

TERRARIUM BUILDING, PART I: A SIMPLE TERRARIUM  
THAT CAN BE BUILT QUICKLY.

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INTRODUCTION

The terraria, that will be dealt with in this series of articles, are not really suitable for strictly arboreal snakes. Personally, I only have experience with species of snakes which live on the ground or in low bushes, and therefore I tried to construct terraria with a large ground area. A second point of importance for me, is the possibility of stacking the terraria; it must be possible to stack them easily or to place them in a rack, because they then take up less room. Furthermore I favour terraria with a sloping front window, which is placed at an angle of  $60^{\circ}$ . In this case you have no trouble with "mirror-

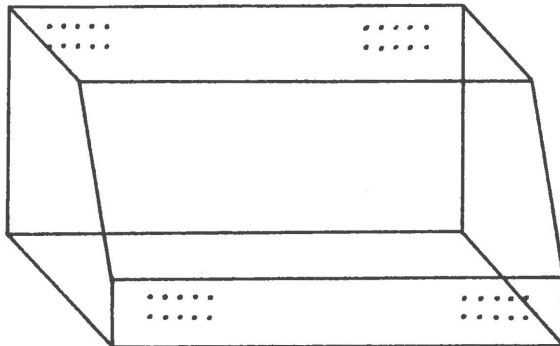


Fig. 1.

effects" of the window when you look through it into the terrarium.

## LIGHTING AND HEATING

The lighting is simply provided by means of incandescent light bulbs which hang in the terraria: 15 Watt in a small and 25 Watt in a larger terrarium. I refer here to light bulbs of the normal size (6 cm in diameter). These bulbs do not become too hot and a bulb of 15 Watt can even be kept in the hand when it is on. Bulbs of 15 and 25 Watt of a smaller diameter become too hot and I would advise against their use in a small terrarium. During daytime the lightbulbs also produce the heating for the terraria. However, in winter it becomes too cold at night when the terraria are in an unheated room; the terraria then have to be heated by means of heating cables, which are connected to a thermostat to keep them at the appropriate temperature.

However, especially in summer, during the day time you have to keep an eye on the temperature, for on a sunny day the temperature will quickly rise too high for the snakes when the lamps are on.

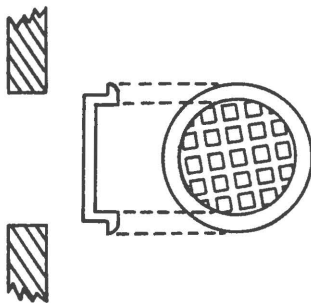


Fig. 2.

## MATERIALS

As constructing material I use "melamine" coated chipboard that is obtainable in various colours or woodgrain patterns. This material is very smooth and therefore easy to clean. I choose white plastic-coated chipboard because this results in clean fresh-looking terraria. Also this colour is ob-

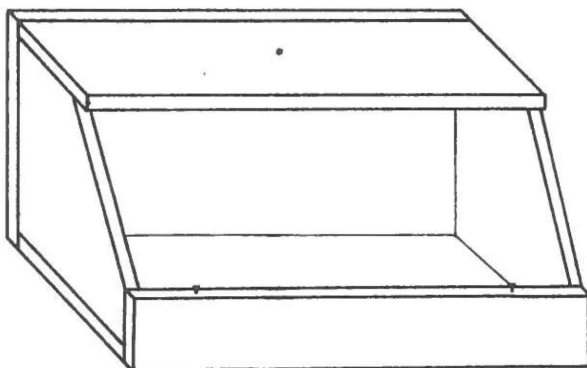


Fig. 3.

tainable in sheets of 12 and 18 mm thick, so one can choose the thickness depending on the size of the terrarium to be build. Usually for the greater part of the terraria 12 mm is sufficient. Chipboard of 18 mm results in terraria which are much too heavy.

For the front window I use window glass of 3 mm thickness. When you enlarge the sizes given in this article very much, then you have to use window glass of 4 mm thickness.

Ventilation occurs by drilling series of holes into the front and into the top of the back wall of the terrarium (figure 1) or by fixing plastic ventilation gratings (figures 2 and 5), which are obtainable from do-it-yourself shops. Be sure the holes in it are not big enough to allow young snakes to escape. The ones I use myself are 32 mm in diameter with holes of 2 mm.

When you drill ventilation holes or holes for placing ventilation gratings, clamp a piece of wood at the backside of the sheet in which you are going to drill. If you do not, drilling will result (especially in plastic-coated chipboard) in an ugly hole at the backside of the board when you push the drill through it.

