TERRARIUM BUILDING, PART II: TERRARIA IN SERIES.

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INTRODUCTION

The type of terrarium that I will deal with in this article, is perfectly suited for building a series of terraria, connected to each other (figure 1). I have built terraria of two different sizes in this way: five smaller terraria in a series, each measuring 30.5x32x24.5 cm (lxwxh), (total length 160 cm), and four larger terraria in a series, each measuring 38.5x47x39.5 cm (lxwxh), total length also 160 cm). I use the smaller terraria to raise young snakes, and when they become too big, I transfer them to the bigger terraria.
One feature of this type of terrarium is the front window, which pushes up under the top of the terrarium when it is opened. Furthermore the front

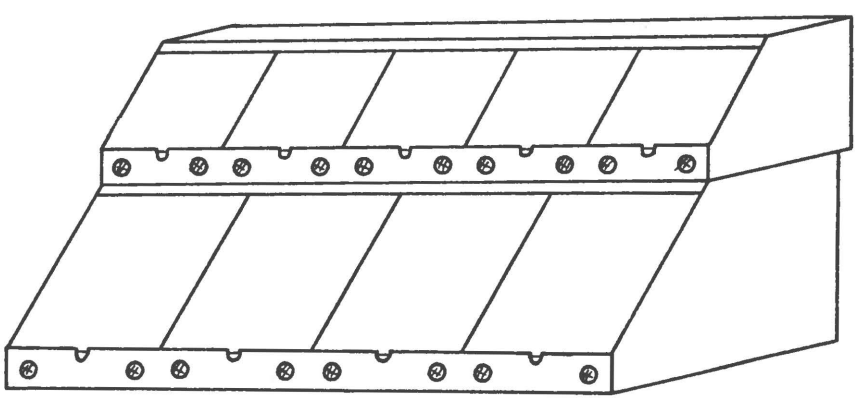

Fig. 1.

window completely closes the terrarium, leaving no gap through which a snake could escape.
Just like the terraria which are described in part I, these terraria are excellently suited to stacking (figure 1) and you have almost no troubles with "mirror effects" from the front windows, because they are placed sloping under an angle of 60^{o}.
Lighting, heating, and ventilation are regulated as described for the terraria in part I, on the understanding that I use light bulbs (diameter 6 cm, normal fitting) of 15 Watt in the smaller terraria and 25 Watt in the larger terraria.

MATERIALS

For building materials I recommend white melamine coated chipboard of 12 mm thick. Because there are three or four partitions in between the terraria, the whole construction will be strong enough. I do not like to use chipboard of 18 mm thick, because this results in terraria which are much too heavy. However, the front is constructed of 18 mm chipboard since the number of cuts in the wood would seriously weaken 12 mm chipboard.
Window glass of 3 mm thickness is strong enough for terraria of the sizes described here.
Because the front window closes the terrarium completely, the inclusion of ventilation grids is very important. It is best to include two ventilation gratings in the front (figure 1) as well as in the top of the back wall. These should be of the type described in part I.

CONSTRUCTION

A series of five small terraria can be built from one sheet of chipboard (of 12 mm thick) of 157.5x

