



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Gardening in Miniature/Creating Fairy Gardens (March 2, 2019)

by Priscilla Girard, UCCE Master Gardener

Creating a perfect little world where magic can happen is what got me hooked on miniature gardens. Creating these little scenes brings out our inner child and offers endless opportunities to stimulate our imaginations and express our creativity.

The first decision to make ---what theme or scene do you desire? If your goal is to create a traditional landscape that you might find in your own backyard, then your choice of container, plants and furnishings will be determined by that. Or do you want to create a more whimsical place where fairies might play?

Choosing a theme will narrow down those choices. Some themes you might consider are Under the Sea, the Farm, School, Dinosaurs, or Holidays. The possibilities are endless. Sometimes it's easier to find your accessories or furnishings first and then find a container and plants to compliment those furnishings. Or you might find a very unusual container that inspires you to create a unique garden that would complement it.



Will your finished garden be outside, exposed to the elements and full sun; or on a patio where it will be protected from the hot afternoon sun? This will affect your choice of container, plants, and the furnishings you accessorize with. If the garden will live out in the elements fulltime, then you will want a sturdy container and plants that will not be susceptible to freezing or sunburn. Accessories will need to be durable. Another decision to make is the type of vessel. Choosing a plastic pot or something lightweight should be a consideration. You can plant in almost anything that will hold soil and provide drainage. I have used my grandson's Red Flyer wagon, a child's wheelbarrow, a regular size wheelbarrow, a chair with the seat removed, a vintage suitcase, a recycled bread box, and a metal toolbox. The only requirement is that the container should have holes in the bottom to provide drainage. Plants do not like to be water-logged! When I use a fragile container such as the vintage suitcase, I will line it with bubble wrap to prolong the life of the container. If the container is galvanized tin, a bubble wrap lined interior will help to keep plant roots cooler in summer heat. I still poke holes through the bottom layer of the bubble wrap so the container will drain.

Next, fill your container with potting soil. Do not use soil from your garden! It will compact and prevent roots from growing. If you plan on using succulents, use a cactus mix. Your plants will be happy if you use a plant mix that goes with the type of plants you are using.

The next step is choosing the plants. You should look for plants that have small leaves and fit the scale and proportion of your furnishings. Also consider the light and water requirements of each plant. You want to choose plants that have similar water and light requirements so that all can co-exist happily together. If you are creating a miniature landscape surrounding a tiny house, plant foliage should be in a similar scale. Choose plants that are compact or that can be easily pruned. Limiting the plant colors will create a more cohesive design.

Choosing plants that are naturally dwarf or small in scale will mean less maintenance for you. Some plants such as dwarf boxwood in a one-gallon container can be trimmed down to become a mini landscape tree. Consider using herbs, as they are easy to grow, and some stay small with just a little trimming. Dwarf curry makes a great bush or shrub and provides wonderful contrast with its delicate gray foliage. Creeping thyme makes a wonderful lawn and small scented geraniums can be easily shaped into shrubs or small trees. Sweet alyssum can be trimmed into a flowering hedge. Isotoma makes an excellent ground cover. Wire vine is great for climbing up arbors, but it will need some trimming to keep it from overtaking the container.

An all-succulent garden can take a lot of neglect, while a grouping of ferns or tropicals will require a great deal of attention and water during our scorching summers. If you choose to create an all-succulent garden, Firesticks and Pine Tree crassula will give the illusion of landscape trees. For shrubs, choose small leafed crassula or santolina. Small sedums can be used as ground covers.

For an outside miniature garden, consider using small emitters and connect it to your irrigation system. This will prevent plants from drying out and save a multitude of headaches for you.

Small rocks can be used as stepping stones, and crushed DG can be used as gravel pathways. You want to create walkways and seating areas just like you have in your home landscape. Consider adding an arbor to frame a seating area or some other feature that will make a focal point.

Lastly, add all the furnishings. This will create the illusion of a real space. Buildings should be kept in scale with your plants. Think of all the accent pieces you have in your yard, benches, bird houses, bird baths, lawn furniture, etc. this adds to the authenticity of the space.

Many local nurseries can be a source for miniature garden accessories, occasionally in big box stores, and the internet can be a great source. Look through your grandkid's toys. They have a plethora of "stuff" that you can appropriate/confiscate for your garden. Don't forget about their birthday cake or party decorations! Doll house furnishings are the perfect size and scale for these gardens. Thrift stores also provide some treasures and inspirational containers.

Your miniature garden will be relatively carefree and offer many hours of enjoyment. A basic fairy garden can be changed up for each holiday and is a fun way to collect accessories. Children love helping to plan and create these magical masterpieces. Be sure to share your creation with others!

We love to talk plants. Come ask us your gardening questions!

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 852-3325. Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30am; or in Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursdays only, 9:30-11:30am; or visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions: http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeneers/

The UCCE Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions at the following venues in March:

The UC Master Gardeners will be at Tulare County Office of Education's STEAM Expo on March 9 from 8:30 - 3:00.

You can find us each Saturday at Visalia's Farmer's Market in Sears Parking lot, 8am until 11am.

