

Creating Garden Art, Making Cement Leafs, Stepping Stone, and Tufa pots by Nancy Bissonnette; basket weaver, teacher, and master gardener.

Safety first; wear gloves, dust mask, safety glasses when mixing ingredient. Best to work and cure your pieces outside in a cover and well ventilated area.

Supplies needed; Portland Cement, sand (playground is best, not beach sand), Peat moss, vermiculite or per-lite for tufa pots, concrete bonding agent and cement dye optional. Bucket for mixing, mixing tools, container (yogurt tub, ext.) for measuring, plastic to cover work area and finished pieces while curing, mixing tools; like old garden tools or old wooden spoon, cooking spray, plastic wrap, old towel or papers towels, Acrylic paints or exterior house paint and paint brushes, 18" gauge wire to make hangers for leaves, beautiful leaves with good veining on back, containers for tufa and stepping stone molds (old bread or cake pan, plant saucers, bowl, jello mold, shoe, or other boxes), embellishments; like shells, broken tile or china, beads, bubble wrap ext. and water.

Recipes: There are many recipes you can use and see on line. But these are the ones I use and like.

Cement leaves. Find a nice, smooth edge, veined leaf for mold. Make a mound of damp sand to hold leaf in the shape you want. Place plastic over sand and leaf upside down on top, spray leaf lightly with cooking spray. Now you are ready to mix your cement and start. **REMEMBER SAFETY 1ST.** This is a 3 to 1 rate on 3 pt. Sand to a pt. Cement. In bucket mix cement and sand well, (you can add cement dry at this time). Now add water slowly, a little at a time; you will need just less than 1 pt water in all. And add 2 or 3 caps of Concrete bonding agent in along with the water. The mixed will be like toothpaste when ready to mold. Starting adding the mix to the centre of the leaf, working out to the edges. The mix should be about 1/4" thick in the centre and taper to 1/8" at the edge. Being sure not to go beyond the leaf edge, you can lift the plastic wrap up to smooth the edges. Let mix set for 15 to 20 min. Before adding a wire hanger or writing your name &/or date in it. Cover with plastic and let cure for 48 hours. Now uncover leaf and very carefully flip it over. Cover again for another day or two. Then you can leave uncovered the leaf. It will take a month for the cement to finish curing. The green leaf will peel off on its own as the piece dries. You can now paint or seal the leaf if you wish.

Tufa Pots. Find a mold you like, you can line it with plastic, bubble wrap, or greenery for a design on your finish piece. Be creative. Spray mold with cooking spray, before adding cement mix, to make for easy un-molding. **REMEMBER SAFETY 1ST.** I use 1pt. Peat Moss, 1 pt. Pear lite, 1pt. Cement mix. Mix the peat moss and pear lite well together, add cement (and cement dry if wanted) and mix well to blend all; "just like making a cake". Add slowly and mix in water; it will take LESS than 1 pt. Till you can form a dry ball in your hand of the mix, that holds together and is not dripping water. Press mix in bottom and sides of molds til it is 1 to 2" thick. Smoothing it out as you go and forming a nice top edge. Make 1 or 2 drain holds in the bottom of container. Let set 10 to 20 min. & now you can add embellishments by pressing them in to the surface. Cover with plastic and let cure 24 hours. At the end of 24 hours you can CAREFULLY unmold the pot. You can also use a screw driver or awl to carve designs in the pot now and you can use a wire brush or file to clean up any mistakes or extra cement now. Cover again to cure for 2 weeks to a month, the longer it cures, the stronger it will be. Now leave uncovered to dry for a week. Before planting, rinse with a mix (for 30 min.) of 1/4 cup Vinegar to 1 gal. Water to neutralize any remaining residue from mix. Then rinse again with clear water and plant it up.

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Stepping Stone. There are a number of ways to make stepping stone. You can buy a stepping stone mold, use a plant saucer or cake pan for your mold, or already make cement stepping and add embellishments to it, like in mosaic tiling. Whatever you use, be sure to spray mold with cooking spray first and **REMEMBER SAFETY 1ST**. The mix is 1 pt cement (and dry if you like) to 5 pts. Sand (or you can use the same mix as in the cement leaf recipe, I have used both with good outcomes) Add enough water slowly to make a cookie dough or pudding consistency of the mix. Now start by putting enough in the mold till it is 1/2 full; you can add a layer of wire mesh to support and make a stronger piece, for using it in a path way. Fill mold to top and smooth the surface (a wooden paint stick works well) tap around the mold to release air bubbles and run an old kitchen knife around the edge for easy unmolding. Let set for 30 to 60 min. Before embellishing, drawing and writing in the cement. Cover with plastic for 48 hours, now you can carefully and gently unmold your piece. You can clean off any rough edges with a wire brush or file. Let cure for a month before using it in pathway. The longer it cures the stronger it will be.

Now it is your turn to be creative and add personal garden art to your home garden or gift to gardening friends.

Any questions you can reach me at npbasket@gmail.com