



Concrete Leaf Birdbath or Wall Hanging

MATERIALS LIST

Large leaf; 2' cardboard square; tin foil square; 2 cups moist sand; Sanded Mortar Mix (about 3 cups dry mix); water; mixing bowl; rubber gloves; paint stick or shim; poly-mesh pieces (drywall tape); 4 inches of wire for hanger; plastic scrubby sponge; plastic cups for measuring;

Optional things: Integral color pack; exterior acrylic craft paint in two or three colors; concrete sealer or acrylic craft varnish; plumbing floor flange and matching pipe for elevated stand.

PROCEDURE TO MAKE ONE LEAF BOWL

1. Place a square of tinfoil on top of a cardboard square. Put about 2 cups of moist sand in the center of the foil to form a mound. (Optional—cover the sand with a square of saran wrap, especially for a compound leaf)
2. Center your leaf on the sand mound face down. Make sure that no stem parts stick up or you will have a hole. Adjust the leaf and sand to form a stable upside down bowl shape.
3. Put about 3 generous cups of mortar mix in the mixing bowl. (Optional—add integrated color pack dye now if you are using it). Add water in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup increments and mix thoroughly to make a stiff peanut-butter consistency. Use your stir stick to really dig in the corners to get all dry mix moistened.
4. Make small pancake shapes using about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of mortar mix per pancake. Pat these along the edges of your leaf, building from the outside to the center.
5. When you have covered your leaf with a thin layer of mortar mix pancakes, stop and embed some strips of poly mesh drywall tape in the mortar for added strength. Then make more little pancakes and cover the leaf a second time. Clean up the edges with your stir stick. (Optional—if you want to add a hanging wire, do it now). Ideally your mortar mix will be $\frac{3}{4}$ th of an inch thick all over the leaf, including the edges. Thin edges break easier.
6. Form a flat spot on the top of your mortar mound (bottom of the bowl) if you want it to sit flat with little rocking. Use your stir stick for this task.
7. Put the cardboard away in a plastic bag and leave it alone for at least 48 hours. DON'T TOUCH IT—it has to cure before you finish it.

8. Somewhere between 48 and 72 hours after making the mortar mound, you can gently pick it up off the cardboard and turn it over on the sand. The leaf will be attached. Use your scrubby to gently clean up the edges and smooth out rough spots on the bottom side. Try to GENTLY peel the leaf away from the mortar. DON'T PANIC if it sticks—you have lots of time to get it off. In fact, stop all work for another 48 hours and try again. Even after two weeks, you can take leaf bits off with your scrubby if you need to. They will dry up and fall off by themselves eventually.

9. On Day 8 or 9, your leaf bowl should be cured enough to paint (or to seal with varnish if you are not painting). I recommend two of three coordinating colors of acrylic exterior craft paint applied with bits of sponge. Be natural or go wild—it's your sculpture. When the paint is dry, top with at least two coats of clear craft varnish—either matte or shiny, your choice. Even if you don't paint your leaf bowl, don't skip the varnish step because it makes cleaning so much easier.

10. To mount your leaf bowl on a pedestal, pound plumbing pipe into the ground vertically using a wood scrap as a pad to keep the hammer from destroying the threads on the pipe. Glue a plumbing floor flange to the flat spot on the underside of your leaf bowl. E6000, epoxy or Liquid Nails will work for this. Then screw the flange on to the pipe—voila, instant birdbath!

11. For a ground level installation, place the leaf bowl in an open space (but not too far from a shrub, for cover in case of cat) and add water. That's it.

12. To maintain your birdbath, clean it at least weekly with a vinegar-water solution and plastic scrubby, rinsing very well. Then refill with fresh water. In hot weather you may need to replenish the water daily. In winter you may decide to take the birdbath inside when frost threatens—or you may continue the clean and refill routine. Birds do need clean, fresh water in bad weather, too.

Once you get familiar with concrete as a sculpture medium, you may want to do stepping stones, hypertufa bowls and other garden ornaments. There are so many ways this material can be shaped to adorn your garden. Have fun!