



LEAF CASTING

Leaf casting is an easy way to create artistic treasures that build upon the beauty of nature. It's also a way to create lasting memories of your garden endeavors: the large elephant ear you tended all summer, the wonderful new variety of Farfugium which you added to your garden this year, or the beautiful begonia leaf which was passed down from your grandmother...

While there are many different “recipes” for making a leaf casting, the most stunning castings all begin with a beautiful blemish-free leaf with great veins. If you are like us, you may find you look at plants differently. In addition to enjoying the color, flower and texture of plants, we now find ourselves looking at the undersides of leaves to see their potential.

Lori first learned to make leaf castings at the City Greenhouse with JoAnn Breland. Over the course of time she has discovered different ways to cast leaves and she is now experimenting with plaster of paris to create light weight castings which can be used as ornaments. The recipe provided below is the one she first used.

Instructions for making a leaf casting:

Tools and Materials

1. 10 lb bag of quikrete mortar mix
2. 2 pints of concrete acrylic fortifier grout sealer
3. water
4. pint size measuring cup
5. container for mixing fortifier and water
6. plastic container for mixing mortar and fortifier
7. good fitting, thick, plastic gloves (kitchen gloves work great)
8. safety glasses
9. dust mask
10. acrylic paint in your choice of colors
11. artist paint brushes in a variety of sizes
12. metal file (Dremel tools work great!)

Work area

1. Choose a cool shaded area. The mortar must cure slowly. Casting in later afternoon is preferable so the mortar can cure overnight.
2. The work surface should be covered in plastic. Use a table or 2 saw horses with plywood placed as a top.
3. The shape of your leaf will be dictated by your work surface. If you choose to have a flat leaf you will cast directly on plastic work surface. If you choose to have a more rounded life-like leaf, use the mound of sand.
4. Place a piece of plastic over the casting surface. The plastic needs to be larger than the leaf.
5. Gather tools, mortar, water, and mixing container
6. Choose your leaves and keep their stems in water until you are ready to begin casting. Always select more than you think that you can use.

Mixing the mortar

1. Put on gloves, dusk mask, and safety glasses.
2. Mix concrete acrylic fortifier with water in a container.
3. Pour dry mortar mix into your mixing pan.
4. Pour into the mortar mix at least 2/3 of the mixed fortifier/water. Using your hands, mix together until it feels like its slightly thicker than mashed potatoes. Use more of the fortifier/water mix if needed. Make sure that there are no dry spots and the entire mix feels the same.

Casting

1. Choose your leaf and place it on the plastic.
2. Scoop up a handful of mortar and place it in the center of the leaf
3. Begin patting to spread the mortar up to but **not over** the edges of the leaf. If you need more mortar add it. Try to keep your thickness even and not more than ¼ of an inch if possible (thicker is more work later)
4. If you are going to hang your leaf, add the wire at this point. Gently push the wire somewhat into the back of the leaf and then add more mortar on top of the base of the wire to hold it firm.

Finishing

1. 24 hours later, gently turn over your casting. If you have mortar that has gone past the leaf edges, gently file it down to the leaf edge. Once you have gotten all of the edges close to perfect, remove the green leaf material. If the leaf is still wet, allow it to finish drying.
2. When your leaf is dry, use files, emory cloth, or a Dremel tool, to take off details until you are happy with the edges.
3. Paint the front and back liberally with the grout sealer and let it dry for 15-20 min.
4. Now you are ready to paint your masterpiece with your acrylic paint!

Hints

1. Rinse gloved hands often and try to clean all mortar off.
2. When you remove a handful of mortar, try to make sure that you scrape and pat the remaining mortar into a ball so that you don't have dry areas.
3. Work at a good pace so you do not waste your mortar. It sets up quickly!

Here are a few websites you can refer to for other leaf casting ideas:

- <http://fairegarden.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/how-to-make-leaf-castings/>
<http://www.garden.org/regional/report/arch/inmygarden/2527>
<http://www.artfulparent.com/2012/08/leaf-casting-with-plaster-of-paris.html>

