
HOW TO BUILD A TERRARIUM OF POLYCARBONATE

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INTRODUCTION

The hothouses used in horticulture can be made of glass, but it is also possible to use artificial materials, namely polycarbonate. The advantages of polycarbonate are:

- it is double walled
- it is very light
- light can pass freely
- one can hardly break it
- it is easy to work with
- it is well insulated
- it is proofed against scratching

I have build a few terraria with polycarbonate (pc) and I am very satisfied with the results. Because these terraria weigh about half as much as glass terraria, I am no longer forced to make intricate constructions to support the terraria. And because the terrarium is double walled it has become very easy to hide electric cables. This kind of terrarium is fairly well insulated, so I can use lamps with lower wattage for heating. Dirt attaches less easily to pc than to glass. Another advantage over glass is the fact that pc is unbreakable and scratch proof.

NECESSARY TOOLS

As for tools, one needs:

- a sharp 'Stanley' knife
- a brush
- tape
- silicone sealer
- a brush to clean the pc before using silicone
- tools to connect the lamp

As for materials, one needs:

- 16 mm white plastificised ply wood or glass (for the floor)
- polycarbonate of 10 mm thickness
- lamp holders
- electric cable
- plugs
- glass (at least 5 mm thick)
- profiles for sash windows
- plastic edge profiles
- ventilation grilles
- veneer tape of 25 mm width

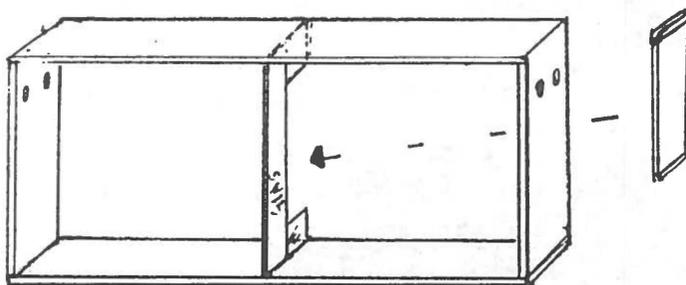
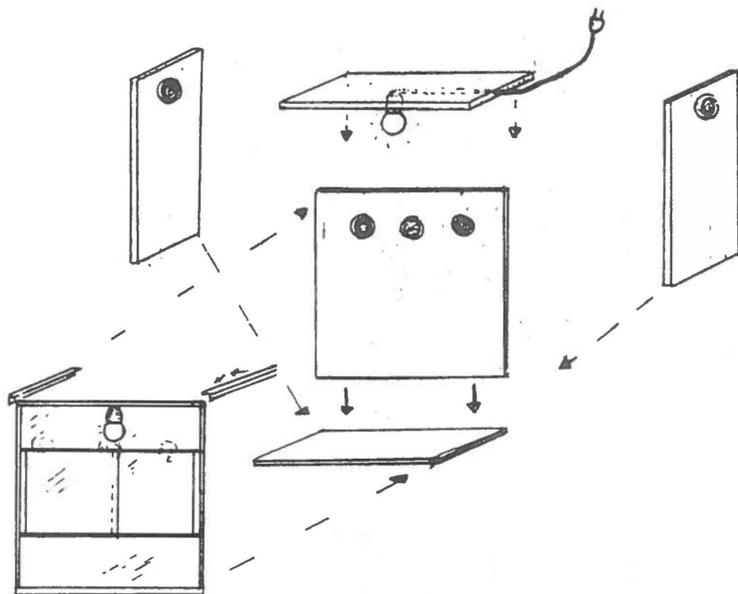
HOW TO BUILD THE TERRARIUM

The floor plate has to be cleaned where one intends to glue on glass or polycarbonate. After this you can clean the side panels, the back and the roof. If the pc has not been cut to the right size, it can be done by using a 'Stanley' knife or circular saw. If using a knife one needs to cut several times. I have less satisfactory results when cutting two pieces of pc at once. The best way to do it is to cut alongside a straight edge until the knife has gone straight through the pc.

After cutting the pc, the ventilation grilles are attached, but it is advisable to do it before putting together the entire terrarium, because at present it is still possible to turn the pc plates

in any direction. I used round grilles of 60 mm for the sides and square grates (32 x 5 cm) in the roof.

The canals which are open after having cut the



opening for the ventilation grilles have to be sealed with silicone glue, this prevents water getting in. It is advisable to attach the grilles after being glued to the pc, with some tape, in order to prevent the grilles from moving before the silicone has dried.

The lamp holder is easy to install. Just make an opening on the spot where the lamp has to be placed. The opening has to be wide enough for the electric cable. The lamp holder can be placed after putting the cable through the opening; the spot where the lamp holder is planned has to be daubed with silicone sealer. Just tighten the cable and put the lamp holder on the right spot. Tape the lamp holder to the spot until the silicone has dried.



Foto 1. Terrarium van kunststof / made of synthetic material. Foto: P. Jacobs.

If all this has been done, the terrarium is ready to be put together. But don't forget to clean the spots where silicone has to be used. They have to be entirely free from grease (so don't make any finger prints on these areas). Once the terrarium has been put together, with exception of the front, it is time to design the front. This is entirely determined by your own wishes and how you want to sash windows. All edges on the inner side of the terrarium get some extra glue; they must be polished by a wet finger prior to glueing. Outside the terrarium I use plastic edge profiles of 15 x 15 mm to put on the outside of the edges.

To put the finishing touch on the wood (if using ply wood for the floor) to pc connection, one can use veneer tape, which has to be attached by means of an iron. Use veneer tape which is about 5 mm broader than the ply wood, so it can also be attached to the pc. Of course much depends on your skills and your own ideas, but with some skill everyone can build a pc terrarium. In my opinion pc is a good medium for terrarium building.

If the terrarium is long, it is necessary to make a supporting beam in the middle of it. This supporting beam can be made of, for instance, glass. This supporting beam can be extended to some kind of partition, which can be partially removed. This might be very helpful when feeding, cleaning up or for separating snakes.

Translation: J.C. Jacobs.