## CONSTRUCTION

The size of the terrarium, as described in this

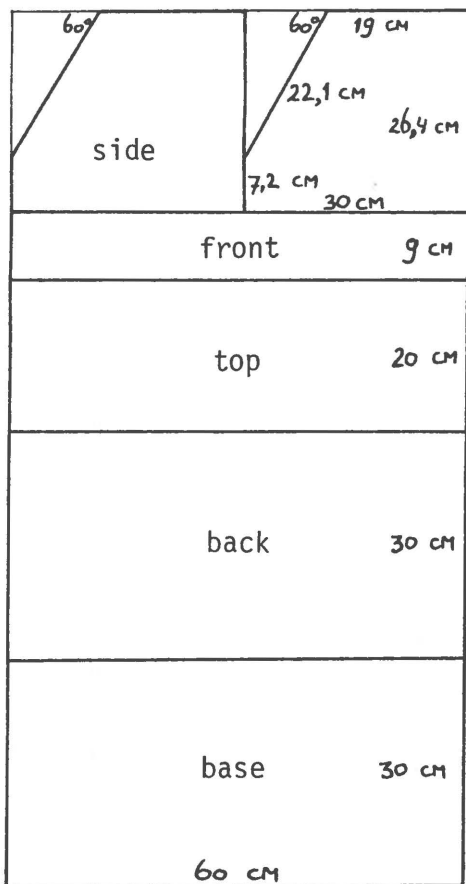


Fig. 4.

article, is 60 x 32.5 x 30 cm (l x w x h). It can be made from one sheet of chipboard of 60 x 120 cm, as depicted in figure 4. The measurements as given are only true if 12 mm thick chipboard is used. When you want to use another thickness or even want to make another sized terrarium, first read the chapter "Variations" carefully. When you mark out the measurements on the sheet of chipboard, do not forget to take into account the width of the cut of the saw.

In the front and back walls you drill the holes for ventilation and in the middle of the top you drill a little hole, in which the electric flex just fits, so that the bulb, that is hanging on it,

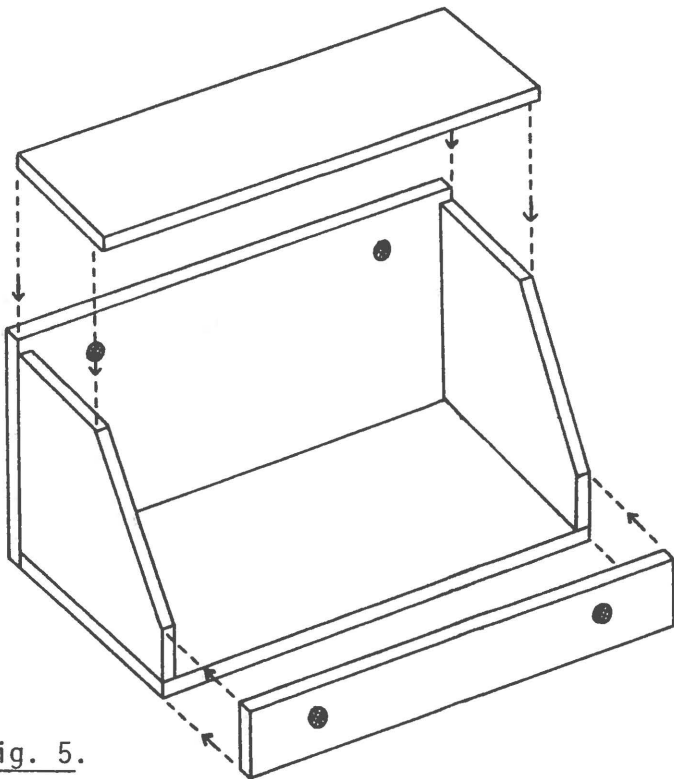


Fig. 5.

does not descent because of its own weight. Put the terrarium together as shown in figure 5. For this use joiner's glue that you put on the edges which come against each other, and flat-headed chipboard screws of 4 cm long, which you should also dip into the joiner's glue before you screw them into the wood. To prevent tearing of the wood you first have to drill a hole that is a little narrower than the screw.

## FINISH

The visible cuts of the saw, which you see at the front and top of the terrarium, can be finished with a kind of plastic tape specially made for this purpose: when you iron it with a hot smoothing iron, it automatically sticks to the wood. Pull the electric flex through the little hole in

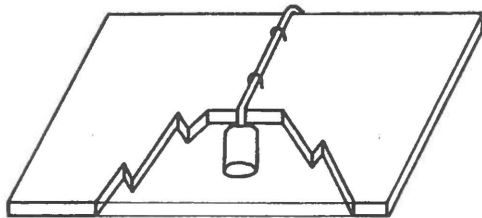


Fig. 6.

the top of the terrarium and fix a light fitting to it. Now pull at the wire, so that the fitting hangs as high as possible, and fix the wire with one or two little staples (figure 6).

