

Wilmette Pet Center

"the place for people who love pets"



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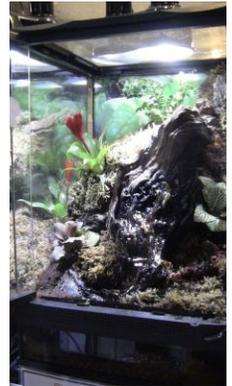
Creating the perfect terrarium

One of the most enjoyable parts of owning an amphibian or reptile is their enclosure - it is like having a small chunk of a tropical jungle or desert right in your home! Building an enclosure, combining live plants and animals together, is attractive and very satisfying. And while many people are too afraid of getting into terrariums, with a little planning and thought it's easy!

First, decide what kind of creature you want to keep. Learn about its requirements, heat, humidity, and temperature. A great place to start is with our care sheets here. You can also stop by any time and talk with our experienced staff; we can help you figure out exactly what animal will suit your desires.

Then, you build your terrarium.

Choosing the terrarium itself. This seems obvious, but there are a few things to keep in mind. It must be waterproof on the bottom for tropical and temperate setups. You also need to decide the appropriate sized cage - bigger is always better, and many reptiles and amphibians prefer to climb, so taller can be more appropriate. You'll also need that room for desert reptiles that like to dig. Air flow will matter, too, in your choice of cage with a screen lid or sides.



Drainage: water pooling in the soil is a recipe for a filthy, smelly cage. Provide drainage, just like you would with plants. Gravel makes a great base, although we prefer Zoo Med's Hydro Balls. These porous, expanded clay balls have huge surface area for beneficial bacteria - it also makes an excellent base for plant growth.

Tip: place a layer of mesh or screen on top of your drainage, under the substrate. This will prevent soil and debris from falling into your reservoir and making a mess. Extend the mesh up the sides of the cage for an inch or so to make sure your substrate stays in place.

Substrate: The substrate not only gives your creature a place to live, but can play an important role in maintaining humidity. We like to use ground coconut fibers; they'll hold moisture and help prevent the growth of unwanted organisms. Spot clean it daily, do not saturate, and change it out when it begins to get dirty and break down. A layer of moss on top will help keep the substrate in place and looks great.

Decorations: This is the fun part! These can be anything from natural wood branches and vines to plants, either plastic or real, or anything else you can imagine. Keep in mind your animal's needs: nocturnal creatures would appreciate a log hiding hut, climbing animals like anoles like hanging plants to hide in. For tropical species, epiphytes, plants that don't have a root system and depend on moisture from the air, can be stuck into a background or tied to branches. Desert terrariums can be decorated with some of our small succulents to create a realistic look.

Want something cooler? Try our miniature skulls or other decorations for a really unique look!



Water fountains can add an incredibly realistic looks and help maintain the humidity in a tropical terrarium. They're easy to make: place a water pump in the drainage part in the bottom. Cut a hole for the

tube, and run it up through the substrate to a branch or series of rocks. Keep the reservoir filled, as pumps will stop working if they run dry. You can make it even easier with a pre-made fountain like the ones from ExoTerra or Zoo Med!

Tip: Because many amphibians are sensitive to chlorine, it's important to use distilled water in foggers, and dechlorinator in mist bottles and when refilling water.



There is a new, exciting innovation in amphibian/reptile keeping: bioactive terrariums. Tropical terrariums can utilize tiny creatures - microfauna - isopods and springtails to help create an ecosystem. Isopods are a type of crustacean, more commonly known as pill bugs, wood louse, and roly pollies, that lives under wood and in the soil (only a couple of the hundreds of species are used to create bioactive terrariums.) Springtails (Collembola) are tiny hexapods (no larger than 1/16 of an inch) that live in soil, leaf litter, and around rotting wood; they're named for a folded tail-like appendage on their abdomen that they use to jump away from threats. These microfauna do a lot for your terrarium by helping

decompose organic waste, leaf litter, and fungi, provide nutrients for your plants, and can provide a natural snack for many smaller species like dart frogs and small geckos.



If you're feeling creative and adventurous and are ready to try your hand at creating your terrarium, we have everything you need to get set up! From the gravel and Hydroballs for drainage to coconut bark and soil for substrate, cool epiphytes and small tropical plants, to the various sizes of terrariums and aquariums we have what you need. Our experienced staff will be happy to help with advice and tips to help get you started!

Need a little help getting started? The Galapagos Terrarium Starter Kit is perfect! Available in both tropical and arid styles, they contain basic pieces, including wood, mosses, and stones to give you a place to begin with your decorating skills. Already have a terrarium? These kits make a great way to spice up your usual layout!



Not feeling brave enough to create your own? Check out our pre-made terrarium kits! They're the perfect size to add your own dart or tree frog or gecko. Customize the terrarium to your specific species needs with the appropriate light, heat, and humidity - check out our care sheets on your animal here, or stop by the store to find out what the best temperature or humidity is to keep your pet happy and healthy. We even have desert terrariums, perfect for small reptiles like small geckos and tarantulas.

Terrariums are increasing in popularity, and it's no wonder why. They're easier to set up and maintain than most people think, and the pairing of plants and animals can be beautiful. If you think you're ready to take on this incredibly satisfying hobby, or if you have a terrarium that needs to be freshened up, stop by and speak with our staff for more tips and help creating your creature's new home!