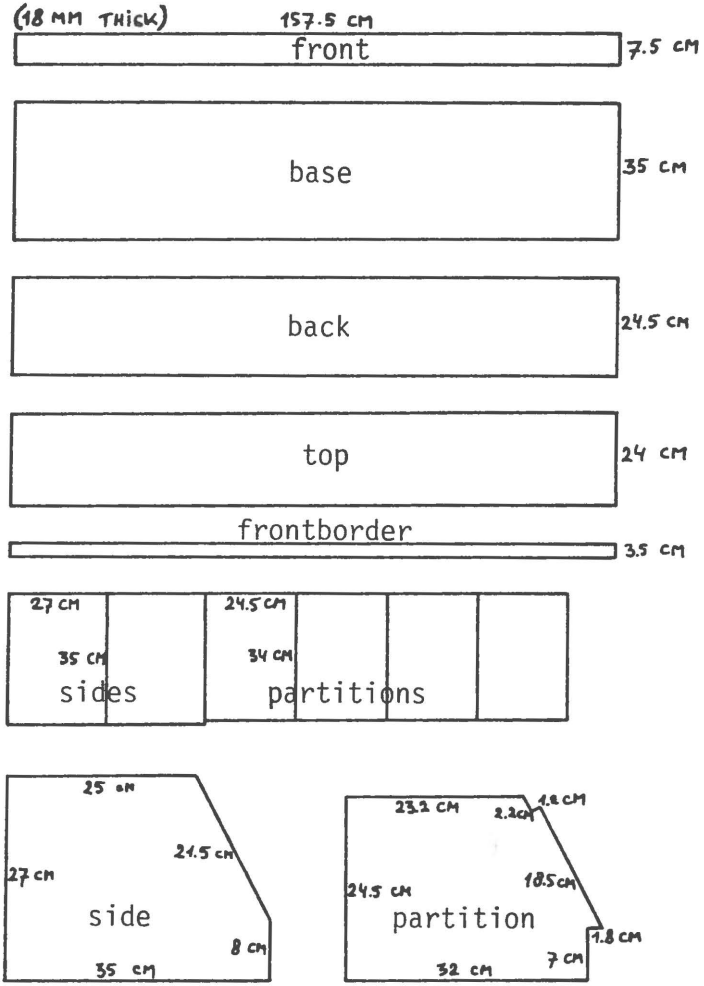

Fig. 2.

124 cm. From this sheet you can saw the components as shown in figure 2.
The components for a series of four larger terraria may be sawn from a sheet of chipboard (12 mm thick) of 157.5x208 cm. The component parts have the measurements as given in figure 3.

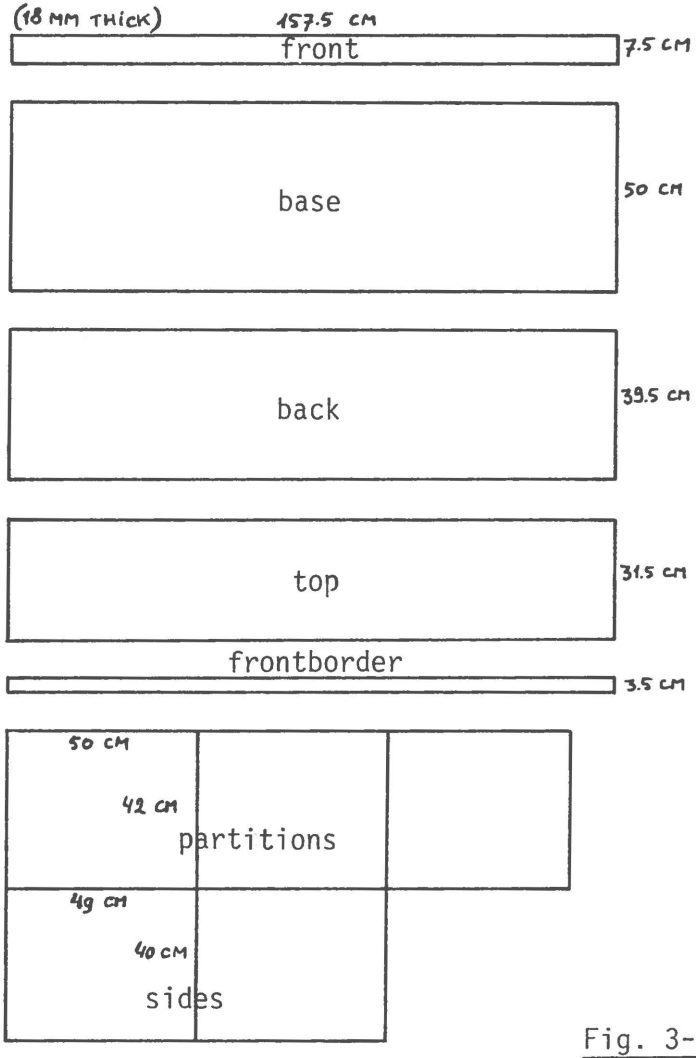

Fig. 3-a.

