

LEAF CASTING

MATERIALS NEEDED:

<p>Construction or Play Sand Quikrete concrete vinyl patcher, 40# bag Plastic wrap sheets (dry-cleaning bags, table cloths, etc.) Mixing container (bucket, tub) Trowel or wooden stick for mixing concrete Water source and spray water bottle Rubber gloves and disposable face masks</p>	<p>Wire brushes, files, sandpaper for cleaning Paints, stains, concrete dyes (if desired) Paint brushes, sponges, rags, paper towels or newspaper Sealant (liquid or spray) to weatherproof item Spray cooking oil (to help if leaves are not slick) Fresh leaves for casting: Gunnera, Hosta, Rhubarb, Elephant Ear, Lotus, Sycamore, Fig, Oak Leaf Hydrangea, Datura,</p>
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DIRECTIONS:

1. Cover surface work area with plastic sheet
2. Mound damp (not wet) sand into a "dome." The shape of the dome will determine the curvature of your leaf casting. The dome should be large enough to extend beyond the size of the leaf. The sand needs to be damp to hold its shape. If needed, to prevent cracking, spray with water.
3. Cover the entire mound of sand with a sheet of plastic so that the leaf does not come into contact with the sand.
4. Lay the leaf face down (veins up) onto the sand dome.
5. Cut the stem close to the base of the leaf. Any damage or holes in the leaf can be repaired by laying piece of another leaf over the hole.
6. If the leaf does not have a leathery feel, like an elephant ear, lightly spray it with cooking oil so that it will peel easily when the concrete dries.
7. Mix the concrete with water to the consistency of brownie mix or tooth paste. A good formula is 4 parts concrete to 1 part water. If adding cement stain, mix it with the first bit of water (a little goes a long way). Mix it thoroughly. Kneading with your hands is best—takes out the air bubbles and a warm hand puts the concrete chemicals to work.
8. Place a handful of concrete in the center of the leaf and begin patting it toward the edge. Keep it thick (about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in the center) and pat it thinner as you move toward the edge (about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch). Work slowly and do not pat the cement all the way to the end of the leaf—leave just a bit of the leaf edge showing so that the cement does not run over the edge. If the mix is too wet, blot it with a paper towel. If you plan to hang the leaf casting, place a wire loop or piece of coat hanger into the cement near the stem area (be careful not to puncture the leaf)—reinforce the concrete in this area to hold the hanger. Using a damp paintbrush, stroke the casting from the edge to the center to smooth the surface.
9. Cover the entire leaf loosely with plastic wrap so that it dries evenly. In extremely hot temperatures, you may need to cover it with a damp towel to prevent drying too quickly and cracking. Leave for 48 hours to set and dry.
10. Uncover gently. Remove the top plastic. Lift the entire leaf being careful not to damage the more delicate edges. Place it on a flat surface, back side down, and peel off the original leaf. If the leaf does not peel easily, let it dry further and remove it with a wire brush.
11. Allow it to cure for another week (preferably submersed in water for good curing) before painting, staining and/or sealing.
12. Use a file, sandpaper, or a multi-tool to carefully smooth the edges.
13. Be as creative as you like with the painting. In nature, veins are generally lighter not darker. Acrylic paints can be used full strength or in thin washes with 2/3 drops of paint to a half or a full cup of water. "Paint" with a brush or use a dry brush or sponge to "dab" the paint. If applying a second coat, be sure the first coat has dried.
14. Apply the sealant after desired colors are achieved and leaf is dry. Suggested—Quikrete Wet Look High Gloss Sealer (Gallon only) or Clear Acrylic High Gloss Coating (spray can).