



CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

Desert Dish Garden

Purpose

Promote coordination and fine motor skills. Stimulate tactile sense. Utilize “clock-face” system of orientation.

Description

In this activity, participants will plant a small garden of succulent, fleshy leafed plants. They will add their own decorative touches to make a desert display.

Time needed: 55 minutes

Materials

- 15 flats without holes
- 15 6" diameter round, shallow plastic containers
- 1 5-gallon bucket of soilless mix
- 1 5-gallon bucket, half full of sand
- 15 Spray bulbs filled with warm water
- 15 paper cups (3 ounces)
- 30-45 pumice stones
- 1 5-gallon bucket of pea gravel, half full
- 15 panda plants, 3-4" tall (*Kalanchoe tomentosa*)
- 15 sedum plants (*Sedum lineare* 'Variegatum')
- 15 jade plants 3" tall (*Crassula gollum*)
- 45 plant labels



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Waterproof markers

15 plastic bags with handles (if possible)

Procedure

1. Introduce the activity and the plant material. (Be sure you have researched information on each plant.)
2. Organize work area:
 - a. Place the dish garden container in the upper left-hand corner.
 - b. Place the water bulb filled with warm water to the right of the container.
 - c. Place the flat without holes, one between each pair of participants.
3. Bring the soil bucket and then the sand bucket to each participant. Participant uses the dish garden container to scoop approximately one container full of soil and then about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a container full of sand, placing each medium into the flat.
4. Add warm water with the spray bulb. Mix with hands until the potting mix is thoroughly moistened but not soaking. The mix should become dark brown and hold together when squeezed.
5. Use a small paper cup to scoop gravel to cover the bottom of the container (about two to three scoops); $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch layer of gravel at the bottom of the container.
6. Fill the pot to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the top with the moist potting mix. Make sure it's firm, but do not pack it.
7. Explain how the round container can resemble the face of a clock, and make sure everyone understands where the numbers can be imagined to be.
8. Make three equally spaced holes by poking with an index finger until the gravel



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is felt. Make one hole at “12 o’clock,” one at “4 o’clock,” and one at “8 o’clock.”

9. Remove the plants from the cell pack by gently squeezing the pack from the bottom. This should loosen the root ball. Then grasp the plant's main stem at the base between a thumb and index finger, and gently pull it out of the cell.
10. Plant one succulent in each hole. Firm the soil around the plants and add extra soil if needed. The soil should be about ½ inch from the rim. Optional: Assign a specific plant to each clock-face position to reinforce the concept.
11. Water the dish garden with a spray bulb so the potting mix settles next to the plants.
12. Participants leave their seats to select one or two stones to accent their planting with. Select by texture.
13. Place two or three stones in garden.
14. Have the participants write their names on plant labels. Insert the labels in the potting mix.

Information about succulent plants

Plants that survive drought by storing water in their tissues are called succulents and there is an enormous range of them, including all cacti. Thus, the phrase, "All cacti are succulents, but not all succulents are cacti. "

Primarily fleshy leaves and stems characterize succulents. The plants store water and thus, in the wild, overcome periods of drought and high temperature.



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Succulents do well in high light situations and require water every ten days to two weeks. A succulent dish garden should be allowed to dry out thoroughly between watering. Because the plants are able to store water, the greatest danger to successfully growing succulents is over-watering.