

Concrete Leaf Casting

Create your own concrete leaf casting for use as a birdbath, birdfeeder, or yard art. Smaller castings work great for household decorations and centerpieces.

Materials:

- Leaves
- Sand
- Quikrete Sand Mix or other sand-only cement mix
- Rubber gloves
- Trowel
- Bucket or wheelbarrow
- Water
- Plastic Wrap
- Old knives, skewers, and toothbrushes for removing leaf material
- Acrylic Paint and Brushes
- Concrete Sealer and Brushes



Prepare the Casting

- Select a leaf: Strong veins will show up better in the casting. Waxy, more durable leaves (like hostas) will peel off more easily. The larger the leaf, the more fragile the final casting will be. About 12-14" wide is a good starting size.
- Line a table or large piece of cardboard with plastic wrap.
- Make a dome of sand at least 2" larger than your leaf. Mold the dome to fit the contours of your leaf (top-side down). Taller, more rounded domes will result in a deeper casting. Spray with a mist bottle to help sand hold shape. You can also simply lay the leaf flat if you don't want to create a bowl shape.
- Remove your leaf and cover the sand with another layer of plastic. Clean your leaf of any sand and lay over the plastic.
- Trim your leaf stalk! Cut it even with the leaf or you will have to deal with a hole in your casting later.



Make the Casting

- Mix the cement mix with water until it reaches the consistency of thick brownie batter.
- Scoop small amounts of concrete onto the leaf, starting in the center and working your way out. Work to make the center of the leaf 1-2 inches thick and the edges no thinner than 1/2 inch, though a bit thicker is better.

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- Leave a small rim of leaf (1/4-1/2") uncovered by concrete to create a smoother finished edge. Gently pat the concrete to remove air bubbles and smooth the edges and back of the casting.
- If desired, or if you make a large leaf, add pedestals to help support the casting when upright. Make small pegs out of concrete and attach them to the base. Press a piece of cardboard against the pegs to flatten and even them out.
- Cover the leaf with plastic wrap and let dry at least 48 hours. The slower the concrete dries, the more durable it will be, so keep it shaded and out of extremely hot areas.

Paint and Finish the Casting

- Remove the plastic covering the leaf. Working carefully, slip your hand under the casting and lift it from the sand. Carefully turn it over onto a work surface.
- Peel the leaf from the casting. Some leaves will release very easily; others will need much more work. You may need to use skewers, old knives, or toothbrushes to help peel off the leaves. Try not to use anything too abrasive, as it may remove some of the texture of the leaf. Starting with a larger vein and peeling outward is often helpful.
- Once the leaf is removed, sand or otherwise smooth the edges if necessary. Brush your casting to remove concrete dust.
- Paint your casting as you prefer. Play with using different colors, shades, and washes to achieve the effect you desire, or leave the concrete plain if you prefer that look. Thin the paint to help it soak into the grooves of the concrete better. The more water you add, the lighter the coloration will be and more of the concrete's texture will show through. Several coats will likely be necessary, but it dries quickly.
- Once your final paint coat has dried, apply concrete sealer to protect the casting.
- Allow to cure several more days before placing outside.



Maintenance and Use Tips:

- We do not recommend using these castings for food storage or serving without some sort of material between the food and the casting surface. Try serving dry foods in a casting lined with napkins or kitchen towels, or packaged foods.
- We recommend bringing your leaf inside during the winter to help avoid cracking. You may also wish to reseal the leaf each year.
- Use your casting outside for a birdfeeder or bath. Shallow castings work great for butterfly water sources. Add some small rocks or pebbles to create resting places for the butterflies as they drink.