MINIATURE FAIRY GARDENING

by PAT CORDRAY

Maas Nursery, Seabrook

Fairy gardens are miniature gardens for the home, patio or office. These can be planted and completed in a few minutes, a few hours or as a hobby taking months to complete. Fairy gardens can be changed seasonally or just on a whim. These miniature gardens are real gardens needing water, light, and pruning.

Any container can be used for fairy gardening, from a regular standard pot, to a broken pot, to a red wagon. Hang them on the wall or from a hook using a hanging basket. You can even stack containers. Whatever you use, make sure it has good drainage.

Creating your scene is the next step. Will you create a secret garden with paths and birds, a park, a vegetable garden with rows and tools, Southwest scene, quaint sitting area, wooded forest with a stream or river, beach, tropical oasis, putting green, sports field, etc.?

I usually start with an idea, for example, stairs on the edge of the container or a hovel, and the garden starts with that.

 PLANTS -- Pick plants with similar water needs, different leaf color, texture, and growing habits. Don't crowd plants; allow room for them to grow. Room is also needed for fences, patios, paths, bridges, homes, stairways, fairies, and/or anything else that completes your fairy garden. As plants grow, pinch them back to keep them the ideal size and shape for your garden. If the plant takes over the container, replace it with something less vigorous.

Some of Pat's favorites include, l to r: Dwarf mondo grass (up to 6", easy to divide); ardisia 18", use as "trees," pink flowers, red berries); blue moneywort (use as "grass," blue/white flowers); and 'Chocolate Chip' ajuga (2-3', chocolate-green leaves, purple flowers).

SOIL -- Miniature gardens need soil and Baccto is nice and light soil for plants or succulents. Your soil does not have to be level across the container. Make hills, valleys, streams, rivers or a beach for interest. Once soil is in, press down and compact soil. If you build up soil, you will need a retaining wall. Use flag stone, sticks, or broken pottery, to keep the soil in place. Clean the inside edge of the pot before you cover the soil. Use rock, pebbles, mulch, sand, moss, tumbled glass, etc. to cover all the soil. With soil covered there will be less soil splash when you water.

WATER -- Water plants as needed. Use your finger to check for dampness. Sometimes soil may feel damp when it is just cold. Water with a turkey baster to direct the flow to plants roots without disturbing the garden. Succulents need only water occasionally, allowing the soil to dry before you water again.

PLANTING -- Arrange items and plants in the container before you plant. When placing plants decide how the garden will be viewed, from all sides or from the front. Move your items around until you like the arrangement. Push down firmly around each plant and fill in soil around them making sure the roots are completely covered. I find my design develops as I go, so I have to be careful when I plant to not disturb my scene.

Remember it is all the little details you add that make your fairy garden interesting, unique, and fun. Use found items like acorn caps for making mushrooms, birdbaths or bird nests. Use sticks to make fencing, houses, and doors. Small pieces of flagstone make excellent bridges, patios, retaining walls, cliffs, and paths. Broken pieces of pottery make interesting stepping-stones, garden walls, and bridges. Small Mexican beach pebbles also work well as stepping-stones.

Use crushed limestone for paths (make sure your area for the path is level before adding the limestone, just like any "real" garden). The list of items to use for your fairy garden is only limited by your imagination. As you add your items press them firmly in place, making sure they are secure. You can use wire to secure items if needed.

Fairy gardening is an excellent way to use your imagination to create the garden you always wanted.