The measurements of the front window can be best determined by determining the height of the front window first with a piece of thick cardboard. The front window rests against the sloping sides of the terrarium and is prevented for slipping away at the lower side by two little nails. It cannot be pushed away by an inhabitant of the terrarium

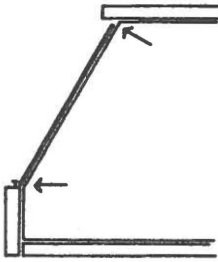
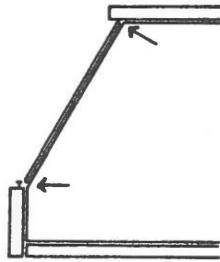
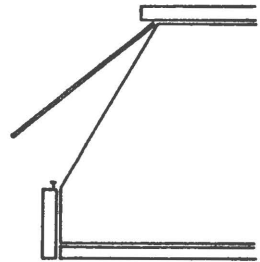


Fig. 7-a.



b.



c.

at the top because of the protruding topline (figure 7-a). The front window can be removed by grasping it with both hands at the sides, pushing it a little upwards (figure 7-b), and by turning it towards you at the lower side over the nails (figure 7-c). The nails should not be too high because otherwise the channel above the front window has to be too broad.

## VARIATIONS

The "simple" terrarium, as described in this article, can be cut and built up within one or two hours and looks nice when it is finished. But if you have some more time, several parts of the terrarium can be amended.

When you use a different thickness of chipboard (i.e. not 12 mm) or if you want to enlarge or reduce the given measurements, then you have to take into account the following measurements, which cohere (figure 8):

- A = height back (F) - 2x thickness of the wood
- B = height front (E) - 1x thickness of the wood
- C = D + 1 cm.

If you want to equip the terrarium with sliding windows, then figure 7 will be superceded by figure 9. The width of the top (C in figure 8) can become the same size as D, because there is now no

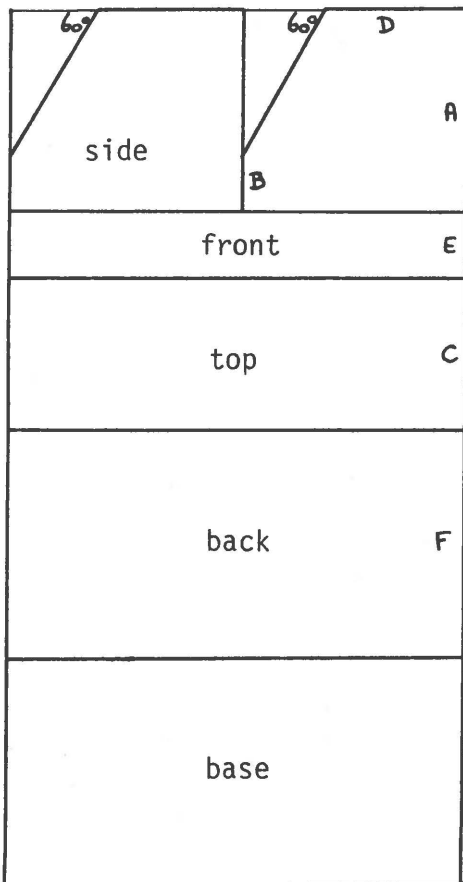


Fig. 8.

need for a protruding top. The sides of the terrarium do not have to fit between top, base, front and back (figure 3) but against it (figure 10). So they become 12 or 18 mm (the thickness of the wood) wider at each side (figure 11). In this way the sliding windows will fit in between the sides. Sliding windows have the disadvantage that between both windows is a gap, through which young snakes (think of the unexpected birth of young snakes, which are very small) could escape. When using sliding windows one has to mount a thin lath, or





60°



Fig. 9.

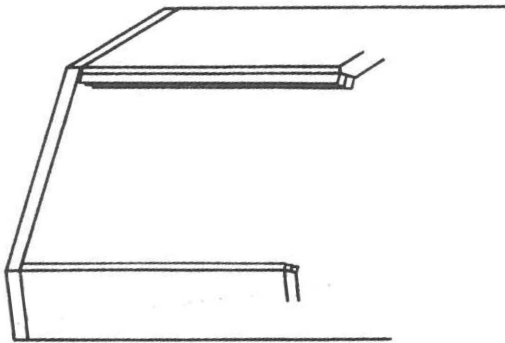


Fig. 10.

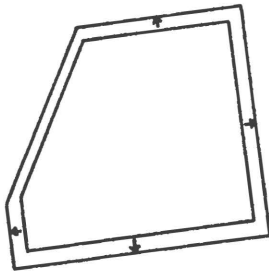


Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

something like that, on one of the glass plates (to fit in between them), so that the gap is closed over the entire length (figure 12). One has also to use glass of the appropriate thickness, so that the windows cannot "wobble" in the sash rail (figure 12). In this way the gap is kept as small as possible. To prevent a snake wriggling itself through the gap of a not well-closed sliding window, one should mount a strip of sash rail at the sides of the terrarium. The glass will fit in this when the window is closed.