

Gardening Basics

Do YOU Believe in Faeries? How to create a garden they will love!

Faerie gardening has become popular the past few years with a supporting cottage industry that includes classes, books, crafting techniques and propagation of new varieties of smaller scale plants. Children and adults alike who previously may not have had an interest in horticulture or didn't have the room at home to explore its wonders, now are dipping their trowels in the soil to create their own faerie garden.

As Master Gardeners, we appreciate any opportunity to share the rewards of gardening and to teach individuals how to make it an enjoyable part of their lives. So, we offer this beginner's guide to the practice and art of faerie gardening.

What is a faerie garden?



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In mythology and children's stories, faeries are portrayed as benevolent, sometimes mischievous creatures with magical powers. A faerie garden is a story-telling scene that includes small plants and structures such as dwellings, furniture, animals, and little creatures like those depicted in fairy tales. The design and components are limited only by your imagination.

Let your creativity fly

It takes a special person to imagine a place where small, dainty creatures flitter and flutter among the flowers spreading joy to all who care for them. But once we can suspend our disbelief in such things, the magic of faeries soon emerges and our urge to create a happy home for them grows. (The term suspension of disbelief has been defined as a willingness to suspend one's critical faculties and believe the unbelievable, the sacrifice of realism and logic for the sake of enjoyment. The term was

coined in 1817 by the poet and aesthetic philosopher [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#).

Anyone can create a faerie garden. And any faerie will tell you, it doesn't matter how big or small, fancy, or simple, your garden will be appreciated. It takes but a few steps to get started and it's almost guaranteed that once you do, you will want to nurture it forward.

Begin by developing a vision or theme

What's the story you want to tell of your garden and the faeries who live there? Do you envision a tale of a deep forest with filtered sun rays where a cottage built into a tree stump beckons our curiosity? Perhaps a village story bustling with the daily (and nightly) activities of faerie families? Or maybe a beach scene – even faeries need a vacation now and then. A tea party? A jungle? Train station? A farm or mountain scene? A modern city? Let children help with the vision and have fun with this planning exercise. Then use your theme to guide you in choosing style, location, accessories, and plants.

Based on your theme, determine your style

Victorian, French, Spanish, cottage chic, modern, medieval, Renaissance; there are countless different styles to fit your vision. Explore new ideas! Do you want a replication of your own personal style or try something new? Look through Pinterest or one of the many books on faerie gardening to help ignite your imagination. Walk through your own garden space. Scenes of everyday living for humans remain very similar for faeries, just smaller in scale. Whatever your decision on style, keep in mind that faeries need a quiet niche or two to rest and hide from the heat of the day, noise and birds who might think a faerie would make a tasty treat.

Deciding your garden scope, size and location comes next

Do you envision an indoor or outdoor garden? Small or large? Indoor gardens are small in scope, as are outdoor gardens built in pots and other containers. Outdoor faerie gardens scenes can be quite large, taking up significant garden space. Beginners may want to start small.

You might begin by creating a garden in an old wagon, a lined basket or flower box, bird bath or a large pot. Wheelbarrows, galvanized tubs, terrariums, even garden pot saucers make excellent small faerie places, and easy to move when needed. Remember to add drainage to avoid pooling of water damaging plant roots. When planning to build a faerie garden within your own outdoor garden, look for existing plants or items you already have that will add interest to your theme. Examples include a tree stump, evergreen plants both low and tall, or a water feature. Whatever it may be, build on what you already have in place and help develop your theme as this will meld your new garden into the old as if it was always there.

Speaking of size, let's talk scale

It's a good rule of thumb to use the miniature scale of 1:12. A foot tall plant in the real world is only an inch in the world of faeries. A four-inch figurine is the same as a four-foot child. Keep a tape measure on hand when you find items for your garden to ensure things stay in scale. You want your garden to be large enough to see, but small enough for the comfort of faeries.

Lest we forget about the budget

Faerie gardens can be inexpensive (even free!) or may be costly depending on the garden's scope, needed supplies and accessories. Establish how much you want to invest and try to stay on that point. If you have a knack for crafting or basic carpentry, all the better. These skills will save expense and add fun to your project.

Plants are crucial to a successful faerie home

While living plants are always preferred, a few artificial shrubs or trees are acceptable. Keep in mind the scale. Most plantings should be low and small. Examples are endless and include bonsai specimens, mosses, violets, varieties of thyme, sweet alyssum, creeping phlox, blue speedwell, golden stonecrop, or some of the new "steppingstone" plants now found in nurseries.

