

Terrariums are Growing in Popularity

by Pam Adams

They look like pretty plants nestled in decorative containers, filled with layers of dirt and decorative rocks. Or pretty plants nestled in semi-enclosed containers filled with dirt and decorative rocks, much like terrariums. Lisa Hoerr-Grandstaff insists they are the next new thing in gardening - tabletop gardening. People have always had houseplants, she explains. But tabletop gardens are different. They're like stylish miniature container gardens. "That, in itself, makes them different from some ficus sitting in the corner," she says. Not that there's anything wrong with that ficus in the corner. Hoerr-Grandstaff just happens to be promoting her passion for tabletop gardens: "They're like having a small garden in your home." Stroll with her through her family's Green View Nursery and she points out all manner of tabletop gardens inside the gardening store. One display shelf holds a simple, easy-to-care-for rocky succulent garden in sand, fit for a coffee or end table. On another shelf, there's an elegant crocodile fern in a striking glass vase. The roots are wrapped in moss, sitting atop a layer of rocks, then dirt. A black end table in a corner is highlighted with an Asian-inspired tabletop garden. Green thyme climbs over shiny black rocks in a glazed black platter for a simple yet highly stylized look. A blown-glass bulb, reminiscent of a fish bowl, is the centerpiece on a patio table. A single yellow-moth orchid and two types of ferns, accented with a touch of purple pansies, create a garden in glass. Indeed, terrariums are nothing more than tabletop gardens, which, like bell-bottoms, wedge heels, and other fads from the 1970s, are coming back. "Garden Design magazine just featured them," Hoerr-Grandstaff says. She also conducted a workshop on them last month. But she suggests a larger point is the variety of tabletop garden styles. Just as there's a garden for every taste, there's a tabletop garden for every taste. Only tabletop gardens are portable, suitable for apartments, offices, nursing homes or classrooms. But aren't plain, old houseplants portable? Well, stop thinking of a houseplant in a pot. Think art, sculpture in garden form. Think of the approach landscape architects use designing outdoors: Will it be temporary, say a centerpiece for entertaining, or permanent? Will it be in a sunny room or a shady corner? Is the room humid or dry? Low-maintenance or high-care? Take those thoughts indoors and into a smallish container. "The design sense, that's the element that's different," she says. "More people want a tabletop garden to enhance a room or be a dramatic, stylistic element." The container is the basic element, the hardscape, of a tabletop garden. From a design standpoint, according to Hoerr-Grandstaff, the container is as important as the plant selection and soil. It should harmonize with a room's decor, but there's room for imaginative selections as long as it's waterproof and there is some way to allow for drainage. As the container should blend with the room, the plant selection should blend with the container and the location's climate. Hoerr-Grandstaff likes succulents for their low-maintenance, classic look. But tabletop gardens naturally lend themselves to a variety of plants and herbs. Herbs, in particular, can be both fragrant and practical in a tabletop garden. Forced bulbs, such as hyacinth and narcissus, grown in soil or water, can create a dramatic horticultural focal point. Moss and grasses can come inside for a tabletop garden. "Gardens that have a great deal of green can be beautiful," she notes. One other thing about tabletop gardens: Because they're smaller, much smaller, than most gardens outdoors, they can make interesting accents for entertaining or seasonal decorating. Hoerr-Grandstaff has included tiny, personalized tabletop gardens in table settings for entertaining. Guests took them home as party favors.

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