

Concrete Leaf Castings - As Easy as (Mud) Pie!

Materials:

20# concrete vinyl patch
Concrete bonding adhesive
Liquid Cement Color (concrete dye-optional)
40lbs play sand
Plastic wrap
Water
Large trash bags or plastic drop cloth
Masking tape
Several leaves with few/no holes or tatters
18 G wire or PVC pipe pieces for mounting
Big Leaf option: concrete reinforcing fibers

Tools:

old trowel
5 Gal bucket
several small buckets
large plastic "Rubbermaid" tub
Old table
dust mask
vinyl (rubber) gloves
toothpicks
Wire cutters
Pliers
Old Paint Brush

***Leaves can wilt quickly, so if possible, cut them just before and keep them in a bucket of water until you are ready.

NOTE: Some sources use 3 parts fine 1lb sand to 1 part Portland cement instead of the vinyl concrete patch. I like the "patch" better as it's easier and smoother.

For Painting:

Patio Paints™, or acrylic, or outdoor latex paint

Krylon™ sealer spray

Brushes

Sponges (small from craft store)

Old soft T-shirt pieces

Water

Small buckets/ old plastic butter tubs

Ziplock™ small freezer containers

Paper plates

Thin gloves optional

OPTION: before painting, try making “test” color patches on 3 x 5” index cards. Paint rectangles of color from paint full strength and different mixes of color (for example: a 50:50 mix of fuchsia and magenta). It’s also nice to do test spots of paint on extra/ chipped pieces of concrete- especially if you used a concrete dye and that can change the color some.

Directions:

Getting ready:

1. Cover table with plastic tarp.
2. If making wire hangers to hang up the leaves- bend 18G wire into a loop with 2 ends sticking out at the bottom. Bend these ends up a little so when they are embedded in the concrete, the loop will stick out some.
3. Put play sand into 5 gal. bucket and add a little water- just enough to make it damp so it can be molded. Mix well.
4. Place a dome of sand on the table at least 2” wider than the leaf.
5. Trim the leaf stems down flat with the leaf. If there are any holes or tears in the leaf, place masking tape over these on the top side of the leaf (not the back of the leaf as the cement will go over this).
6. Cover the sand dome with plastic wrap so later the concrete won’t stick to the sand at the edges of the leaf.
7. Fit the leaf onto the sand and make sure the sand will support the hollows of the leaf. You can make a more interesting cast by making some “waviness” to it by pushing some depressions in the sand or elevating some areas. The overall dome shape of the sand will make a cup shaped leaf when done. I like to pile a little extra sand on some of the leaf edges to make them look flared back some when turned over.
8. Using a dry paint brush, brush away any sand on that might have gotten on the back side of the leaf.
9. Lay the leaf face down on top of the plastic wrap.

Mixing concrete:

1. Pour dry vinyl concrete powder into a large plastic tub, wearing a dust mask (the fine powder can waft into the air). With an old trowel & vinyl gloves ("rubber") on, slowly add water and mix thoroughly to get all the powder off the sides and bottom. With gloves on, squeeze through some to make sure there are no lumps.
2. Add concrete bonding adhesive (1/2 cup did about 6 gal of concrete powder)—this makes it smoother and stronger.
3. Add concrete dye, if desired, to the depth of color you want. Mix very well. The consistency should be like thick brownie mix- or very soft cookie dough. It shouldn't run off the leaf, but not be so thick it isn't easy to mold.
4. After all is mixed, place a blob of concrete onto the top of the leaf near the center. Gently push out toward the leaf edges, trying not to pass the edges much. Use your opposite hand, cupped, to keep the concrete from going too far and to make the edges more even. The smoother and more even the edges, the less filing or finishing you may have to do when hardened. The outer edges should be about 1/4" thick and the center about 1/2" thick, unless you are doing a really large leaf such as a large rhubarb leaf- then the center can be 3/4" thick. Also, make sure the center covers the big veins and the stem part.
5. If you are going to hang the leaf, insert the ends of the bent wire into the upper center of the leaf. If you need to, you can place an extra small blob of concrete over the ends to make sure they are imbedded enough. Smooth this out.
6. Dip the paint brush in water and drain on the side of the water bucket. With even strokes, brush from the leaf edges to the center until all is smooth.
7. HINT: If there is extra concrete left over after all leaves are covered, make into flat 1/2" pieces to be used for testing paint colors on them.
8. Cover with plastic wrap & cure for 2 days, hopefully in the shade and not in a hot area. If hot, cover with a damp towel or damp newspapers over the plastic. If you wait more than 2 days, the leaf can rot and it's a mess to try to peel it off.
9. When dry, gently turn the leaf over. If it's a really big and heavy leaf, have a friend help you so the edges are not as likely to break off; they are most fragile.
10. Carefully peel off the leaf trying to get as much to come off in one piece as you can. If pieces stick, I use toothpicks in the veins to try to lift them up. I've tried scrub brushes, but found this scraped off the cement, too.
11. Cure the leaf, especially if it's a large one, for another week before sealing it or painting it. I store mine in a large plastic tub with sheets of foam rubber or bubble wrap between them. You can wait months to paint them or seal them without painting.

