



Kusamono : Dish-Style Display

Kusamono is a Japanese planting style that is related to Kokedama, Nearai, Shitakusa, and Bonsai. Both Shitakusa and Kusamono utilize grasses and flowering elements to suggest a season or place. Shitakusa is traditionally placed near a Bonsai to suggest its natural setting and environment. On its own, it is called Kusamono and is displayed in a shallow dish or tray or perhaps creatively on a piece of driftwood or a found object. More specifically, Kusamono do NOT use a traditional plant pot or container.

The dish or object used for the Kusamono is just as important to the composition as the plants themselves. A handmade dish or object is traditional, but a shallow dish – like a serving platter or pasta plate – works just as well.

Creating a Kusamono

Supplies

- Select plants with similar watering and light requirements. They should be either ALL indoor houseplants and tropicals or ALL outdoor hardy plants.
- Choose an arrangement that suggests a season or place, a native ecosystem, or that fits some sort of intentional theme.
- A shallow dish, bowl, platter, or container
- Organic Potting Mix, moistened
- Spray Bottle
- Soil Perfector, rinsed and moistened
- Coffee Filter
- Charcoal
- Preserved Sheet Moss, moistened

Assembly

1. Clean your dish and remove all stickers and tags.
2. Fill the bottom of your dish with pea gravel or soil protector about 1 inch deep or whatever is appropriate to provide drainage for the depth of your chosen dish.
3. Sprinkle a light layer of charcoal over your soil protector. A “handful” should be plenty.
4. Place the coffee filter over the substrate layers (trim to fit).
5. Using very damp potting mix (almost muddy), start building a mound several inches above the rim of your dish. You are creating a hill that needs to be taller than the rim of your dish. Moist potting mix can be packed and mounded much easier than dry potting mix. Leave about a half-inch of space around the inside of your dish as you are building. Build towards the MIDDLE of your dish. You will be “tucking” moss into the edges of the dish, so you do not want those edges filled to the brim with soil.

6. Decide on the arrangement of your selection of plants and dig a hole for each one. Be mindful of the arrangement and how the plants will grow and expand around each other. Dig away a place for each plant and make sure the roots are entirely submerged in your hill. Add a bit of potting mix around the crown if necessary and pack it firmly to keep plants in place. Use additional potting mix as needed to round out your hill before proceeding to the next step.
7. Once all plants have been added, add a “blanket” of damp preserved sheet moss on top of the potting mix. Using a large sheet or several ripped pieces, cover the potting mix and tuck the moss into the edges of your dish. You should not see any potting mix once covered. You may need to make a few rips and tears to accommodate your plants.
8. Add any decorative stones or other objects at this point by tearing a hole in your moss blanket and inserting the items into the potting mix. They will stay in place when stuck into the potting mix and surrounded by moss.
9. Clean up any dirt on your container and plant leaves - you are ready to display your *Kusamono*!

Care

- Your placement and light levels will depend on the plants you chose.
- Aim to keep your display moist at all times. It helps to spray water directly at the crown of your plant, or even by pulling back the moss to dampen the potting mix directly at the roots every few days.
- Lightly spray plant leaves with a spray bottle every day.
- Once per week, you will want to do a deeper watering by placing your whole display in the sink and letting water completely penetrate the moss and potting mix layers. Tip the container gently to drain excess.
- If you notice a plant is limp, do a deep watering immediately. If one of your plants does not survive, simply replace it by pulling back the moss and replanting.



Holly Rogers, Bowood Farms



Young Choe, www.kusamonochoe.com