On front and back walls you mark the places where you want to place the partitions, so that the places for ventilation gratings can subsequently be determined. In the same way you determine the middle of each terrarium on the top. On the top, at a distance of 7 cm from the back edge you drill

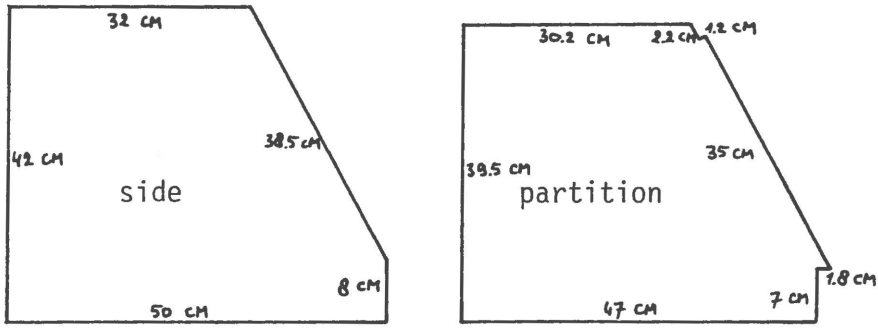

Fig. 3-b.

a hole, through which the electricity wire just fits. The bulbs have to hang as near the back of the terraria as possible, because of the design for opening the front window.

The front (18 mm thick) has to undergo several essential carpentry operations, some of which cannot be done at home by most people. You will have to ask help from a specialist wood-worker, perhaps for example, from the shop where you bought the chipboard.

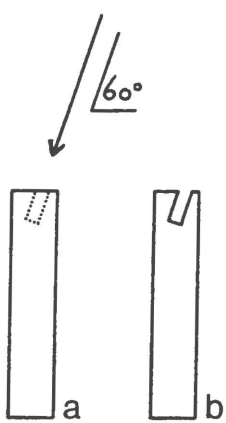

Fig. 4.

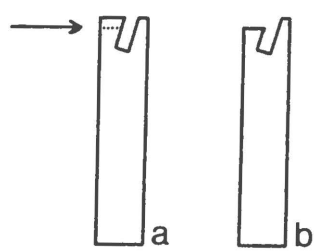

Fig. 5.

1. Initially the front must be sawn in the way shown in figure 4. Take care that the saw-slit is wide enough for the front window glass to fit in it freely.
2. Next the front side has to be sawn as shown in figure 5.
3. Following this one has to mill a groove in the middle of each terrarium (figure 6), in which you can put your finger to open the front window. The width of the groove is dependant on the thickness of your index-finger and it should be only just deep enough for you to put your finger underneath the front glass to lift it.
4. At the points where the partitions have to be fitted the frontside has to be sawn and filed to the proper depth, so that the partitions fit snugly in the grooves (Fig. 7).
5. Drill holes at the relevant points for the fitting of the ventilation gratings.

As you can see, the front is one of the most complicated parts of this type of terrarium. When you

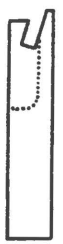

Fig. 6.

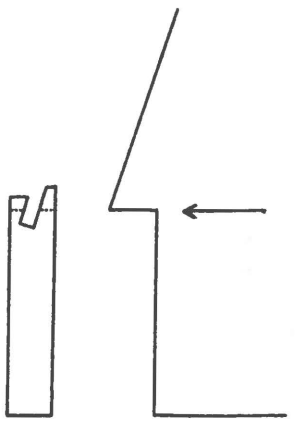

Fig. 7.

