

A garden gnome waits outside an open door with flowers. (Jaci Smith/Owatonna People's Press)

How does your garden grow?

For these folks, very, very small

By JACI SMITH
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Perhaps it was a sprinkle of fairy dust inhaled at a trade show, but four years ago, when Patty Cornell started seeing miniature gardens popping up everywhere she looked, she knew it was going to be big.

She was right.

Miniature and fairy gardens are the terrarium craze made new again. Except instead of planting in clear plastic containers with lids, miniature gardens allow you to create your own world anywhere — in your garden, beneath a tree in your yard or in a container of your choosing.

The explosion in popularity has led to the creation of several lines of fairy gardening materials that produce fairies, trolls, animals, houses, ponds, bridges and boats.

Cornell, who, along with husband Eric and Nick Poehler, owns Turtle Creek Nursery on Owatonna's east side, is all in. This year, Turtle Creek touts seven different lines of miniature gardening supplies, from moss to gnomes to trolls to whole villages.

And of course, Turtle Creek also has the flora to go with the miniature fauna — and everything else.

Poehler, who is the architect of the miniature village that is displayed in Turtle Creek's store, likens

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the craze to creating with model trains. Poehler said he loved building little towns with model trains when he was younger and now that has translated into the care he took in constructing his miniature village.

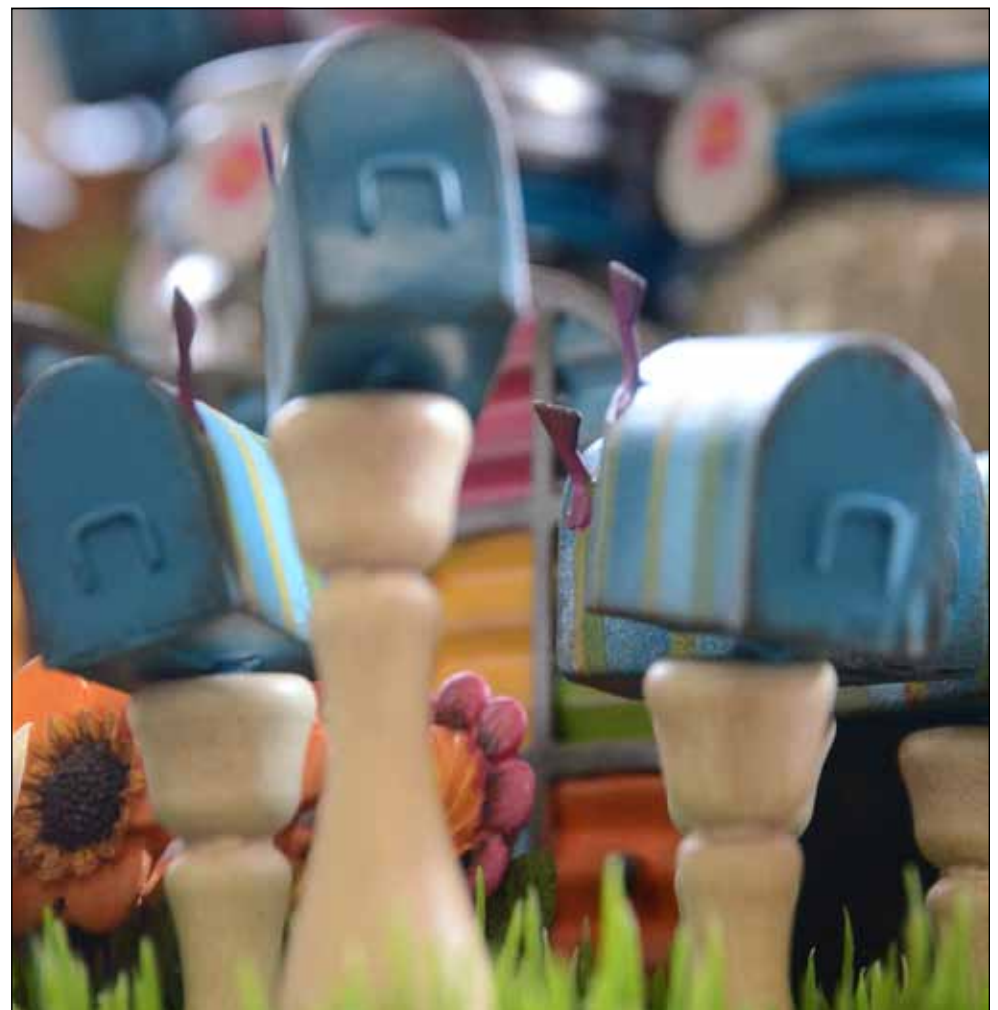
Look carefully enough, and you'll see an owl gazing down hungrily at a tiny squirrel nestled in the grass. Pass over a covered bridge carefully, as a troll hides in the creek bed beneath. Both are Poehler's handiwork.

