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Master Gardener

Miniature Gardens

**Terrariums**

**Putting your Terrarium Together**

* Choose a clean, clear glass or plastic container
* Add drainage material and growing medium
  + One-fourth of the terrarium’s volume should be used by the growing medium and drainage material.
  + Activated charcoal and pebbles should be place in the bottom of the container for drainage. These can be mixed together, but the charcoal usually will be most effective in eliminating chemicals that could prove to be toxic to plants if placed in a ½-inch layer above the layer of gravel, crushed terra cotta, marble chips or other drainage material.
  + Charcoal is especially important in closed terrariums, which prevent the natural escape of chemicals.
  + Sphagnum moss, placed over the layer of gravel and charcoal, prevents the growing medium from sifting into the drainage area.

**Growing Medium**

* Must be clean, well-drained and high in organic matter.
* Pre-packaged peat-lite mix (blend of peat moss, vermiculite and perlite) is a good choice.
* Homemade mix
  + One part peat moss
  + One part rich garden soil
  + Sterilize

**Watering**

* A closed terrarium normally will not need water for 4-6 months.
* The presence of wilting plants indicates the need for water.
* Open terrariums need watering occasionally but not as frequently as other houseplants.
* A dish garden, unless it is the desert type, will need frequent watering.
* Waterings must always be light!

**Terrarium Plant Heights**

* Small (1-6 inches)
* Medium (6-12 inches)
* Tall (over 12 inches)

**Small Plants (1-6 inches)**

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| **Plant** | **Height** | **Containers** | **Comments** |
| African violet | 1-6 inches | Open, dish | Must have good drainage |
| Baby tears | 1-3 inches | Closed, open | Vigorous ground cover |
| Bird’s nest Sansevieria | 3-6 inches | Open, dish | Very tough plant |
| Chinese evergreen | 3-6 inches | Closed, open, dish | Very durable; can be cut back |
| Creeping fig | 1-3 inches | Closed, open, dish | Forms dense mat, clings to rough surface |
| Dwarf gloxinia | 1-3 inches | Closed, open | Very dainty; keep warm |
| Gold dust dracaena | 3-6 inches | Closed, open, dish | Slow growing |
| Hen and chicks | 1-3 inches | Dish | Best for desert garden; bright light |
| Irish moss | 1-3 inches | Closed, open | Groundcover |
| Miniature peperomia | 1-3 inches | Closed, open | Avoid over-watering |
| Moss sandwort | 1-3 inches | Open, dish | Needs excellent drainage |
| Panda plant  Kalanchoe tomentosa | 3-6 inches | Dish | Suitable for desert garden |
| Pygmy cactus | 1-3 inches | Open, dish | For desert garden, needs bright light |
| Spider plant,  airplane plant | 3-6 inches | Closed, open, dish | Forms new plants on runners |
| Stonecrop (Sedum) | 1-3 inches | Dish | For desert garden |
| Strawberry begonia | 1-3 inches | Closed, open, dish | Runners like strawberry |
| Swedish ivy | 1-3 inches | Closed, open, dish | Low, creeping, very durable |
| Variegated oval leaf peperomia | 3-6 inches | Closed, open | Colorful foliage |
| Watermelon peperomia | 3-6 inches | Closed, open, dish | Avoid over-watering |

**Medium Plants (6-12 inches)**

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| **Plant** | **Containers** | **Comments** |
| Aluminum Plant | Closed, open, dish | Gets leggy in poor light |
| Asparagus fern | Open, dish | Good drainage, low light causes leaf drop |
| Begonia | Closed, open, dish | Many types |
| Maidenhair fern | Closed, open | Dead fronds may need removal |
| Prayer plant (*Maranta*) | Closed, open | Leaves fold together at night |
| Table fern | Closed, open | Tropical fern |
| Dwarf natal plum | Open, dish | Easily pruned |
| Dwarf pomegranate | Open, dish | May need pruning; fruits in bright light |

**Tall Plants (over 12 inches)**

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| **Plant** | **Containers** | **Comments** |
| Airplant (*Kalanchoe pinnata*) | Open, dish | Prefers full sun |
| Arrowhead plant | Closed, open, dish | Fast growing climber |
| Bunny-ears cactus | Open, dish | Bright light |
| Croton | Closed, open, dish | Foliage colorful, bright light |
| False aralia | Closed, open, dish | Needs pruning to keep low |
| Heart-leaved philodendron | Closed, open, dish | Climber or trailer |
| Miniature holly | Closed, open, dish | Avoid over-watering |
| Parlor palm, Neanthe bella palm | Closed, open, dish | Slow growing |
| Polka dot plant | Closed, open | Pinch back to prevent legginess, bright light |
| Pothos | Closed, open, dish | Variegated foliage, climbs |
| Sander’s dracaena | Closed, open, dish | Corn-like plant with white stripes |

**Plants for Outside Miniature Gardens (Hardy to Zone 3):**

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| **Miniature Plant** | **Height** | **Light Requirement** |
| *Ajuga* | 3-4 inches | Partial shade to shade |
| *Armeria* (Sea Thrift or Sea Pink) | 4 inches | Full sun |
| *Astilbe* ‘Lilliput’ | 6-8 inches | Part sun to full shade |
| *Dianthus* (Maiden Pink) | 4-12 inches | Full sun |
| Hens and chicks | 2-5 inches | Full sun |
| Miniature hosta | 6 inches or less | Partial to full shade |
| Miniature dwarf bearded iris | 6-9 inches | Full sun |
| Irish moss | Ground level mat | Full sun to partial shade |
| Lady fern ‘Minutissimum’ | 8-12 inches | Light to full shade |
| *Lysimachia* (moneywort, creeping Jenny) | 2-4 inches | Full sun to partial shade |
| *Pinus mugo* ‘Teeny’ | 6-12 inches | Full sun to partial shade |
| Primula denticulate (drumstick primrose) | 8-12 inches | Partial shade |
| Primula polyantha | 6-12 inches | Partial shade |
| Pygmy potentilla | 3-4 inches | Full sun to partial shade |
| Sedum | 4-8 inches | Full sun |
| Woolly thyme | Ground level mat | Full sun |
| Woolly yarrow ‘King Edward’ | 6-8 inches | Full sun |

**Miniature Hostas**

There are 342 registered miniature hostas. Following is a list of miniature hostas shown in the presentation:

‘Blue Mouse Ears’

‘Cameo’

‘Cat’s Eye’

‘Cookie Crumbs’

‘Cracker Crumbs’

‘Frosted Mouse Ears’

‘Gemstone’

‘Hideout’

‘Itty Blue’

‘Lakeside Baby Face’

‘Lakeside Cupcake’

‘Mighty Mouse’

‘Pandora’s Box’

‘Peanut’

‘Teeny-weeny Bikini’

**References**

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  + Heger, M., Lonnee, D., & Whitman, J. (2011). *Growing Perennials in Cold Climates* (1st ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
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