

## GARDENING WITH FAIRIES by Virginia Krebs

Have you ever seen a Fairy? Hundreds of Flower Fairies work and play in every garden, wood and meadow caring for flowers and trees. They only reveal themselves to those who believe in them. So, leave your disbelief behind, and prepare to enter the secret world of the Flower Fairies.

Generally, the flower fairies are the ones that are attracted to fairy gardens. Commonly described as gentle spirits of the earth, they love natural beauty and luxury. You don't really need to believe in fairies to have a fairy garden on your deck or patio – although it couldn't hurt. Children and adults alike will delight in planting and caring for these miniature gardens brimming with charm and intrigue.

Begin by choosing low-growing herbs or small plants. The scale of plant material in your fairy garden container is important because the plants create the miniature landscape and make it manageable. Many of these plants grow slowly and easily can be maintained by trimming them back

Not only is the fragrance of these herbs captivating, the flowers are quite striking as well. Oreganos feature many different flower colors and varied leaves, *Thymus praecox 'Minor'* is suitable as a groundcover and only grows about ¼ inch tall. Curly chives have a blue twisted leaf and form a hedge and gray-leaved Greek sage gives contrast to the common, green-leafed plants. To soften the edges, Irene rosemary cascades wonderfully down the side of the container.

Other favorites for the fairy garden include variegated or green myrtle, which makes a small standard when pruned; dwarf pink autumn sage, for its small compact green leaves and beautiful pink summer flowers; lemon-scented geraniums, which serve as small upright trees with their ½ to ¾ inch crinkled, dark green leaves; and creeping savory, which is easy to shape into a small bush.

Choosing a container is very important. No matter which container you select make sure it offers sufficient drainage from the bottom. Durable hypertufa troughs and pots will withstand many different kinds of weather conditions and won't blow over. Available in many shapes and sizes they fit nicely into the landscape and small plants don't get lost in a mob of other plants on the ground.

Terra cotta pots and window boxes are good choices, available in a vast array of sizes and shapes. The saucers of the large-sized pots can make charming gardens for fairies too, be sure to provide drainage. If you choose a wooden window box, choose sturdy, long lasting redwood or cedar. These boxes will need adequate drainage holes like any other container.

The potting mixture for containers is important. Peat mixes are too lightweight, dry out quickly and won't keep the pot from blowing over in the wind. You can purchase premixed soil specifically for containers or mix your own with the following combination: 2 parts sterilized soil, 1 part peat moss or compost and 1 part perlite.

Sunlight is vital to the success of the fairy garden (at least 6-8 hours in a sunny spot). In the hot summer months, daily water is needed so monitor this according to the light and temperature.

There is no limit to the variety and intrigue you can offer with your fairy garden. However, you may want to populate your fairy garden with store-bought inhabitants. Real fairies are somewhat temperamental and difficult to come by. Whether you're designing it for your own enjoyment, or for others, have an enchanting time and maybe, just maybe, the fairies will pay a stealthy visit some night by the light of the moon.