Many low growing plants can be trimmed to look like hedges, such as some varieties of thyme. A stand of higher growing plants can act as trees either in or just beyond the garden's perimeter. For indoor gardens, the possibilities abound including selecting plants intended for terrariums and dish gardens.

Whether the garden is indoors or out, ensure plants have the correct soil, drainage, and sunlight to flourish. Select varieties that thrive in the conditions where your faerie garden is placed. For example, although most mosses live in the shade, there are some types that will grow in sunlight, albeit not full-on North Texas afternoon sun. If your garden is in the shade or indoors, try growing your own moss by painting plain yogurt to bits of clay pots or other items that can breathe and hold moisture. Moss will start to grow on the clay pieces in about six weeks.

Accessorizing the garden

First, inventory what you already have that fits your theme. Check out sewing or craft boxes. Buttons, ribbon, thimbles, beads, seed pods, twigs, spools, costume jewelry and shiny tidbits are all useful supplies. Have a craft swap day with friends to explore what they have and are willing to add to your project. If you or someone you know is a skilled carpenter, scraps of wood can be used to build a table or door, windows, a ladder or swing.

Old birdhouses are easily transformed into lovely faerie homes by drilling or filing out a door and perhaps a window or two. Scraps of wood, wire, tin, and pebbles can be turned into tables, chairs and all other kinds of faerie needs and desires for just the cost of a fun time putting them together. Carpenter's glue, fishing line, thin wire and string are all useful items to have on hand to tie, hang or build accessories. Larger stones or broken pottery can serve as fencing or barriers from pesky pixies who can play mischief on a faerie's garden home.

Where to find faerie garden supplies. Garage and estate sales are good potential sources for one-of-a-kind miniatures at a great price. Keep an ear wide open while you look. Your inner faeries will know what you're up to and often whisper, "Oh my, that will be perfect!" Remember, you don't have to start off grand. Start with a few things and add on as your imagination and budget allows.

For those whose budget is larger, shops, craft stores, doll house and toy train suppliers, and the internet are all places to find endless additions that enhance your theme. Need help? Check Pinterest for hundreds of new ideas from other creative people. Always keep an eye open when you are out and about for miniatures in furniture, plants, and other accessories – they are everywhere! Even holidays are celebrated by faeries and suppliers have the goods to suit your dreams.

Putting it all together

Once plant choices and accessories are in hand, and the site of the garden cleared and prepared, begin constructing the foundation of the garden. For smaller scope projects, have one item – either a plant or accessory – be the highlight. Establish this focal point first then build from that, adding smaller plants and accessories. For larger scale projects, there can be one or more focal points that wind throughout the garden. Either way, establish these foundations first, then add points of interest to help complement and draw the eye through the garden. Its best to place larger items first then place smaller items.

Creating motion in the faerie garden helps foster and guide the imagination. Some gardeners place artificial faeries in action scenes to build a sense of motion and life. It's a matter of choice, but motion is important to help replicate a feeling of "life." Suspending butterflies and dragonflies by fishing line or wire from higher plants works well. A miniature grouping of a mama duck and ducklings marching down a path, a kitten at a dwelling door or a puppy with a ball add a sense of playfulness. Building a small playground creates a scene of children playing. A tiny pond with real water or blue pebbles adds life as well. Adding a string of battery powered faerie lights gives your garden life and depth into the night.

A note on accessory stability. Apply glue or stick a sturdy wire into the bottom of accessories whenever possible to secure into the ground and stabilize the item from wind, rain and faerie children running through. Wooden or other porous items should be sealed with acrylic sealer to protect against water and soil moisture.

Safety first. If your garden will be enjoyed by young children, be mindful of safety issues such as swallowing garden items, eating plants, and the strength of the garden to live up to the rigors of childhood curiosity. Resin accessories last the longest, can usually be chewed with no safety concerns and stand up to at least gentle tossing. Small children should always be supervised around faerie sized gardens.

The most important advice

Have fun planning and building your faerie retreat. Children, grandchildren, friends and, of course, faeries will enjoy this bit of magic you have created.

Notes and References

While most of this article was written based on personal experience of the writer, the following references were utilized to confirm and/or add to the knowledge provided:

Bawden-Davis, J. & Turner, B. (2013). *Fairy gardening: Creating your own magical miniature garden*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.

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