

ALTERNATIVE PLACES FOR A TERRARIUM



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■ INTRODUCTION

Terraria for snakes are often very poorly decorated to answer the demands for cleanliness and maintenance. I have tried to built terrariums that fulfil these demands, but at the same time are nice to look at and efficiently use the space available. In this paper I describe four terrariums and hopefully make some suggestions to the reader.

Terrarium 1 on top of the staircase



Photo by Gijs van Aken

■ IN GENERAL

All my terrariums are located in the attic. To make sure that during wintertime night temperatures do not drop below the required minimum, I have installed an extra radiator and thermostat. During sunny weather the temperature in the attic can reach high levels. The lights in the terrariums therefore need to be turned really low. The weather really influences the conditions in the terrariums but I have never noticed a negative effect on the animals.

In the terraria I use the self-made armature for heating lights that I described previously in *Litteratura Serpentina*, volume 17, no.2. For all sliding windows I use plastic profiles that are available in DIY stores.

The attic is painted in grey and white. I have used the same colours for the terrariums. This way the terrariums blend into the interior.

■ TERRARIUM 1

This terrarium (Photo 1) is located above the staircase. Using a glass panel it is separated into two parts. I use this terrarium for terrestrial animals: sandboas (*Eryx conicus*) and geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*).

Construction

The bottom is screwed onto the handrail and consists of multiplex, 18 mm thick and 95 x 95 cm, and painted grey. The back part (95 x 20 cm) is separated from

the front part by a glass plate (vertical) and closed by a horizontal wooden plate with ventilation holes. The glass sides are 20 cm high and are finished with an aluminium profile. For heating I use a heating mat which partly heats both the open and closed terrarium. Light comes from a desk lamp just above the terrarium.

Decoration

The decoration is simple and consists of some stones and sand (chinchilla sand for the boas and beach sand for the geckos). From above, a plant grows down into the terrarium. Surprisingly, the geckos leave it alone, so I still have some green furnishing.

■ **TERRARIUM 2**

Underneath the lowest supporting-beam of the roof a dark, empty corner was present, which was of no direct use. By placing a terrarium in this corner I made a housing with a floor surface of two square meters without losing any walking space (see Photo 2). The lighting made the dark corner disappear and at the same time created a spatial effect. Because of its shape (low with a large floor area) this terrarium houses my *Boa constrictors*.

Construction

The back was painted with waterproof paint. Wooden laths were used on both sides and covered with plywood. The space between the plywood was filled with rockwool. The inside was painted with waterproof paint and for the front I used grey paint. The bottom lies on some wooden laths which are placed on the concrete floor. The space between the bottom and the

Terrarium 2 at the side of the attic with the Boa on the occasional table.

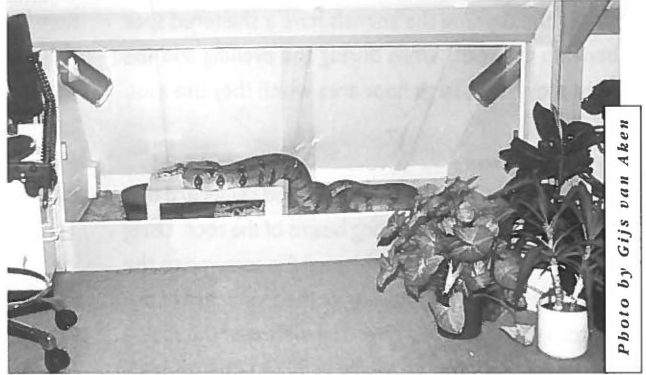


Photo by Gijs van Aken

floor is also insulated with rockwool. The front consists of sliding windows that rest upon an upright piece of deal of 20 centimetres high. The upper profile for the sliding windows is fastened to the supporting beam. The openings between the supporting beam and the ceiling provide ventilation.

Decoration

The bottom, as well as 10 centimetres of the side panels, is covered with lino, the edges of which are sealed with silicone kit. The bottom is covered with a thick layer of wood shavings, a water bowl, a concrete tile which is positioned beneath one of the heat lamps, as well as two occasional tables that were dumped by my wife.

■ **TERRARIUM 3**

The position of this terrarium (Photo 3) in the ridge of the roof, makes it well suited for arboreal snakes such as those from the *Corallus* genus and *Chondropython*. The position ensures that the animals are always approached from below. Approaching these animals from above is, especially for young snakes, very stressful,

because they are on the menu of birds of prey. Because the terrarium has the shape of a triangle, during the daytime the animals have a sheltered spot beneath the roof, while during the evening and the night they have a large floor area which they use a lot.

Construction

The bottom consists of plastic covered chipboard that rests on the upper supporting beams of the roof. Using a few pieces of metal this chipboard is screwed to the back wall. To prevent sagging of the front part of the bottom (which is likely given the weight of the sliding windows) an aluminium profile of 50 centimetres is fitted to the bottom plate, directly behind the raised border. This profile is connected to the supporting beam

in the ridge of the roof through a metal wire. The bottom has a surface of 50 x 230 cm. The terrarium has a maximum height of 110 cm. Ventilation holes are located at both sides and in the ridge of the roof just below the supporting beam. The sides and the ceiling are treated with waterproof paint.

Decoration

The bottom is covered with newspaper which is not visible because of the height of the terrarium. As climbing gear I use broomsticks which are fastened at different heights to the walls or ceiling. All plants are grown on hydro culture which has the following advantages:

- In contrast to normal soil, it is no source of infection;
- by using clay beads, the snakes cannot dig into the pots;
- when polluted, the upper layer of clay beads can easily be changed;
- the extra water in the pots provides an extra increase in humidity.

■ **TERRARIUM 4**

This terrarium is created below an existing workbench (Photo 3). The workbench has a depth of 90 cm. Deliberately, I have chosen to make the terrarium 'only' 50 cm deep. The remaining space behind the terrarium I use for storage. Also beneath the terrarium there is storage space, hidden from the eye by some sliding doors which are again painted grey. The terrarium measures 160 cm long, 50 cm deep and 30 cm high and is currently in use for *Python regius*.

Construction

For the sides and the back, as well as for the bottom,



Photo by Gijs van Aken

Terrarium 3 in the ridge of the roof.

I have used plastic covered chipboard of 18 mm thick. This created a sturdy construction that is necessary to carry the weight of the workbench as the terrarium replaces the table-legs. By placing a separating wall I can create two terrariums, each with a length of 80 cm. The heating mat is positioned in such a way that, if necessary, both terrariums can be heated by the same mat. Two spotlights take care off illumination.

Decoration

Furnishing is traditional with wooden shavings, tree-stumps and slate.

■ IN CONCLUSION

In the descriptions of four of my terrariums I have tried to indicate how you can use the available space in a creative way. Also not every Spartanly furnished terrarium has to be ugly. Each room has its own possibilities. This article deals with some of the possibilities that an attic can offer. In my opinion, however, you do not necessarily have to have an attic to be creative with the available space.

Translation from Dutch by Cécile and René van der Vlugt.

English corrections by Chris Mattison.