

## Kentucky 4-H Virtual Experiences

### 4-H Dish Gardens

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Hello I'm Jessica Sayre. I'm the Extension Agent for Horticulture in Harrison County

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and I'd like to welcome you to the Kentucky 4-H Virtual Experience. Today we are going to be

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talking about how to make a desert dish garden. We actually have a new publication

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that you can go online or check with your 4-H agent and they can help you find that but the

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dish garden publication tells you all of the instructions that we're going to be going through

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today and one cool thing about the dish garden is for one it's really fun to make, two you can

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actually enter it into your county fair as a 4-H project and then if you win your county fair it

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can move on to the state fair as part of the 4-H Horticulture and Plant Science Division

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and it is class 566 so if you're looking online or if you're looking through the 4-H

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fair book catalog then that's where you can find that. So we'll go ahead and get started.

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So to make a dish garden you are going to need a container we will talk about a variety of those,

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we're going to use some potting soil, we're going to use some sand, and then we're also going to use

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some rock and of course plants. So a dish garden you can make it a couple of different

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Ways. There can be a desert dish garden or there can be a more tropical dish garden

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but a desert dish garden typically does a little bit better. Desert type of plants like cacti

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they will handle this type of container better. Interesting things about a dish garden is

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the container that you are going to be planting in does not have holes in the bottom so if we

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were planting annual flowers or something like that to go on our front porch and water in a pot

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we want to make sure that there are drainage holes. That is one thing that is different

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about a dish garden. It does not have drainage holes which is one reason why our cacti and

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more desert type plants will do better in this environment because we're just going

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to give it a little bit of water every now and then. So the containers that you can use are

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pretty much unnumbered but they're not going to have a hole in the bottom so this

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is just a plastic container that you would use to you know in your kitchen to

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store leftovers or whatnot. This is a little baking aluminum baking sheet that you can use

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and this is the lid that came with this and you could actually even use this. We've got another

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bakeware dish. This one's a little small but it can be as large or small as you want it to be

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but you can find something that's brand new at the store, there's glass, there's plastic but any type

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of container that's going to be fairly shallow and no holes in the bottom is what we are going for.

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Okay so the first step when building our dish garden after we have selected our container

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and I think today I'm going to use this aluminum dish. We are going to

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fill it with all of these different materials. So I mentioned that there is potting soil, sand and rock.

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So since there is not drainage holes in the bottom of this we need these different layers

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to allow for some drainage in the container so that the plants are not sitting in water.

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Anytime they're too saturated then that allows for root rot and things that are going to get

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into the plants that will ultimately kill them so we don't want that so we're going to

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kind of incorporate these different items and kind of mimic what it would be like in

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our soil that would allow for drainage. So first we're going to start with some rocks.

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We're going to do a thin layer of rock . These are decorative rock which is nice

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because they're colorful. If you were using a clear container you would be able to see

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those different colors throughout but they don't have to be this type of rock. They can be

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almost like gravel. It's just allowing for that drainage. Next we are going to use sand. So one

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thing that I will mention now is where to purchase these materials. A lot of your home improvement

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stores will have this in the garden section and then of course garden centers will have this

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type of material and if you're struggling to find some of them a lot of times if you look in the

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where you would purchase fish tanks or fish food or things for an aquarium you can find

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a lot of these materials there as well other than the potting soil so you don't have to go anywhere

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Special. There's a lot of different places if you look in the right department of the store

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where you can find these. So we started with our rock next we're going to add a layer of sand.

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So we're just going to kind of spread this out among the rocks

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and the sand will help absorb water so whenever you water your plant you're going to give it and

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we'll talk about that but we're going to give a little bit of water but we don't want it

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sopping in water but the sand will help absorb some of that excess moisture.

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Okay so now we have the rock in the sand the next thing we're going to add is some potting soil.

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So this particular soil that we're using is an indoor potting mix but most types of

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bagged potting soil that you purchase at a store is going to be perfectly fine for this

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type of project so we're going to add in some soil

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and depending on what size of container you're using it'll depend on how much you're

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actually going to add but we're going to add our potting soil pretty much to

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the top of the container regardless of what size container you have.

