


KENTUCKY 4-H PROJECT GO!




Desert Dish Gardens

In this activity, youth will learn about and create a desert dish garden. A dish garden is a collection of similar plants grown in an open container. In a desert garden, the plants are all succulents. Succulents are plants that can survive in a hot, dry climate because they can store moisture in their stems or leaves during rainy periods. During drier times, succulents give off moisture much more slowly than most plants. Evaporation is slowed down by wax or hairs or by a reduced surface area. (Many succulents have a spherical shape because a sphere has the smallest surface area for a given volume.) Succulents grow naturally in semi-deserts where long, dry-periods are broken by short, rainy periods.

Materials Needed

Plants: You can buy succulent plants from a florist or from a store that has a gardening/plant section. Choose plants of different sizes and shapes that will go well together to make an interesting garden, and that are in scale with the container you plan to use. Select small plants that grow slowly. Plants should fill the container but not crowd it. Examples of suitable plants to include are: Cacti, Agaves, Aloes, Euphorbias, Jades, and Echeverias.

Container: Any shallow dish, pan, or tray that is about 2 inches deep can be used. The size of the container will depend on the number of plants that you plan to use. Some suitable containers are plastic bowls, pottery dishes, or aluminum pie pans or trays.

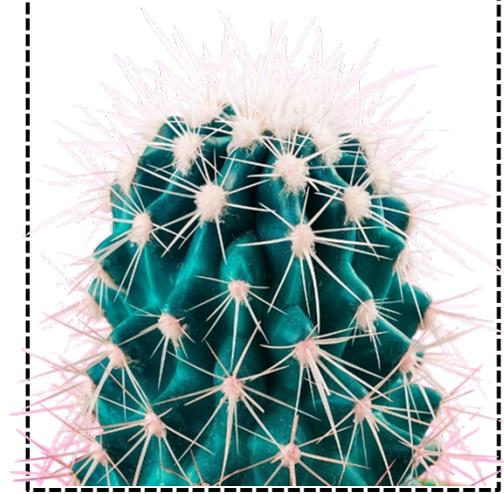
Growing Medium: For the growing medium, you will need pea gravel, sand, and general potting mix.

Accessories (optional): To add interest to the scene you created, you can add rocks, wood, figurines, or other small décor items.

Additional Items: Gloves, and tongs or tweezers

Materials Needed

- Plants
- Container
- Pea Gravel
- Sand
- Potting soil mix
- Gloves
- Tongs or Tweezers
- Cup (for watering)
- Water
- Accessories (optional)



Learner Objectives	Skill/ Grade Level	4-H Core Area	Life Skills	Video Lesson
Youth will learn how to create and care for a desert dish garden.	Beginner Youth Ages 9-18	Agriculture/Horticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to Learn • Planning and Organizing • Decision Making 	 SCAN ME




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Do the Activity:

1. Clean your container.
2. Fill the container with the growing medium. Lay a thin layer of pea gravel at the bottom of the container (around ¼ inch thick). Then lay a thin layer of sand (around ¼ inch thick) and next a thin layer of potting mix (around ¼ inch thick). The medium should be around ¼ of inch from the top of the container.
3. Remove the plants from the pots they came in. To do this, gently tap or squeeze the sides of the pot and pull the pot away from the plant. Do not pull on the plant (this may damage the plant). If necessary, have an adult help you cut the pot away from the plant. If you are working with cacti, use gloves and tongs or tweezers to protect yourself from the thorns.
4. Decide how to place the plants. If the dish garden is to be viewed from all sides, place taller plants in the middle and shorter plants around the outside. If the dish garden is to have a front and back, place taller plants in the back and shorter plants in the front, so that all plants can be seen well.
5. Scoop out the growing medium to make holes large enough for the plants' roots. Set the plants in position, larger ones first, and press the growing medium firmly around the roots and base of each plant. Some of the growing medium may have to be removed from the container to make room for the plants' roots.
6. Add other items, such as rocks, wood, figurines, and small décor items to beautify your dish garden (optional).
7. Water the garden immediately, but do not flood it. Carefully tilt the container to drain off any excess water.
8. Dish gardens do best in hot, dry, sunny locations. Choose a room in your house that has plenty of sunlight, is warm, and is dry (as opposed to rooms that may have higher humidity levels such as bathrooms).
9. Keep the growing medium (soil) of your desert garden rather dry. Do not water too frequently. Some desert gardens may not need to be watered for two or three months. Always drain off any excess water.
10. Turn your dish garden container occasionally so that different sides are towards the sun to give the plants a balanced form.
11. If any plant overgrows the container, remove it and grow it as a single plant in a separate pot.

Desert Dish Garden Project Factsheet: <https://tinyurl.com/4hdesertdishgarden>

Visit the 4-H Horticulture webpage, <https://4-h.ca.uky.edu/content/horticulture> for the Kentucky State Fair guidelines and scoresheet for this project (Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Science, Class 566: Dish Gardens).

References:

Succulents and Cactus, A Sunset Gardening Book (Lane Magazine and Book Company).

Cacti and Succulents by Walter Hoage, trans. and rev. by E. E. Kemp, 1963 (E. P. Dutton).

The Cactaceae: Descriptions and Illustrations of Plants of the Cactus Family, by N. L. Britton and J. N. Rose (Dover).

Adapted from 4BE-13PO 4-H Indoor Gardening Project: Making a Desert Dish Garden prepared by Madge Balden Adams, former special assignment writer for Horticulture, 1976. Revised by Ashley Osborne, Extension Specialist for 4-H Youth Development, 2020.

Learn more at www.kentucky4h.org or contact your county extension office.

Extended Learning	Civic Engagement	Communications	Exhibit	References
Complete the Project Record Sheet for your desert dish garden available in the <i>Making a Desert Dish Garden Project Fact Sheet</i> .	Take pictures or make drawings of the step-by-step process you completed to create your dish garden. Use your pictures or drawings to lead a 4-H class during a club or camp session.	Present a 4-H demonstration on how to create a desert dish garden.	Enter your project in the county fair.	See References listed above.

