

Faerie Gardening

By Jackie Johnson BS, ND, MH

Every season, I enjoy teaching “How to Make a Fairy Garden” classes in northeast Wisconsin. This past summer three classes were filled to capacity with waiting lists and I’m already scheduled for two in 2010.

What is a fairy garden? It’s a miniature garden – either in a wild area of your existing yard or garden or in a container. Creativity is the key ingredient and even the most self-proclaimed “unimaginative” folks find themselves fashioning tiny swings, arbors and stools out of twigs, raffia and string.

I start the class by explaining a little bit about fairies – and since there are men, women and children who attend; this part is altered to suit the audience. Stories of faerie origin range from J. M. Barrie (Peter Pan) telling us that “When the first baby laughed for the first time, the laugh broke into a thousand pieces and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies.” Another theory claims the little folk are of another world, and lived here long before we humans came. When we did come, the wee ones knew we didn’t share well as a race, and went underground or into natural and wild spaces for survival. Stories along this line suggest that Robin Hood may have been a fairy who was fighting to preserve his way of life! More recently some feel fairies (also known as Pixies, Divas, Brownies, Elves, Dwarfs, Gnomes, Leprechauns, Little Folk, Wee People, Green Children, etc.) are the children of Adam and Eve whom Eve hid from God, or the children of Adam and Lilith. Still others feel these are the “in-between folks” pagan spirits who are not bad enough to go to hell, nor good enough to get into heaven.

Whatever you choose to believe (or not) I found, in our research, that humans have been enchanted by the thought of a small world living right outside our realm for thousands of years and across many cultures. Stories and myths of the wee folk exist all over the world, proving we’re both fascinated by them, and not quite sure we don’t believe....

Peter Pan told us “Every time a child says “I don’t believe in fairies’, there is a little fairy somewhere who falls down dead.”

I recently called on a friend who is a practicing psychologist, and said “Mary, I have a professional question for you”. Well, at first she nearly hung up! But her curiosity got the best of her and she tentatively asked “what...” fearing, I’m sure, to be bombarded with deep dark secrets harbored for years. Instead, I asked her about fairies.

Mary feels that our fascination with the wee little people comes from the yearning we adults feel to indulge in fantasy that we haven’t experienced in years. At about 6 or 7 years of age, our parents told us our imaginary “friends” did not exist. And after that, they didn’t....

As gardeners we know the feeling of relief we get after a day in a high tech environment, when we finally sit in our gardens and get our hands in the dirt. It gives us a break from our realities and technology that intrudes into so much of our daily lives.

Think about it – what would you really rather be doing right now – sitting at your job or making a tiny world filled with plants, shiny objects and fairy dust? Maybe, just maybe, those imaginary “friends” of so many years ago, still exist and are waiting to be invited to come play again!

My classes start with this bit of history and lore, and then each person is given a container. Any type of planter is ok – some folks like the window box types, others prefer the round hanging baskets. Even a new kitty litter box can be used. We’re from Wisconsin, so our plants have to be hardy Indoors too.... We’ve used Rosemary (including a nice trailing variety), a variety of mosses, Scented Geraniums, thyme (a very important fairy plant), miniature roses, violets, various mini sedums and succulents a wonderful Alpine Ladies Mantle, other Alpine plants and miniature trees.

Ideas for structures include small birdhouses or hummingbird houses or those broken clay pots you just can’t throw away, laid on their side half buried in the soil. Dollar stores are great places to find reasonably priced objects. Fish aquarium stones are great for paths, as well as marbles and shiny half marbles.

A marble glued to a golf tee makes a fine gazing ball. A seashell glued to a golf tee makes a delightful birdbath. Glue will come

unstuck if it gets too wet, so you may be re-gluing from time to time. Willow twigs make wonderful arbors and other small branches make clotheslines and benches. And don't forget about Popsicle sticks – they can be made into boardwalks and fences. It's important to keep everything in scale. When you buy or make a piece, imagine the fairy using it, and then keep everything else to the same scale.

Larger stones can be made into stone fences and can also be used to give a tiered dimension. One rock collector brought some small crystals and put them around a pond. (Ponds can be made from votive candle holders, or the clay plant pot bottom.

A couple things to remember – fairies LOVE shiny objects so there should be shiny objects in the garden. They also love to sun themselves on rocks, therefore, each garden should have a sunning rock, and some are quite vain and like to look at their reflections, so a mirror or a pond should also be included. (Sunning on a shiny rock makes even a mischievous faerie deliriously happy!) Fairy dust (glitter) sprinkled about gives feeling of festivity. Keep in mind, however, iron objects can do fairies great harm and should be avoided entirely.

Once the garden is done, I tell the students, watch for signs. Fairies keep close ties with hummingbirds, frogs and butterflies, so if you see them in your garden, fairies are probably there as well. Remember, fairies come in all sizes, so whatever you make; the right sized fairy will find it and move in. A tiny welcome sign is very inviting, as is a tiny piece of something sweet. A drop of wine will hasten a fairy feeling at home and make them so appreciative you make expect a favor back someday.

The following is a poem I wrote for our faerie garden instruction book:

The Faerie Gala by Jackie Johnson

**The moon comes up, the night is here,
The crickets chirp “the coast is clear”.**

**The guests arrive in silent droves,
From all the hills and all the groves.**

**A tiny drum from acorn made,
It resonates...the highest grade.**

**A piece of web a spider gives,
Strings for the harp, the music lives.**

**From little stems the flutes are done,
The time is now, it’s almost one.**

**The magic music fills the air,
The elves, the pixies have not a care.**

**The fireflies keep the place alight,
With tiny twinkling lights of white.**

**The mossy stumps are filled with food,
The Wee Folk Prince is quite the dude.**

**The place is filled with pure delight,
The fairies dance, the plants have sight.**

**The breeze gives chance, the trees keep beat,
The Fairy Queen sits on her mushroom seat.**

**The forest watches all with glee,
The fun, the games that we can’t see.**

**The event goes on throughout the night,
And poof....its gone at sun’s first light.**

Do they exist? What do you think?