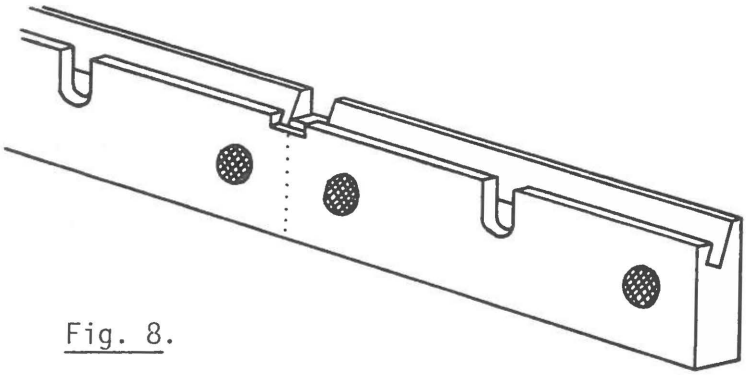

Fig. 8.

have prepared the front in the right way it will look like the drawing (figure 8).
If it is not possible for you to get any help in preparing the front as described in counts 1, 2 and 3, then you can "do-it-yourself" as follows:

1. Take a lath of 157.5 cm in length and about 4 cm width, and plane it sloping over about 1-1.5 cm as shown in figure 9.
2. Ask somebody who owns a saw bench to saw a corner in the front of about 4 mm width and about 4 mm deep (figure 10). Take care that the

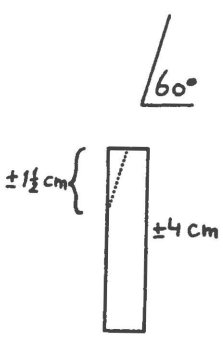

Fig. 9.

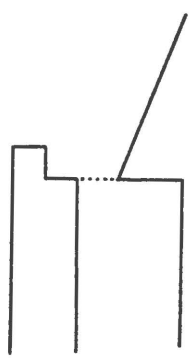

Fig. 10.

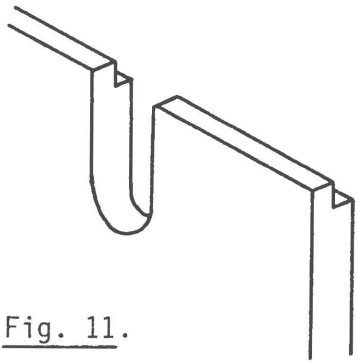

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

depth of this corner is as high as the corresponding place of the partition. Use 12 mm thick chipboard for the front in this instance.

3. Saw grooves in the front of about 2 cm depth. These are for you to put your finger in to open the front window (figure 11).
   Afterwards, when the terrarium is constructed you can saw the lath mentioned in (1) above into pieces, which fit exactly between the partitions. Screw them to the rear edge of the front (figure 12). This results in a front that fulfills the same function as the one in figure 8.
4. and 5. These points remain unchanged.

The front border also requires careful preparation. First, for the entire length, a section 4 mm wide and 1.5 cm high must be cut away (figure 13-A). Next the other side has to be planed as showed in figure 13-B. Now the frontborder fits exactly flush with the partitions.
Finally the fore edge of the top has to be planed as showed in figure 13-C, so that it smoothly fits against the rear edge of the frontborder.
Now you can start to put the terrarium together. Using joiner's glue and flat-headed chipboard screws (drill a little hole first) the base and back wall are fixed together first, after which

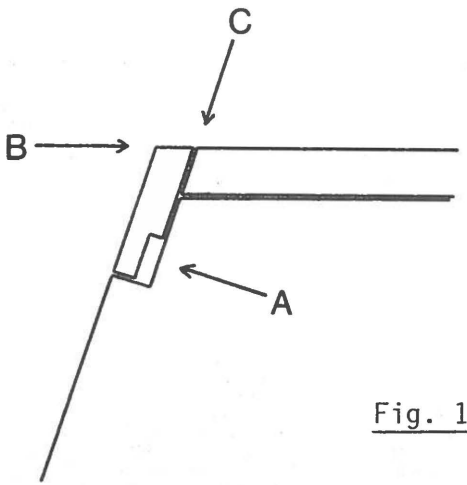

Fig. 13.

the front and the partitions are added. After mounting the frontborder you should fill the little holes which are in between the frontborder and the partitions (figure 13-A). Thereafter the top and the two sides are mounted in situ.

