

# WORKSHOP EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Built by The Home Depot Kids Workshop

## American Eagle

Ages 5-12

### Nature Observations

Go outside and observe the world around you: What do you see? Use a pencil to sketch a picture below. Then add color to every part of your drawing that a human did *not* build or create.



Now focus only on what you have colored. This is your ecosystem! An ecosystem includes all the living things in an area (plants, animals, insects, etc.) as well as natural non-living materials like soil, rocks, and dirt.

### Land or Water

There are two main kinds of ecosystems: terrestrial (land-based) and aquatic (water-based). What type of ecosystem do you think bald eagles, like the American Eagle you created, prefer?

If you said terrestrial, you're correct! Bald eagles tend to live in forests. But if you said aquatic, you wouldn't be too far off either. Bald eagles' favorite food is fish, so they like to live *near* aquatic ecosystems . . . just not in them!



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## Create a Terrestrial Ecosystem

Let's create a mini indoor terrestrial ecosystem called a terrarium, which will be the perfect home for your American Eagle!

### To create this ecosystem, you'll need:

- A terrarium container
- Plastic wrap and string *if* your terrarium container did not come with a top:
- Gravel
- Soil
- A few small plants\*  
\*Tip: Speak with a garden center expert to make sure you pick plants that will thrive in this environment! You may need to show them the size of your terrarium.
- A spray bottle filled with water
- A few other items from nature that you can collect outdoors: rocks, twigs, leaves, etc.

Then build your ecosystem by following these instructions:

1. Coat the bottom of your terrarium container with gravel, followed by at least a few inches of soil. The gravel will help water drain from the soil.
2. Spray the soil with water, until it is moist but not sopping wet.
3. Use your hands to plant each of your plants in the soil. Be sure not to overcrowd them! If you're unsure how much space they need, a quick web search should help.
4. Think about where your American Eagle will fit best. You could place it inside your terrarium if there's room, or you could prop it on top of the terrarium once it is covered.
5. Put the other nature items that you found in your terrarium, and arrange them in a way that's appealing to the eye!
6. Then give your ecosystem a couple more sprays of water before you place the cover on your terrarium or cover it with plastic wrap and secure it with string.



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*Why should you cover your terrarium?*

The cover will help water continuously cycle through your terrarium! First, the plants will absorb the soil's water with their roots. Next, the plants will release the water through their leaves, which is called *transpiration*. This water will then begin to *evaporate*, but the cover will stop it from leaving the terrarium! When the water vapor hits the glass, it will *condense* into droplets, eventually trickle back down to the soil as *precipitation*, and then begin the water cycle all over again.

7. Check on your terrarium every few days. If the sides of the terrarium seem too wet, use a paper towel to remove some of the moisture. Or, if the soil is looking too dry, a few sprays of water should do the trick!

## Add even more life to your terrarium!

Interested in adding insects to your ecosystem?

### If so, you'll need:

- A bottle cap or cotton balls
  - Insect food: food scraps, leaves, twigs, etc.
  - If your terrarium originally came with a cover, you'll now need: Plastic wrap and string
  - Insects, of course! (See #2 below)
1. Prepare your terrarium for its new residents by making sure it has each of the following:
    - **Air:** Insects need oxygen to survive! Replace the terrarium's top with plastic wrap if needed and poke a few tiny holes into it. Once you have added your critters, secure the plastic wrap with string.
    - **Food:** Worms will be happy if you place a couple small food scraps in the soil, and other insects should enjoy eating leaves and small twigs. Be sure to add more food periodically.
    - **Water:** While most insects will have enough water as long as your ecosystem is moist, it never hurts to have a little extra! Place a water-soaked cotton ball or a water-filled bottle cap in your ecosystem. Replenish it as needed!
  2. Once your terrarium is equipped with air, food, and water, you can find insects one of the following ways:
    - With the help of an adult, go outside and catch a few insects that live in your area. Caterpillars, worms, and/or black ants are all easy insects to catch.

or

    - If insects are tricky to find in your ecosystem, take a picture of your terrarium and bring it to a local bait shop. Speak with the employees and select insects that would enjoy your terrarium.

### Keep Watch:

Remember to check in frequently to make sure your terrarium is doing well. Your plants and insects should co-exist and thrive without much help from you! If it ever looks like your insects are having trouble, it may be best to release them back into their natural environment.

