

RHS Weekend

Planting up an indoor terrarium

House plant terrariums – glass containers or jars used to display and grow exotic plants – remain popular, and are great fun to put together, especially for younger gardeners. With a wide range of suitable plants available, the creative potential of planting a terrarium is limitless. Material as diverse as small succulents, versatile airplants and delicate ferns can all thrive, if combined and cared for properly. Terrariums can also make thoughtful, easy-care presents for those who do not have access to outdoor space of their own.

Terrariums can be completely enclosed – for example the stoppered bottle gardens popular in the 1970s – but contemporary styles often have openings. The size and placement of these will determine the amount of water required, and so govern the plants you select. If your plants prefer high humidity levels, such as maidenhair ferns, *Selaginella* (clubmoss) and *Fittonia*, an enclosed terrarium may be most suitable, and will need less frequent watering. Plants enjoying drier roots and better air circulation, including many succulents and cacti, should do better in a terrarium with openings and be kept drier.

Planting tip: carefully divide up larger plants if they are too big (such as *Hypoestes*, below).



PHOTOGRAPHS: RHS / TIM SANDALL

1 Add a layer of gravel

Choose plants that share similar care requirements and comparable vigour to make looking after your terrarium easier. Most designs lack any drainage holes so, to help prevent root rot, place a layer of gravel in the base of the terrarium where excess water can collect.

2 Plant with care

Use a potting compost suited to your plant types. Take time over the planting, and experiment with different positions for your plants. Some succulents can be fragile. Loosen rootballs before planting, and use your fingers to firm the compost lightly around plants once they are in position.

3 Finishing touches

Topdress carefully with another layer of gravel to help keep in moisture, and give your terrarium a clean finish. You can provide extra interest, if desired, by adding decorations such as moss, bark, pebbles and shells.

4 Placement

Once you are happy with the planting, find a good place to display it. Most house plants do best in bright but indirect sun; east- and west-facing windows are ideal, perhaps moving to a south-facing window for winter.

Jobs to do in May

Ornamental garden

- ❖ Hoe off weed seedlings as they appear.
- ❖ Take softwood cuttings of hardy and tender perennials such as *Fuchsia*, *Anthemis*, *Pelargonium* and *Verbena*.
- ❖ Continue to mow lawns every week, gradually reducing the height of cut.
- ❖ Lift and divide overcrowded daffodil clumps. Gently separate offsets from parent bulbs and replant immediately.
- ❖ Put plant supports in place for tall-growing cottage-garden perennials such as *Delphinium* and *Digitalis*.
- ❖ Plant up containers and hanging baskets with summer bedding (above right). Use a quality multipurpose (ideally peat-free) potting compost, and add a slow-release fertiliser.
- ❖ Wait until all risk of frost has passed before planting or moving tender plants outdoors (late May in the north).
- ❖ Carry out 'The Chelsea Chop' at the end of this month on late-flowering herbaceous perennials, to delay flowering further.



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Kitchen garden

- ❖ Earth up potatoes by drawing soil around developing plants, using a draw hoe or spade.
- ❖ Harvest rhubarb (right), from established crowns as stalks reach 23-30cm (9-12in). Pull (do not cut) stalks, taking no more than half at any one time.
- ❖ Sow outdoors herbs grown as annuals, such as basil, parsley and dill.
- ❖ Weed and apply a straw mulch around strawberry plants to protect developing fruits from soil splash.
- ❖ Put supports in place for pea plants and broad beans.
- ❖ Thin seedlings of vegetables direct-sown last month, including beetroot, spring onions and spinach.
- ❖ Inspect gooseberries regularly for signs of damage by sawfly larvae. Pick off by hand, or apply an insecticide.
- ❖ Water container-grown fruit crops generously, ideally in early morning or evening, to aid fruit development.



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Wildlife gardening

- ❖ Put up nest boxes for summer-migrant birds such as swallows.
- ❖ Top up birdfeeders to help garden birds feed their young. Avoid food such as whole peanuts: large items may choke chicks.
- ❖ Make a log pile from prunings and felled trees (above) as shelter for wildlife, ideally in a semi-shaded corner.
- ❖ Mow recently sown perennial wildflower meadows to a height of 5cm (2in) to encourage good root development.



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