



## Concrete Leaf Impressions

Prepared by Barbara Miller, ABG Horticulturist



### Materials Needed

- A deeply veined leaf
- Play sand
- Portland cement
- Water
- Plastic wrap
- Concrete reinforcement fibers
- Paint or concrete dye (optional)
- Concrete sealer or polyurethane

### Tools

- Bucket or wheelbarrow
- Hoe
- Scrub brush
- Paintbrush
- Disposable Gloves



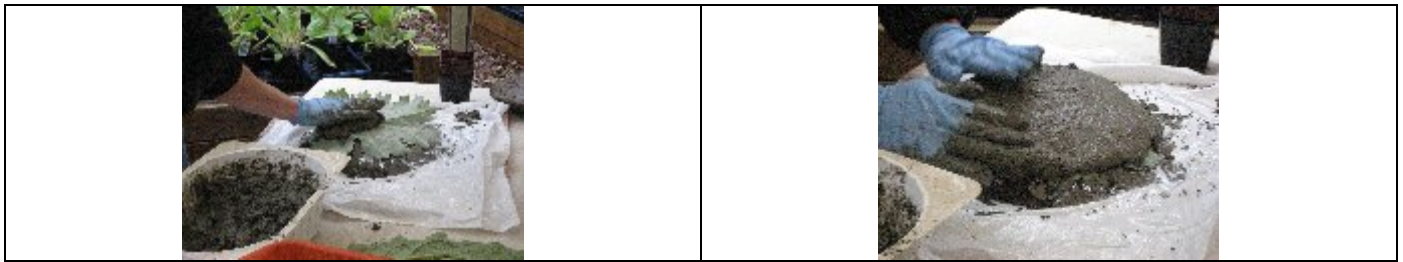
**Step one**—On a flat surface or a piece of plywood, mound sand into a dome to support the leaf and form the bowl of the birdbath. You'll need enough sand for the entire leaf to rest on, plus a couple of inches around the edge to spare. Use play sand or a finer sand with little gravel. The sand pile will support the concrete-covered leaf and create the shallow depression that holds the water. Cover the dome with plastic wrap to keep the sand from sticking to any concrete that might leak through a hole or run over the edge of the leaf. If you do not mind the sand, skip the plastic wrap.

**Step two**—Lay the leaf face down on top of the sand mound. Cut the stem off close to the base of the leaf. Make sure the sand extends a couple of inches past the leaf edges. If the leaf you want to use has a hole in it, no problem. Just cut a piece from a different leaf and make a patch.

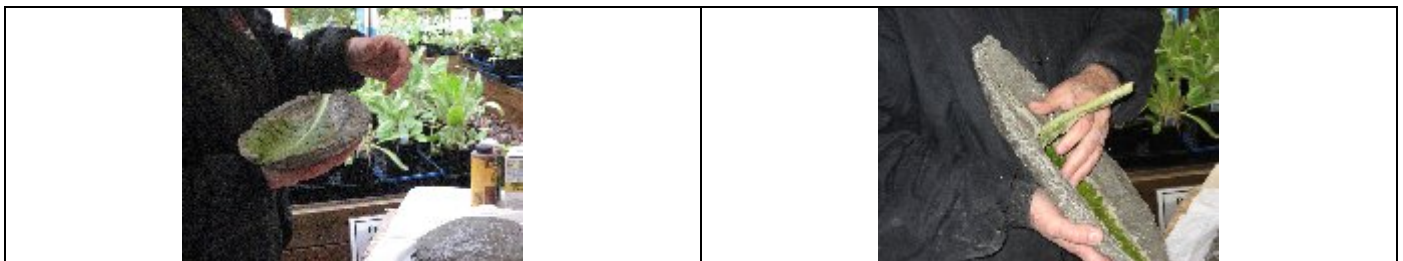
**Step three**—Mix the concrete and sand together dry, **use 1 part cement to 3 parts sand**. Pour the dry concrete mix into a plastic bucket or wheelbarrow. Add concrete reinforcing fibers to water before mixing with concrete. Slowly add water until the mixture is the consistency of a thick brownie mix. It should be thick enough that it won't run off the leaf but not so thick that it can't be moved around easily.

**Step four**—Scoop some of the concrete mix onto the center of the leaf and begin working it toward the outer edges. It's a little like spreading out pizza dough. Try to keep an even thickness as you work the cement to the edges of the leaf; add more concrete if you need to. The big veins that run down the middle of leaves need plenty of concrete to cover them so be generous there. The thickness depends on

your personal preference, but thicker is better for durability. Once you have the leaf covered with concrete, a hook can be added to the back for hanging if you want. Cover the whole thing with plastic wrap or a garbage bag so it dries slowly and does not crack. If it's hot outdoors or you're working in full sun, a piece of moist burlap on top will help it dry evenly. There are many conditions that influence how long it takes concrete to dry. It will generally be ready for handling in 48 hours.



**Step five**—When the leaf has dried, but before you let it cure, carefully turn it over. Your leaf will need support when turning, do not hold it around the edges at this point, as it is the most likely part to break off as you pick it up. Have a friend help you turn it over so you can distribute the pressure more evenly. Now you can pull off the plastic wrap, if you used it, and start peeling away the leaf. If some of the stem still does not come out, just leave them for a few days, they'll dry out and be easier to pull. Even though the birdbath can be handled, the concrete needs to cure for about two weeks to come to full strength. It's important not to let water sit in the birdbath until curing is complete. Once cured, use a metal file to smooth any rough spots or edges.



**Step six**—To use your leaf as it is, just add a coat of concrete sealer, such as Thompson's® Water Seal® or Drylock®, to protect it from the weather. If you want to paint the leaf, acrylic paint from a craft store works well. Start with your darkest color and use it as a wash by thinning the paint with water to make it run over the entire surface of the concrete, making sure all the veins are filled in completely. Let it dry, then begin adding other colors, but keep this paint thicker so it will not wash into the veining. It dries quickly and you can begin another coat almost as soon as you finish the first. The concrete might have run over the edge of the leaf onto the plastic wrap or sand in places, which created a border around the actual shape of the leaf. So when you paint, follow that edge to contrast between the impression and concrete or you can paint right up to the edge, if you'd prefer. However you decide to decorate your leaf, be sure to seal it with a coat or two of concrete sealer or, for a shiny surface, exterior polyurethane, which will help preserve the color and protect the concrete. Bring inside in winter or flip upside down so water does not collect in bowl.