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 adheres to the wood. Thread a piece of electric cable through each of the little holes in the topside of the terrarium and fix a light-fitting on it. Now tighten the cable, so that the light-fitting is as high as possible, and secure the cable with one or two little staples. At the back of the terrarium all electric cables can be connected, so that the whole series of terraria can be controlled by a time-clock to give a proper day/night rhythm. The fitting of supports to hold the front glass

Foto 1. Terraria Anton van Woerkom.

Foto 2. Terraria Anton van Woerkom.

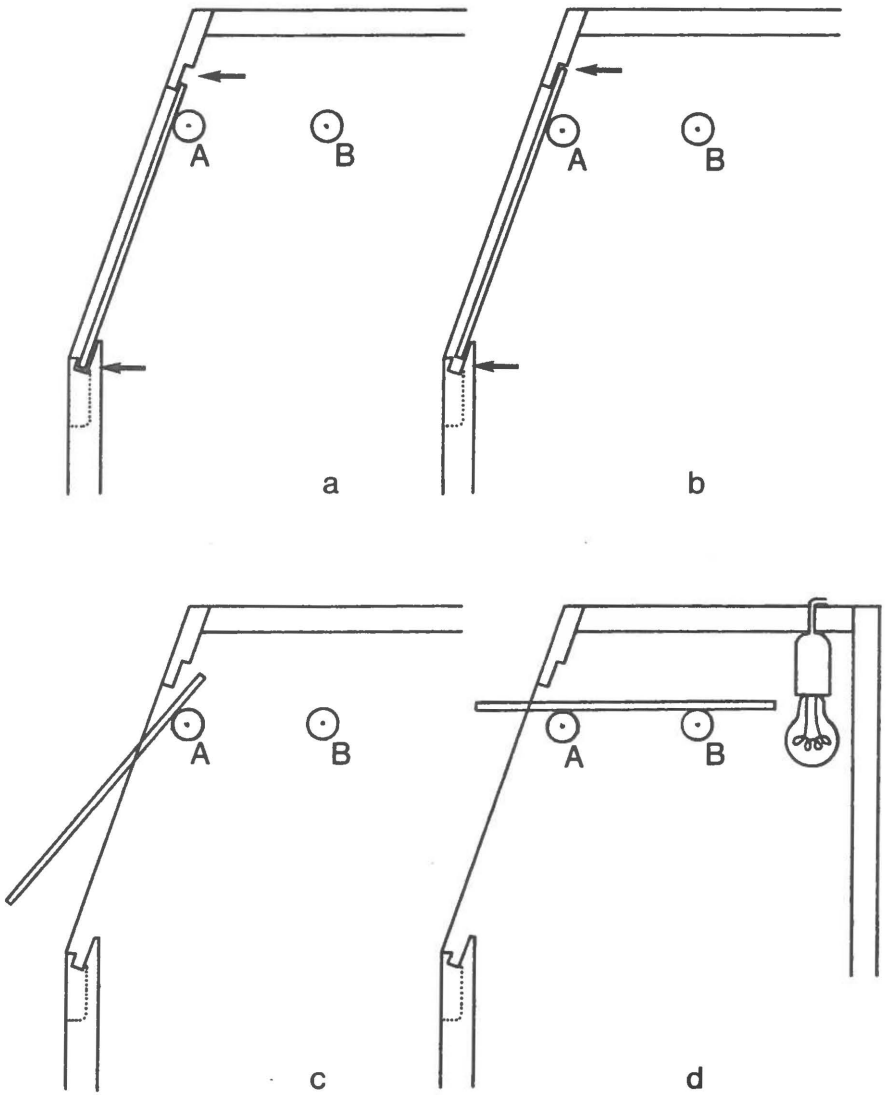

Fig. 14.

