

PROJECT IDEA STARTER

Miniature Gardens

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Whether it is crops, vegetables, or flowers, people enjoy growing plants. Gardening in any form offers a wide variety of opportunities for creativity. Miniature gardening is a popular new way to be involved in gardening, and anyone can do it. Even those with limited space and budgets can create miniature gardens. A miniature garden can be as individual as its gardener!

Miniature gardens are exactly that—small or dwarf landscapes. Greenhouses and nurseries carry dwarf varieties of herbs, mosses, succulents, and bonsai-type plants and trees bred specifically for miniature gardens. In fact, bonsai gardening, which started in China during the sixth century, could be considered one of the first forms of miniature gardens.

Miniature gardeners often create their gardens around themes, such as fairies, gnomes, dwarves, and elves, but garden themes can be built around almost anything. A beach resort? A miniature farm? A wonderland for mini-horses? Selecting a theme is your first step, and you get to decide.

After identifying a theme, select the container or location for the garden. Containers are often the best choice for beginners because they require less of an investment in plants, materials, and time. Containers also offer the flexibility to be moved around and placed indoors or outdoors. Containers can be deep or shallow, but a very shallow container limits you to plants with shallow root systems.

Once the theme and container are selected, determine how much money you want to spend. Minimum supplies needed are pebbles, soil, and plants. If you have free access to natural elements like pebbles, sticks, moss, and soil then you won't have to budget for them. Thrift stores are often good resources for miniature items. Garden centers, nurseries, or large hardware centers carry dwarf plants and trees. Be sure to ask for dwarf varieties. After you have gathered all your supplies, cover a work surface with newspapers or plastic. Begin by placing pebbles approximately 1" deep in the bottom of the container for drainage. Next, read the plant tags to determine how much soil is needed and use at least that much. Again, a shallow container limits how deep the soil can be. To make watering easier, make sure there is at least ½" between the soil and the top lip of the container. Use a spatula or a large spoon to dig a hole to the depth determined by the plant tag. Gently remove the plant from the store container and give the roots a ¼" haircut to stimulate root growth.

PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.

Bark, finely chopped mulch, moss, or tiny pebbles can be placed over the soil surface.

Now it's time to decorate the garden surface. Using small pebbles or sand, create paths leading to a tiny house, bench seat, table and chair, or fairy hiding beside a rock. Use pine cones, branches, sticks, pebbles, and other natural elements to design the garden. Most of the fun is in playing with and rearranging the garden elements!

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are specific things members want to address during their project adventure. Using 4-H 365 Self-Determined Project Guide, identify at least three areas of interest and at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the list below or make up your own.

Plan a Garden

- With an adult project helper, search the Internet for examples of miniature gardens.

1-2-3 Garden Construction

1. Place pea-size gravel or pebbles 1" deep in bottom for drainage.
2. Place soil on top to ½" from top edge of container and pat gently to compact the soil.
3. Place largest items first, then the plants, and then smaller items.

- Select a theme for your garden.
- Visit a nursery or garden center to observe types of miniature gardens.
- Interview a miniature garden enthusiast.
- See if a local nursery or garden center offers a class on miniature gardening. If so, sign up!
- Write a list of supplies you already have on hand and a list of supplies you need. Consider whether you can make some of the items you need.

Select a Location or Container

- Speak to your parents or guardians about the location for your miniature garden. If using a container, decide if it must be a non-breakable material like plastic, wood, concrete, or metal.
- Select a container for the garden. Decorative containers you could use include vases, fish bowls, terrariums, urns, or platter/tray dishes. See if you can repurpose something like a basket, birdbath, or wagon into a container.
- Make your own container out of hypertufa, artificial stone that is very lightweight when dry. Find directions for how to make hypertufa containers online.
- Search the Internet and select plants for the container you selected. Discuss them with your project helper.
- Decide what size the items in your garden will be. They should all be about the same size or scale.
- Unique decorative items are fun and unexpected when used as containers. Anything



The Ohio State University (Garden by Jill Stechschulte)

that can hold soil and water will work such as grills, boots, boxes, tires, and gutters.

Shopping for Supplies

- Before shopping at retail stores, check out local thrift stores. Some miniature items like doll furniture can be purchased at a fraction of the cost.
- Hobby stores provide a wide variety of inexpensive miniature items from furniture to decorative stones. Dried mosses are also a great addition to miniature gardens.
- Create a list of plants you would like to use, then visit at least two nurseries to see which are available. If the plants you had in mind are not available, be open to substituting with ones that are. Make sure they are suitable for a miniature garden.
- Live plants such as mosses and succulents should be purchased through a reputable store that features miniatures. Ask the store's staff for other ideas about suitable plants to use in containers.



Create Natural Elements

If your garden has a forest theme, make a forest friend. First, collect an acorn (for the head) and a pine cone (for the body). Glue the acorn to the pinecone and use a permanent marker to make eyes on the acorn.

Make a miniature item to add to your garden's landscape using small twigs and clear, permanent craft glue. Collect small twigs, then create a chair, bench, arch, shed, cabin, or whatever you want to add to your mini scene.

Use larger stones and rocks to add interest and hiding places.

Create a water feature with shells, beach glass, and smooth stones to make a beach; use colored glass to make a lake and add miniature trees; or use miniature furniture and blue marbles or tiny blue stones for a backyard pool.

Make a miniature picket fence by joining similarly sized twigs with twine.

RELATED RESOURCES

Websites

Better Homes and Gardens, bhg.com/gardening/container/plans-ideas/mini-garden/

Lushome, lushome.com/minature-garden-designs-fairy-gardens-defining-new-trends-container-gardening/109289

Gardener's Supply Company, gardeners.com/how-to/growing-succulents-in-containers/7020.html

National Gardening Association, garden.org, search for "terrarium"

Videos

Visit [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search for "miniature gardens" to see what other miniature gardening enthusiasts are doing!



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