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We're just going to smooth that out now. We don't want to press it down. We don't want to pack it

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down because that will take out any of the air space that is in between these soil particles

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and we want that air space because that allows for air movement which the plants are going to need so

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now we have our three layers next step is going to be putting the plants in. Okay so now that we

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have our layers in our container we are going to plant our cute little plants that we have here so

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we are just a reminder we are making a desert dish garden so these are going to be plants

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that don't require a lot of water. They like it a little bit more dry which is perfect for this

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type of container because remember we don't have drainage holes so we're not going to be watering

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very often we're just going to be watering as needed. So there's a lot of different

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I guess patterns and different ways that you can that you can plant. There's lots and lots

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of different plants that you can use. You can go to a local garden center and look around and

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you'll see lots of different items. So first thing we're going to do is we're going to take it out of

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our container and you can see that the root ball is kind of conformed to what the container was

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so we're actually going to very very gently push around on that root ball and break up those roots.

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What this does is encourage new root growth so after they've been kind of smooshed around then

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the roots will be like oh I need to grow out and not stay confined to that container like I was in

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so we're going to plant this so we're going to dig a little hole

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and we want to plant to where the top of the root ball was so we're going to gently press some soil

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around that just like that and remember we don't want you to smush the soil because

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we want to keep all those little air pockets within so we're just going to gently press

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so I've got three plants today you can do as many or as few as you want and it can be any variety

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of plants. You can do all of the same kind or you can choose three different ones like we have here.

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That's totally up to you. So this root ball is a little bit larger and you can see how large

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those roots are so we really want to and they kind of started twisting around so we really want to

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break this up. We actually for this one since it's a little bit deep I'm going to pull off some roots

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and no I'm not killing plant I'm just going to take off some of those extra roots so that it's

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not so deep and it will work well in our container. So we're going to dig another little hole.

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We're going to place that in and then gently press that potting mix back up around that plant.

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Okay and then our third guy this cute little cactus it's got some spikes on it

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so you want to be very careful with that. Anytime you're using a cactus there's probably going to

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be some spikes and we don't want those sticking in our fingers and have a splinter so you can do

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you can handle it with your with your bare hands. I'm going to because the bottom of this one you

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probably can't see but it's not very spiky. The big spikes are at the top so I'm going to be able to

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handle it down here at the bottom. If you have a cactus that is going to be very spiky like this

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because they're super cool looking but you want to be very careful whenever you're

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handling it so that you don't get poked so you can use some rubber gloves like cleaning gloves

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or gardening gloves something that's going to be a little bit thicker to protect your hands

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just so that you don't you don't get poked. So once again

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we're going to break up this root system a little bit and that's going to encourage some new growth

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and then we're just going to dig a little hole stick him in you want to press down a little

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bit on that guy because he's a little bit top heavy so we want to make sure he's very secure.

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So we have our three plants. Now again you can do any design that you like and then of course

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you can add some little accessories if you want to at the end. So we've got some soil on him.

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So we've got these decorative rocks. If you want totally up to you you can put a few little

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rocks down it doesn't have to be covered but if you just want some extra visual appeal

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sometimes people will find some little fairy garden figurines like or some little toadstools

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or some little fairy garden benches and things like that and stick those in for a little extra

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decoration and all of that is totally fine. So at this point all we have left to do is water it.

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Okay so now we have everything planted we're going to give our plants a little drink so we're just

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going to use tap water and anytime you water your plants you want to try to water at the base

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of the plant not necessarily overhead because the roots are what we want the water to get to so

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we're going to give it a better opportunity and be a little bit more efficient with our water if

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we water at the base. So I just got a little cup of water and we're just going to give a little drink

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all the way around the plant and then we're going to do the same on all three

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and this potting soil is really going to soak this water up the first two or three times. So the

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beginning right after you've planted everything you're probably going to need to give it a little

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bit more water than you will in the future using a little bit more water than my little cup held so

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we're just going to do it around the base of the plant so that can get kind

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of saturated and then we aren't going to water it again until our soil feels dry. So

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now that we have everything planted and we are watered you're just going to want to put this

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near a window where you can get some sunshine and then like I said water as needed. We don't

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want to give it too much water. Our plants are actually more likely to die from too

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much water than not enough water and so we just kind of want to monitor that and as I mentioned

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at the beginning you can enter this into your county fair as an entry in class 566

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and then potentially it can move on to the state fair into the Cloverville section of state fair.

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So if you have any more any questions or if you want some more information on how to make a desert

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dish garden or any of the 4-H horticulture categories just check with your local county

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Extension office with your 4-H agent or someone in the office and they'll be happy to help you.