

## Yard and Garden - 03-30-2013 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Oh, the innocence of childhood. As a little boy, I vividly remember when I lost a tooth, my mother would encourage me to place it under my pillow at night. I usually did so with a certain degree of apprehension. The reason for my reluctance wasn't because I did not believe in the tooth fairy, but rather Mom would always qualify her encouragement with, "If you've been a good boy, the tooth fairy will come tonight and leave you a gift in exchange for your tooth." Although, sometimes, I was probably undeserving, the tooth fairy always came through. The following morning, instead of a tooth was a shiny nickel or dime. Although those days have long passed, I recently found a new way to attract fairies. I learned how to create a fairy garden.

Last Saturday morning, I presented a program on vegetable gardening at the Steinbrink Landscaping and Greenhouse's Spring Fling celebration. If you recall, that particular morning was the first Saturday of spring, 2013. It was cold and snowing, certainly not very spring-like. Arriving early and with a little time to spare before I was to speak, Rocky Steinbrink, the owner of Steinbrink's Nursery, asked me if I'd like to take a few moments and tour the greenhouses. I answered with a resounding, "Yes."

If you've ever stepped into a greenhouse, especially when it's snowing outdoors, you might have felt as I did. It was like stepping into the tropics. The air was warm, moist and heavenly scented with flowers and growing plants. Pots and pots and pots of lush green plants abounded. While standing there in awe, one particular display caught my attention. It was an area devoted to fairy gardens. Immediately, I wanted to know more about these enchanting miniature gardens.



Poetically stated, fairy gardens are green places for small spaces. They are miniature table-top container gardens, complete with structures and living plants. I have even heard they lure fairies and bring good luck to one's home. These magical miniature container gardens will not only fascinate children but will captivate the hidden child in adults as well. In this fairytale landscape, pocket-sized plants become enormous trees;

small pebbles make a stone path. A piece of mirrored glass creates a small pond. Add a few miniature furnishings like a birdbath, a wheelbarrow, a watering can, an arbor and perhaps a table or bench, and you will have a charming miniature landscape that rivals the grandeur of Mother Nature. Their design is limited only by one's imagination.

All one needs is a container with drainage, quality potting soil, an assortment of itty-bitty plants, natural materials including bark, twigs and leaves, and a few other miniature decorative items.

As I toured the greenhouse, I saw a number of pre-made fairy gardens designed with a number of themes. Some were specially fabricated with children in mind, while others were more adult-like. I



immediately thought, “Here is one gardening project the whole family can enjoy.”

How perfect they are for someone who is downsizing but still loves gardening or for someone who is simply trying to find that perfect centerpiece for the patio table.



In addition to already prepared fairy gardens, the nursery offers an array of miniaturized plants including succulents, dwarf conifers, petite ferns, and other diminutive plants that will simulate trees, shrubs, and grass in fairy gardens. They even have an assortment of miniature decorative furnishings. I was assured that if one’s imagination was lacking, staff would even help with designing one’s little garden.

If you like gardening, I urge you to consider fairy gardening. With a little imagination, you can create the effects of a bewitching forest, a mossy lawn or a cottage garden that echoes Mother Nature’s grand schemes.



Who knows, should you grow your own fairy garden, some morning when you awaken, chances are you might find a shiny nickel or dime lying in its pathway. It could happen—if you’ve been good.