

Terrariums have made a comeback. There are two basic styles, one with a removable top, and one that is solid with an opening in the top or side. The one with a removable top has a very shallow planting area and probably needs a liner going up the side to hold additional soil. It may also dry out quickly. If the solid type has a small opening, it could be difficult to plant and clean. The solid type would probably look nicer if you lined it with moss before adding your soil, which could make for some interesting moments.

They also come in many neutral colors, or white. Whichever style you get, **MAKE SURE YOU CAN LIFT IT!**

A terrarium should fog up twice a day, in the morning and evening. Add water a little at a time. An excess amount of water is nearly impossible to remove. A terrarium should always look immaculately clean. It says you cared and tried. Your plant material should look very well groomed. Never place a terrarium in the direct sunlight because the plants will burn. You should be able to keep a terrarium attractive for about four months. After that, the plants usually become too big, and algae will form on the bottom. Many miniature sinningias love terrariums.

The first thing you will need to do is get out the schedule to make sure what the title is. Review the rules of the schedule; does it require a certain plant material, are mirrors allowed or disallowed, is there a size restriction, etc.?

**PLANTS**

When choosing your plants, don't use too many colorful plants. Instead, go for leaf texture. If a plant is too tall, you can cut it off at a branch; or if there are many plants in a pot, you can separate them. Remove any burned edges. Milk will cut through spray residue on leaves, but you must do it leaf by leaf.

When choosing your violet, try not to pick a dark flower because it is a recessive color and they tend to not show up in gardens. If you do not have an appropriate violet, you can purchase one before the show. You may have to remove many rows of leaves to get the violet the size that you want. If you wrap the root ball in a nylon hose, it will keep the roots together, yet provide moisture for the plants, assuming the rest of the soil is damp. All plants must be removed from their pots and planted. No cut plant material, the American flag, or live animals is allowed.

Plants must never touch the top of a terrarium, can touch the sides, but should not deform the natural shape of a leaf. The height should be a little above the halfway mark.

It is optional if you want to line the bottom and sides of the terrarium with moss, but you may want to place some on the top, covering the soil. When adding moss, add a little at a time. I like to work with it damp because it doesn't leave residue on all the plants. Aquarium rocks are another good ground cover, as well as pine bark, gravel, ivy moss, or even moss from your yard.

After planting a terrarium, use long tweezers with cotton to remove loose soil on the walls and plants. Immediately before a show, do a final grooming and be sure to remove any spent blossoms on the violet,

**ACCESSORIES**

When choosing accessories be sure they are small. It is fun to "hide" them behind a plant or leaf. **LESS IS BEST...WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT!** Never use any valuable or family heirloom accessory because many have been stolen during shows. If you really want to use something valuable, glue it down!

Rocks in terrariums can become very heavy. A good alternative is pine bark. You can always stabilize it by gluing to a stick.

**RIVERS AND LAKES**

Many schedules call for a river or a lake. This can be done using many creative items such as small rocks, a small bowl filled with water, paraffin wax, pre-colored candle wax, melted crayon, or cellophane wrap crinkled up. Clear window or door caulking added in layers takes on a milky color, or use aquarium stones, and mirrors, etc. Be sure to do your river or lake ahead of time.

**JUDGING TERRARIUMS**

The AVSA scale of points for judging container gardens are:

- 1. Landscape plan .....40 points
- 2. Suitability of materials .....20 points
- 3. Condition of materials .....20 points
- 4. Cultural perfection .....10 points
- 5. Relation to container .....10 points

**1. Landscape plan**

The concepts of good design should be followed. The combinations of materials should be harmonious, and there should be contrast of texture, size, color, and height to add interest. The size of the plants or foliage should be in reasonable proportion to each other.

**2. Suitability of materials**

Accessories should be appropriate to the class title, the type of planting, and reasonably scaled to the size of the container and each other.

**3. Condition of materials**

Plants should be properly groomed and the container and accessories should be clean. Terrariums should be free of scratches, soil particles, and stains!

**4. Cultural perfection**

Plants should be well grown and free of pests and diseases. African violets should have a "reasonable" amount of bloom. Plants should not be leggy or leaning in one direction.

**5. Relation to container**

Consideration must be given to the size and amount of planted material in proportion to the container. Also, the color and texture of the container in relation to the plants and landscape style should be considered. The container should not dominate the plant material in size, color, or texture.

I enjoy making terrariums because I can make them ahead of a show, and it is a decorative asset afterwards in my home.

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