

# CONCRETE CAST LEAVES

## Using Vinyl Cement Patch

### LEAF SELECTION:

In selecting leaves, there are three things to remember. Look for leaves with: 1) a strong, prominent vein structure, 2) a smooth underside, and 3) a sturdy leaf such as hydrangeas, redbuds, hostas, cabbages, and rhubarb. As you gain proficiency you may want to try more exotic leaves such as acanthus, taro, or gunnera leaves.

### INGREDIENTS AND SUPPLIES:

1. Vinyl cement patch by Pakmix
2. Yogurt containers for measuring
3. Plastic dish washing tub for mixing
4. Hand trowel for mixing
5. Thin plastic gloves
6. Shallow Box with firm or reinforced bottom, nursery boxes work well
7. Potting soil or mulch for mounding
8. Plastic bags for mounding
9. Duct tape to cover small holes in leaves
10. Spray water bottle
11. Needle nose pliers, dental pic for finishing
12. Sandpaper medium to fine grit for finishing

### MOUNDING:

Place the potting soil or mulch in a sturdy plastic bag. Lay the bag in a large flat box, or on a platform such as a board. Wet the medium and firm it by pounding to make a mound a larger than the size of the leaf. If the leaf is very "deep" or concave, and you are having trouble getting a firm mound that mirrors the shape of the leaf, you can use bowls, large round stones as a support beneath the potting soil or mulch. Smooth the plastic bag to get all the air out, tuck ends under.

### MIXING:

Add dry vinyl concrete patch to plastic tub. Slowly add water, a little at a time, to prevent making the mixture "too wet". Using your hand trowel it mixes together easily. The goal is for the mixture to have consistency of stiff cookie dough. Once mixed drop the tub on the floor a few times to release air in mixture. It is important to note that weather impacts the amount of liquid you will use. On hot dry days you will use more, and during rainy weather you will need less liquid. Also, as you work if it is a hot day and the mixture begins to dry you can add more liquid by spraying the cement with a water bottle before you add it to the leaf.

### MOLDING:

Place the leaf, with about one inch of stem remaining, vein side up on the plastic covered mound. To begin molding, take a handful of concrete, make a "mud pie" and press the mixture onto the center of the leaf. You will want to continue adding small amounts of cement and "patting it or slapping it" firmly. Work from the center out to the edges but not beyond! Firmly patting the leaf during construction releases the air bubbles, gets the cement into the cracks/crevices and makes for a smoother leaf. The mixture should be approximately 1/2" at the center to 1/4" thick at the edges, thicker for a larger leaf. You will want to keep your eye on the edges as you work, because as you pat the cement will "slip beyond" the

edge of the leaf and need to continually be coaxed back to the border of the leaf edge. Gently use the side of your hand to do this, keeping in mind you want the edge to be thinner or beveled for the best finished appearance.

When the leaf is fully covered with cement, if you wish to add a metal hanger or copper fitting, this is the time. A hanger should be inserted carefully into the back of the leaf, while being sure not to let it come through the front side. Add a small amount of concrete over the edges of the hanger and smooth to secure it in place. Bonsai wire works well to cut and shape into hangers, but any wire will work.

A copper fitting is placed in the leaf so that the leaf can be mounted on a pole. Set the copper fitting on the leaf. Do not press into the leaf as it may come through the front when you are finishing. Mound cement around the fitting. Build the mound up to the neck of the fitting, while shaping sides into smooth slopes. It will resemble a cone shape, but when placed on the pole it will look better. We like the "3/4 down to 1/2" fittings and 1/2" copper tubing for the poles.

If you must move the freshly finished leaf in the box, do it immediately as vibration or uneven handling when carrying can cause concrete to crack and ruin your leaf.

### **FINISHING:**

Allow 24 hours for leaves to harden. If the weather is very wet, the time needed to harden may lengthen. Handle very gingerly. At this point you can use needle-nosed pliers to carefully "chip away" extra cement on the edges of the leaves. Also, sanding with a fine grit sanding block smoothes and finishes the edges. With larger leaves, set back on mound for support and leave another 12 hours.

Hardened, the leaves can be left in a natural state or be painted with acrylic paints. Acrylic paint can be watered down for a more subtle color. Acrylic holds up well outside but if placed in full sun will fade.

### **ADDITIONAL TIPS :**

- Most leaves cut and immediately placed in water can remain viable for casting for 3 to 5 days.
- If you choose a leaf that has small holes in it, use duct tape to cover the holes from the front to prevent the concrete from oozing through when forming.
- If you are making a birdbath, you will want to finish the leaf and let it harden over night. The next day once you have removed the leaf from the cement sculpture, place duct tape over the hole made by the stem. Place the duct tape on the backside of the leaf. Fill, pack, smooth, and finish the cement from the front. Let harden 24 hours, remove tape. If you are using the leaf as a birdbath, "cure" the leaf in a water bath by letting it soak for a week or wash it out daily, as the lime will leach out for a time. We would not recommend painting the leaf with acrylics if you are planning to use it as a birdbath as the acrylics do leach out into the water.
- To place the mounted leaf in the yard, pound 3/8" rebar stake into the ground, slide the 1/2" copper tubing over and fit the leaf to the copper tubing. Mounted leaves look best low so the eye sees the top of the leaf rather than the underside.
- Keeping the mounds after you are finished will save you some work if you plan to do further castings in the season.