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# *Indoor Succulent Gardens*

One day, I noticed Cedar playing with a dollhouse, and it seemed so dull and lifeless. In a flash, I was inspired to make a terrarium—it was like a living dollhouse!

Terrariums are really easy to make, so I knew Cedar could work on one while I worked alongside her creating a succulent wreath, something I had wanted to do for a long time. With big, messy set ups like these projects require, doing two projects at once is smart, since clean up will be the same. I could help my daughter with the terrarium when she needed it, while I worked on the more technically challenging wreath. She would watch me struggle with the wreath and laugh about my obvious black thumb. We did these projects concurrently over a long, lovely afternoon.

*Terrarium* Child



Terrariums are a great way to help your kids understand landscape design and caretaking. The miniaturized scale really helps focus on how to develop composition. The instructions are detailed, but the project is really quite easy.

In our terrarium, we used about half a dozen succulents. My daughter chose which plants to use, and I helped a bit with the placement. She did most of the patting down of the dirt to settle the plants, and we both brushed the dirt off the plant leaves and the sides of the terrarium. Do not pack in too many plants; they will grow over time and need some room.

**Gather your succulents.** If you are using clippings from your own plants, give them a few days before planting them so they scab and roots begin to form. If you decide to order from a nursery or online, then look for plants sold in 1" to 2" pots—anything larger will need more space than your terrarium can provide.

**Acquire a terrarium.** Succulents need plenty of air circulation to thrive, so you will want use an open container for your terrarium (see resources).

**Prepare the planting materials.** Try to predetermine the amount of gravel, charcoal, and potting mixture you will need to fill your terrarium. Place each of the planting materials in individual bowls that your kids can lift and pour from easily.

**Layer the planting materials in the terrarium.** (See the diagram in the technical notes.) Fill the terrarium with the first layer of material: gravel or pebbles, approximately 2" thick to ensure proper drainage in your terrarium. This step is vitally important for succulents that do not like to be soggy.

## Materials

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10–20 succulent clippings or 5–10 succulent plants in 2" pots (any bigger and you'll crowd your terrarium)

Plastic or waste paper to work on

Terrarium form, such as a goldfish bowl (the container must be open for succulents)

Gravel or pebbles

Activated charcoal

Succulent dirt

Mixing bowls

Spray bottle filled with water

Spoon

Brush

Medicine syringe

Rooting hormone (optional)

Fill the terrarium with your second layer of material: activated charcoal, approximately 1" thick. This layer helps the terrarium to stay fresh and clean by discouraging fungal and other plant diseases. Purchase activated charcoal at any pet store in the aquarium area.

Fill the terrarium with your third layer of material: succulent potting mix, approximately 2" thick. This mix is where the succulents will grow. Add some water to your potting mix so that it holds together and becomes denser. Mix it outside your terrarium so that the potting mix you put in the terrarium is moist and suitable for planting. You may consider creating a mound in the middle or "back" of the terrarium to simulate a landscape. Tamp down the potting mix a bit with the back of a spoon.

**Ready your succulents for transplant.** If you are using cuttings, remove any leaves that will be below the dirt, leaving approximately ½" stem. Taller specimens may need longer stems to balance. You may also consider using rooting hormone to encourage the plants to root (follow the manufacturer's directions). If you are using store-bought plants, you will want to take them out of their pots to make sure that their roots are wet (which makes them more pliable). You can spray the dirt and roots with a spray bottle of lukewarm water to moisten them. Gently aerate the roots by making pencil-sized holes throughout the dirt around them. Most plants will be root-bound, meaning that the roots have grown around and around inside the pot. These roots can be gently broken up to encourage the plants to grow new, healthier root systems.

**Place your succulents in the terrarium.** This part is tricky. Pretend that you are creating a forest. Gently guide your child's selection by placing the tallest specimens in the middle or back of the terrarium, the medium-sized ones in the mound or in front, and your ground-hugging variety along the edges where they can be seen. The point is to make all the succulents visible and give them their own room to shine.

**Plant the succulents.** By looking at the size of the plant's roots, you can figure out how big to make the hole. Make sure that the dirt around the plant is patted down to ensure good contact between the specimen and the potting mix. Use the medicine syringe to water precisely around your plant—not too much, though!

**Take care of your terrarium.** Keep your terrarium out of very intense, direct sun because the glass magnifies and heats the sunlight, which can burn the plants. Do not allow the leaves to touch the terrarium glass, which will cause rot and fungal disease. Remove any dead or diseased plants or leaves from the terrarium immediately. Because of the semi-enclosed environment, disease will pass through the plants quickly. Prune your plants so they stay the size you want. If a plant grows in an ungainly fashion, simply remove it.