Cornell said the interest in miniature gardening has transcended generations and genders. People who don't necessarily count themselves as gardeners can be seen building a small scene. People who don't have space to garden can build a garden for their desk at

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Nick Poehler, co-owner of Turtle Creek Nursery and Landscaping, puts a miniature squirrel right into the sightline of a miniature owl perched on a ledge in the garden Poehler created on the sales floor at Turtle Creek. The popularity of fairy — or miniature — gardens have exploded in recent years. (Jaci Smith/Owatonna People's Press)



These colorful mailboxes are part of a new line Turtle Creek Nursery got in this year. Most of the lines are more earth- and neutral-toned, so this new line adds a spark of color, says Turtle Creek Owner Patty Cornell. (Jaci Smith/Owatonna People's Press)

GARDEN: Turtle Creek offers classes on fairy gardening

From C2

TIPS ON FAIRY GARDENING

Patty Cornell at Turtle Creek Nursery and Landscaping offers these tips for those interested in starting a miniature or fairy garden. Turtle Creek is holding an open house the last weekend in April if you want to learn more:

- Plan how big you want your garden to be before you start buying. Think about scale and proportion
- Consider a theme — what do you want this scene to portray? Not all fairy gardens have fairies. Some can have animals, gnomes or trolls.
- Pick your house first and build around that as the centerpiece.
- Consider pansies. The character Oberon in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" made a fairy spell using pansies.
- Trim, trim, trim your plants in a fairy garden or else they'll overtake the residents.

work or in a pot for their home.

Cornell says she sees grandmas and daughters, sisters and friends. She even knows one man who, with his granddaughter, turned the entire pond in his back yard into a giant fairy garden, which of course he must update and expand upon every year.

Turtle Creek offers classes on fairy gardening — as many as demand requires — through Community Services and more informally through the store. They can supply a container, or you can bring one that tickles your fancy.

"We've seen them in an old wheelbarrow, a watering can," Cornell said. "I've even seen them in old suitcases."

For \$30, you can put together a small garden in a pot, she said.

The most popular plants for fairy gardens include succulents, which require a minimum of care and can usually survive in just about any environment, as well as miniature mosses like Irish moss. Creeping thyme works well, as do baby ferns. Turtle Creek has, over the last four years, steadily increased the number of plants it sells for these special gardens.

Fairy gardening fan Deidre Brown-Leer has been constructing her own scenes with materials from Turtle Creek for the last several years. She has also taught classes at Turtle Creek on constructing your own garden.

Her passion for fairy gardening caught fire about the same time as Cornell's, about four years ago. Her first effort was a small pansy pot.

Today, she works on a village that sits on a 3-foot by 5-foot table on pedestals that she can move wher-

ever she'd like to have it displayed in her yard. She changes or adds pieces every year, as well as replaces the plants depending on where the table is displayed.

"People come over and look it at a lot," Brown-Deer said. "It's fun to watch their reactions because they'll find things every time that no one has ever seen before. It's new every time."



A miniature camping scene made with the newest line available at Turtle Creek, which features bright colors. (Photo courtesy of Turtle Creek Nursery and Landscaping)



A mermaid lounges in the pond while a fairy stands by, watching. Such scenes are common in miniature gardens, which allow the creator as much creativity as they'd like to display. (Jaci Smith/Owatonna People's Press)

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