



Kokedama-Japanese String Gardening

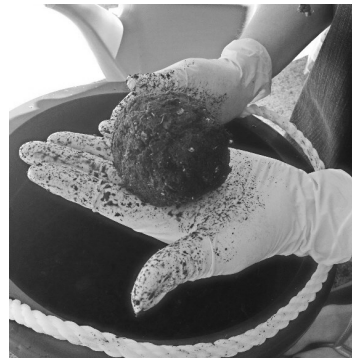
Supplies:

Top Soil	Sheet Moss
Potting Soil	A couple small buckets or bowls
Sphagnum Moss	Flat surface to work on
Natural string or twine, or heavy sewing thread	Plants, a 3"-4" pot is a good size to start with. See list of good starter plants below.
Fishing line/monofilament (optional)	Latex gloves (optional-some people are sensitive to sphagnum moss)

Go through your sheet moss and take out any sticks or bark that may be embedded. Soak sheet moss so it's fully wet and pliable.

Soak a good-sized handful of sphagnum moss, cleaned of any sticks or twigs, in a separate bowl (this is not the moss you'll be using in the soil mix).

Prepare your soil: in a bucket or bowl, mix 6-7 parts potting soil, 2-3 parts top soil and 1 part sphagnum moss (remove any sticks or other crunchy debris from the moss, and tear large chunks into smaller pieces). Mix until everything is incorporated and there are no lumps or clods. Slowly add water, mixing well with your hands between each addition, until the soil mixture is a thick paste. Test by forming a baseball-sized ball working it smooth. A little loose water should appear on the surface as you squeeze it, and when dropped back into the soil bucket from a few feet, the ball should remain intact. If



the ball breaks, add a little more water. If the ball flattens, add a little more soil.



Prepare your plant: remove from the pot and tease the roots apart, shaking off soil. You can also use a hose to wash the roots off. Thick rooted plants can tolerate having all the soil removed, thin, fibrous-rooted plants may fare better if a little soil remains. It's OK if some roots break off. Try to get the root ball as small as possible.

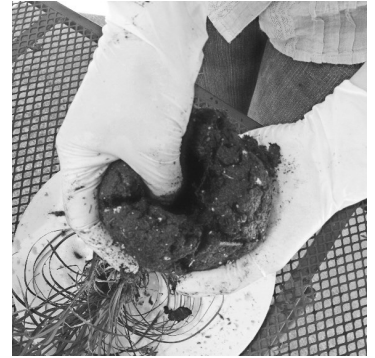
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Place a flat layer of the wet sphagnum moss in the palm of your hand. Set the roots of the plant on top and close your hand, wrapping the roots in moss. Wrap moss with the natural string or twine (just to secure, you don't need to tie a knot.) Set the plant aside.



Form a shallow cup or bowl in your hand with the wet soil mixture (fig. 5 next page). The amount of soil you need will depend on the size of your plant. (If your plant is fairly small and the soil mix is good, you can form a ball here and form a root-sized hole in it with your fingers.)



Set the plant in the "cup", and begin closing the bowl/adding more soil to build up the ball. Be sure there is none of the sphagnum moss around the roots sticking out of the ball as you build it. Keep the soil ball top even with the original soil level of the plant. Keep the ball as round as possible.

The moss will add width to the ball, so stop adding soil when it's a little smaller than you want your final ball to be.

When you are satisfied with the shape/size of the ball set it aside. If your soil mix is right it will be stable and can be set down easily.

Lay your sheet moss out on your working surface. If you have one large sheet of moss, great. Otherwise piece together smaller sections, trying to use a single piece for the center/bottom.

Have a few pieces of twine or fishing line cut to 4-5' lengths ready. Make a "lasso" loop in one piece. (Tie a simple knot near one end and thread the long end of the



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string through it, tighten the knot until it just catches.) Leave the loop a few inches wider than your soil ball.

Set the soil ball in the center of the sheet moss and form the moss up the sides. You may need to pinch out bumps of excess moss if you can't smooth them down, but err on the side of leaving too much. If there are holes, use smaller pieces of moss to patch (small holes will end up filling in as you wrap with string). If your moss is just right it will almost stay in place on its own. Be sure to leave the top a little open for the leaves.

Take your lasso string and loop it around the soil and moss ball at a bit of an angle. You should be able to tell where it needs to go to hold the largest chunks on. Tighten the loop firmly and make a few more passes to secure moss around the ball.



Pick up your ball and begin smoothing the moss and wrapping the string in a random pattern. You may need to mold the ball a bit as you work to keep a nice round shape. If you run out of string simply tie another length to the end and continue. Try to make the pattern of the string pleasing-it's part of the design too! (If you're using fishing line it will be invisible, so don't worry too much about how it looks.)

When you're satisfied the moss is secure, tie off the loose end to a crossing wrapped piece. Tie off near the top if you want to suspend your kokedama by the string, or you can tie a new hanger string on.

You can display your kokedama hanging (they look great turning in the breeze) or set on a pretty plate or saucer. Hang by a single string tied near the top, or make a simple hanger by tying 3 pieces of string together at the top and bottom. Simply rest the ball in the sling.



To water, simply set the soil ball in a pan or bowl of water

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for a few minutes. Water will soak the whole soil ball even if it's only a few inches deep.

How will you know when to water? The ball will get very light and the moss will feel like cardboard. My kokedama that are hanging in full sun need to be soaked at least every other day. The ones in the shade about every third day, though one I have in full shade needs a soak only about once a week. You'll learn quickly how much they need. This is one of the few times that watering a little early won't cause overwatering problems. (As the water drains out after soaking, the natural air spaces in the soil ball remain open better than in a pot.)

To fertilize, soak in a weak mixture of a fertilizer every few weeks, preferably organic. If you use a "blue" fertilizer make sure it's weak enough to barely show any color.

What Plants to use?

Technically, you can kokedama just about any plant, as long as you can manage the root ball (see <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2010/10/japanese-string-gardens/>, where they show kokedama trees!) Plants with very sensitive roots may not tolerate aggressive root cleaning, you may need to experiment to find out what plants work best for you. You can also kokedama multiple plants in one ball, maybe mixing ivy with an upright plant, or trailing vinca with a flowering annual. You're limited only by your imagination!

Good choices for beginner kokedama

(choose a 3" or 4" pot):

Spider Plant (<u>very</u> forgiving!)	Arrowhead vine (Syngonium)
Philodendron or Pothos	Vinca
Boston, Button, Bird's Nest and Pteris (table)	Pilea
Ferns (be gentle with the roots, they are very fibrous and you probably won't be able to get all the soil off)	Fittonia
Asparagus fern (watch for small, thorn-like scales on the stems that can be painful when handling)	Pepperomia
	Juncus
	Ivy
	Herbs



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