

INFORMATION

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The Care & Maintenance Of PLANTED BOWLS & BOTTLES

BOTTLE GARDENS

A bottle garden is a group of plants growing in a large bottle such as a disused carboy or any bottle with a wide neck. Once planted it needs little attention for weeks and months on end. It is a useful decoration for rooms seldom used, weekend cottages or for people who are too busy to be able to take much care of house plants but who like something green growing around them. The garden is immune from draughts and dry atmosphere as the plants are protected by the glass.

A bottle garden is an adaptation of the Wardian case named after Dr Nathaniel Ward, a keen plantsman, who discovered in 1829 that tender ferns could live for years without attention in a glass 'box' with a lid.

The Wardian case is sometimes called a terrarium. When sealed, the bottle keeps all the moisture inside. The plants transpire through their leaves, the moisture condenses on the inside of the glass and drips down into the soil again to be taken up once more by the roots. Completely sealed containers can become steamed up and may not be as attractive as those with an opening, however, unsealed ones will need a little watering sometimes when the soil appears dry or the plants wilt but they do not need watering often.

THE CONTAINER

A Large Carboy, a glass fish tank, fish bowl, disused battery jar or any bottle with a wide neck is suitable. The glass should be clear to allow enough light to get to the plants.

TOOLS

Long-handled tools are necessary to reach down into bottles. A simple way to make these is to tie very firmly a table fork (rake), a teaspoon (spade) and a cotton reel (rammer) to canes or sticks.

A razor blade wedged into a slit in a stick makes a useful pruner. A long steel knitting needle or a darning needle tied to a cane is useful for piercing and removing fallen leaves. Two sticks used as chopsticks may also do this job if you can manage them.

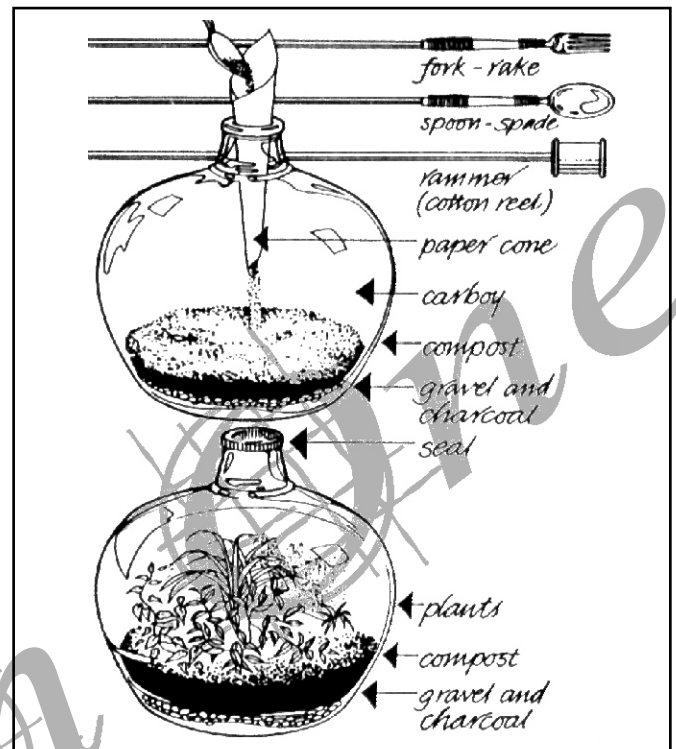
METHOD

Clean the glass inside and out, very well with detergent and warm (not hot) water. Rinse well (this will be its last clean for some time) and allow to dry. Pour in a thin (1cm) layer of peat. Add a 5cm layer of wet pebbles. (The peat will prevent them from cracking the glass). Drop over this a few pieces of charcoal. Add some dry John Innes Potting Compost or soilless compost (a 13cm layer is sufficient in a large carboy). The sides of the bottle can easily become soiled again so it is better to drop the compost through a funnel made of stiff paper. Push the compost down with the rammer and add water (down the sides of the bottle). The bottle is now ready for planting.

PLANTS

Choose small plants which are slow growing and varied in colour, form and texture. Suitable plants include:

Adiantum (maidenhair fern)	Hedera (Ivy)	Pilea
African Violet	Hoya	Saxifraga
Begonia rex (small leafed)	Maranta	Saxifrage
Ferns	Mosses	Tradescantia
Ficus pumila	Peperomia	Nertera



PLANTS Cnt.

Most flowering plants, cacti and succulents are unsuitable. Try the design out first in a bowl of a similar size then plant the bottle, starting from the outside and working in towards the middle. First make a depression in the compost where you want each plant to go. Then take up the fork tied to a cane and stick it firmly into the root-ball of the first plant. Tilt the bottle slightly if necessary so that each plant can be lowered directly into its depression rather than having to be inserted at an angle from the narrow opening of a carboy. (obviously, with a wider opening, the planting process is much more straight forward). Tamp compost around plant with cotton reel tool, then proceed to the next plant. Keep plants away from the sides of the bottle and from each other to allow room for growing. Stones and moss may be added for interest. If the sides of the glass have become dirty, spray with water or sponge with a sponge tied to a long stick or cane.

MAINTENANCE

If the bottle is closed it will steam up for some time but may eventually clear. No water is needed for at least two months. It may go for a year without water but watch for drying out. If steaming persists, leave the top open. More frequent watering will be needed this way but a light spray every two months and watering in the compost every six months should be sufficient. (When watering into the compost, hold the spout of the watering can against the glass so that the water will run down the inside of the bottle and will clean the glass at the same time). Keep the bottle away from the sun but stand in very good light and turn it regularly so that the light falls evenly on the growing plants. A fish tank should have a lid but this can be left partially open. A sheet of glass can act as a lid.

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