must be done very accurately. First I will explain how the front glass can be opened and closed. When closed the glass rests in the groove of the front and is pushed against the frontborder at both sides by a pair of supports (A in figure 14-a), thereby closing the terrarium completely. By inserting a finger in the purpose-made groove you can lift the front glass slightly (figure 14-b), after which it can be pulled up towards you (figure 14-c) and then slid onto the two pairs of side-supports A and B (figure 14-d).
The advantage of this type of window system is that the terrarrium is completely open and that you have both hands free to work in it. With respect to the construction of the terrarium you should ensure that the partitions and the outermost sides are mounted exactly parallel to each other and at right angles to the base. Furthermore the fitting of the supports is critical in obtaining a tight fit of the front glass against the frontborder. One can obtain supports (diameter 15

Fig. 15.

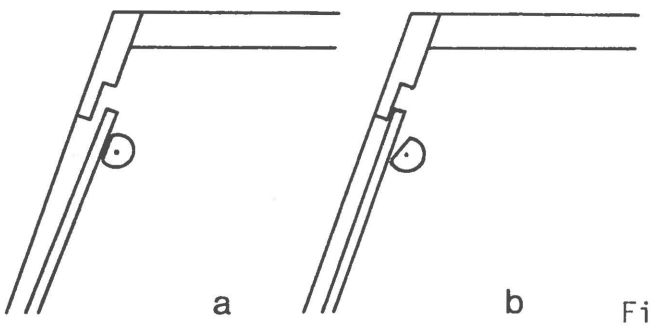

Fig. 16.

mm) which have one flat side (figure 15). They are designed for mounting shelves in a book-case, but are ideal for the present function because they allow you some tolerance in adjusting the front window (figure 16). When the window has been adjusted to be exactly flush against the frontborder, you can fit the second pair of supports (B), at the same height (about 11 cm in the smaller terraria and about 16 cm in the larger terraria) behind supports A. By correctly positioning the flat surface of these last supports, you can let the front window rest on all four supports without wobbling. To determine the position of the front supports and the height of the front window (there must be just enough room left to push the front window up (figure 14-b), you can conveniently use a piece of thick cardboard.

VARIATIONS

With the plan for the terrarium as described in this article it is easy to build terraria of a different size. This is already possible by simply leaving out a partition, in which case you get a terrarium that is two times as long as the original terraria. In the smaller terraria you can manage with only one groove to push up the now double-size front window (figures 6 and 11); in the larger type of terrarium you should retain both grooves, so that you can use both hands to open the large front window.
Of course it is possible to vary the number of lamps that you want to hang in the terrarium according to the temperature required. The following point should, however, be remembered: the larger the terrarium, the more ventilation gratings are required.
Another idea is to saw "gates" in one or more of the partitions (figure 17); these can be opened

during the mating season.

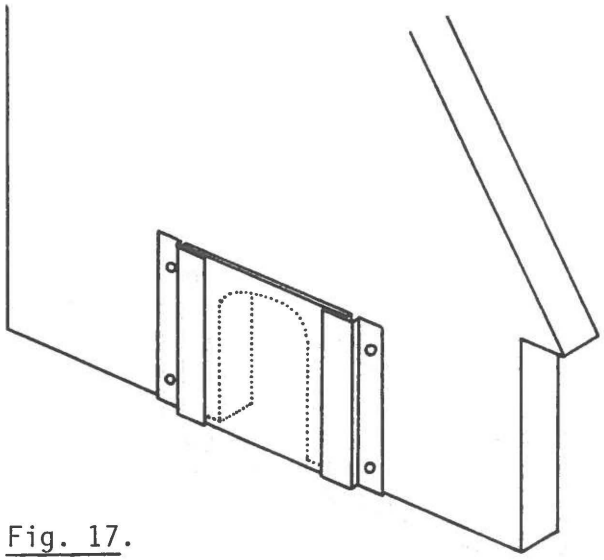

Fig. 17.