm holes into the wall studs to match the dowel positions in the frame. Insert glue into the holes, then lift frame up so dowels go into the holes. Tap the box hard against the wall, using scrap timber on the front of the frame to protect it from the hammer blows.

**STEP 13** Sit terrarium inside the frame on timber blocks. Measure and cut the 90 x 19mm timber to create trim frame to sit inside box frame and hide the edges of the tank. Glue and join at corners using the flat corner brackets.

**STEP 14** Attach the light to the inside of the box frame top. Secure trim to box using small angle brackets.



A glass-topped coffee table is a great arena for a terrarium. You can build a grow box from marine plywood to fit inside the table legs.

You'd need to reinforce the legs for the extra weight and line the box with a PVC pond liner to waterproof it. Or, you can use a pond shell – waterproof and easy – in the base with ply to disguise the pond shell, then stain or paint it. Build the same layers as for the aquarium terrarium, plant up and spray-mist with water. Replace the glass top and you're done!

# what to PLANT

Suitable plants depend on whether you are making an open or closed terrarium. Remember that everything you plant will grow and the point of a terrarium is to be able to view the plants, so with a wall tank you'll want plants of varying height. Here we used an undulating soil line and base layers for visual interest and created height by tying air plants onto driftwood with wire. For the table terrarium, the plants are viewed from above so the aim is to create a carpet of greenery. Lots of popular house plants such as ficus make great terrarium plants and you can also go for mosses, epiphytes and ferns.



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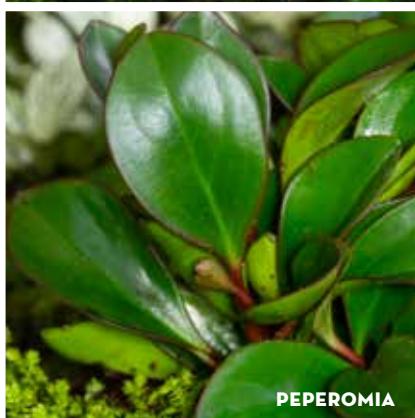
ASPLENIUM



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FITTONIA



PEPEROMIA



SELAGINELLA



MOSS

## Stockists

**Bunnings, bunnings.com.au** Whites Landscaping Stone Fired Clay Pebbles, \$19.98/10L. Bunnings 500g Sphagnum Moss Propagation Block, \$31.45. Bunnings 5L Horticultural Charcoal, \$8.38. Osram 120cm 36W fluorescent tube, \$15. Deta 36W single fluorescent bare batten light with 0.7m cord and plug, \$39.90. Aquapro 3 x 2m x 0.35mm PVC Pond Liner, \$57. Aquapro 1000 Square Feature Poly Pond, \$194. ■