Paint and Seal Your Leaf:

Some use concrete sealer such as Thompson Waterseal™ or Drylock™ to protect it from the weather. Incidentally, I would recommend you bring this in for the winter. If you want to paint it, -- don't seal it first. For ideas on painting, a great book is: [A Garden Gallery, the Plants, Art, and Hardscape of Little and Lewis](#), by George Little and David Lewis, Timber Press, 2005.

It helps to test the color of the paints on index cards first to see how you like them and what colors look good together. You can mix combinations of colors- add a dab of black or white to see how you like various hues or tints. I tried to mimic some of the colors of the flowers in my garden- such as the periwinkle colors I liked. Another time, I tried to match a bright yellow and purple primrose figuring that

if I liked it in nature, it would look good painted on the leaf, too. If you have mixed up a blend of color-keep it in a tight locking Ziplock™ freezer small container so it doesn't dry out.

It was sad when one of my leaf castings broke, but it turned out well in the end as I used it to brush different colors on to see how they looked on the terra cotta color.

Several ideas of how to paint:

1. Paint on the colors full strength. While 1 color is still wet, you can blend it into another color.
2. Part A: Make a "wash" by diluting a color with water. I like the look of this better than full strength color. You just wash the inside of the leaf so it runs into the veins. Excess can be wiped off with a piece of old t-shirt. You can do one color for the center of the leaf and another for the outside. If you put on too much in an area, a damp piece of t-shirt will take much of it off.

Part B: Another variation is to wash all the leaf with one color and lightly wipe off the top with a soft cloth leaving the color mostly in the veins and ripples. When this is a bit dry, lightly brush the top surface with another color to highlight the top of the ripples of the leaf. A slightly dampened sponge can be used for this.
3. Damp sponges with paint or a dry brush with paint can be used to lightly dab on a color to the center or edges. On some leaves, I used 4-5 colors, one washed in the center, another blending into the middle of the leaf, and another lightly sponged on the very outer edges of the leaf. A highlight over the rippled hosta ridges was made with some on some, with a light touch of gold to the rims and tops of the ripples.
4. After all paint is dried, spray lightly with Krylon™. Let dry between coats. I use 3-4 coats & spray lightly so it doesn't make the colors smear and run together. I don't like polyurethane as it yellows later.

Option with hanging the leaves:

I live in a windy area and used clear silicone caulk on the back side to make a "donut" where the leaf would rest against the wall to prevent it from wobbling back and forth in the wind. I also used fine wire looped through the leaf hook and through the picture hanger mounted on the wall to make sure there was no way the wind would blow it off the hook.

Other options:

Put a piece of PVC joining pipe section on the back when concrete is wet. This can be used to make the leaf sit at an angle, or connect it on to a PVC pipe mounted in the ground. You can spray the PVC pipe green if you want with spray paint made for plastic. Or you can insert the circle top of a plant support into the wet cement. Stabilize it until dry with a foam cup pierced with the main wire "stem" of the

plant support. If your leaf is not too heavy, it can then be mounted above some of your plantings in the garden.

For a complete demonstration, see my YouTube video (by dermgood1) at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99yUnB8utpo&feature=youtu.be>

A good web site to see how this is done and other painting ideas is from *Garden Gate Magazine* at: <http://www.gardengatemagazine.com/extras/53birdbath.php>

ENJOY!!

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