

HOW TO MAKE CONCRETE GARDEN ORNAMENTS



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INTRODUCTION

Concrete Garden Ornaments... let's be honest, we all love them! From a typical garden gnome to a graceful Roman statue, there is a huge range of different garden ornaments that somebody will love and want to have in their garden.

I'm guessing you've downloaded this guide because you're curious to how people actually make them? Or maybe you're looking for a new business venture in your spare time? Or you could be just looking for a new hobby? Whatever it may be, this guide is here to give you all the essential information you could possibly need to get you on your way to making your very own concrete garden ornaments!

I have found that there is a lot of information on how to make them on the internet, but it is very misleading and complicated. I believe what works for one person doesn't always necessary work for another. So I've decided I want to cut out all of the nonsense and try and give you the most reliable information possible to make your project stress free and simple, without you having to make too many mistakes.

Thank you for downloading this guide, I wish you all the best with your garden ornament venture.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

MOULDS

Moulds may just be the most important part of your project, there are hundreds of different designs out there to choose from, such as Planters, bird baths, animals, wall plaques, statues, benches and lots more. It's totally up to you which designs you want to choose depending on your project and goals, but personally I would recommend experimenting with the smaller designs first if your new to making concrete ornaments. Larger moulds can be quite expensive at first, you don't want to be putting a lot of money into a large mould before you've even mastered how to cast ornaments confidently.

This guide is based around using a latex mould with a fibreglass support case, which is a very common type of mould. You may be aware of people using latex moulds without the fibreglass support cases, although this is a cheaper method this is something I am not going to recommend in this guide. From my experience it isn't productive and time effective enough, and will not produce quality ornaments time after time as it will cause imperfections and cause the ornament to be out of shape, that is why I only recommend using moulds with a fibreglass case supplied.

I have found that Brightstone Moulds are by far the best quality mould makers in the industry. You can find them by simply searching Brightstone Moulds on Google or Ebay.

CEMENT MIXER

I recommend you use a cement mixer, this will give you the best possible concrete consistency & save a lot of manual labour. If you're on a budget then you can easily find a second hand cement mixer on various selling websites, or you could ask around your friends and family? I have known people to mix there concrete in a wheelbarrow, but this is something I don't recommend, this will only add unnecessary time, and more labour intensive work to the job and this probably won't give you a good strong concrete mix.

VIBRATING TABLE

A vibrating table is very important, the idea behind it is to vibrate the air bubbles in the concrete out and away from the surface of the ornament to give you the best possible finished product. You can purchase second hand ones from various selling websites or you could even have a go at making one yourself.

There is lots of info on the internet that will help you do this or ask around friends and family again. Although, with the smaller moulds, you may be able to reduce some air bubbles by tapping the sides of the fibreglass mould using a rubber mallet and shaking the mould slightly when filling it, but I don't recommend relying on this method if you plan on making a lot of quality ornaments.

(Air holes in the surface may decrease their quality and price)

BALLAST

Ballast is what we are going to use to make our concrete, it is a mix of stone and sand, it is blended together to give more strength to the concrete. I found it to be by far the most simple and easy way of making concrete. You will mix this together with cement to produce concrete. I recommend using 10mm ballast for a good strong mix. You can buy this in single 25kg bags from any builders merchant. Or you can also buy 1 tonne bags of ballast, which can be more cost effective if you plan on making a lot of ornaments.

CEMENT

You will be mixing this with the ballast to create your concrete, Cement comes in many different shades of grey, you will find that most builder's merchants sell different brands, I recommend using any standard cement, but I would try your best to use the same cement throughout your project, as using different brands of cement may vary the colour of your finished product. You will need to keep your bags of cement under cover and away from the rain and damp areas.

SHOVEL

You will need your shovel to load your cement mixer with your ballast and cement. It may also come in handy when cleaning your work area.

JUG

You will need a jug when you scoop your concrete out of your mixer and into your moulds, I recommend using a more heavy duty jug, as the weight of the concrete may crack or break your jug over time.

RASP

A rasp or heavy duty file will be used to smooth the concrete at the base of your ornament once you have removed it from the mould.

TROWEL

A small trowel can be used to level the concrete once you have filled the mould.

WATER

Water will be used to mix your ballast and cement, it will also come in handy when cleaning your tools and work area.

STEP ONE MIXING YOUR CONCRETE

Once you have gathered all of the essential tools for the job we can move on to the fun part!

Firstly, the idea behind the perfect concrete mix for making garden ornaments is the consistency, If the concrete doesn't have the right amount of water in it, it will be too stiff to pour easily into the mould and won't form a perfect cast as the concrete will struggle to move freely into the small details in the design which form air holes. Secondly the most ideal scenario is that you want to be able to strip concrete from the mould within 24 hours without compromising the strength and quality of the concrete. Time can be a very important factor when manufacturing concrete, because the sooner you are able to strip the concrete out of the mould, the more ornaments you can potentially make in the shortest period of time.

The temperature also plays an important role in the drying time of your concrete, I recommend casting your ornaments in doors and away from the elements, so drying time isn't compromised. If this isn't possible then try to keep them sheltered from the rain and from direct sun light as sunlight will damage and cause the latex mould to perish more quickly.

There are a lot of different ways that people can mix concrete, but we are going to use what I have found to be the most simple & reliable.

I found that a **3:1** mix worked very well, because it is strong and should dry within a 24hour time frame.

I have known people to use, **2:1** or even **5:1**, but remember there are a lot of different factors that suit different people's projects. (E.g. Temperature, type of cement.)

WHAT DOES 3:1 MEAN??

STEP ONE MIXING YOUR CONCRETE

3:1 refers to the amount of ballast and cement used together to make your mix.

So your mix should consist of 3 parts ballast to 1 partS cement.

Depending on the amount of moulds you are filling will depend on the amount of ballast and cement you need to mix at one time. I recommend practising with

1 or 2 moulds at first before moving on to filling more moulds in one go.

You need to know you are confident with getting the right mix correct before mixing larger amounts. When you are ready to increase the size of your mix all you need to do is increase the size of the ratios you used before,

For example

$$\mathbf{3:1 \times 2 = 6:2}$$

(6 Shovels of ballast & 2 shovels of cement)

$$\mathbf{3:1 \times 3 = 9:3}$$

(9 Shovels of ballast & 3 shovels of cement.)

It's that simple.

STEP ONE MIXING YOUR CONCRETE

When you are confident and feel ready to start mixing your concrete it's now time to load your cement mixer with the ballast and cement. I recommend loading your mixer with the ballast first and then the cement, this stops the cement from sticking to the sides of the mixer.

Turn on your mixer and load it with 3 heaped shovels of ballast, (or which ever size mix you want to use) then add 1 heaped shovel load of cement, let it mix around until both materials have bonded together. Once it has mixed together, you will need to add water.

The amount of water is very important so take care when adding water for the first time, the ideal consistency of the mix should be runny & creamy, and it should glide smoothly around the cement mixer. Keep adding a sensible amount of water at a time until you find the right consistency. Remember it is important to practice with a smaller amount of concrete because adding too much water will cause the mix to be weak and wont dry quick enough, also this will be a waste of materials. If it is too thick it will create lots of air holes in your ornament.

Once you are happy with your mix you are now ready to fill your moulds...

STEP TWO FILLING YOUR MOULDS

When filling your moulds it is a good idea to place your cement mixer close enough to your vibrating table to make filling of the moulds as time effective and easy as possible.

Turn on your vibrating table with your desired mould ready to fill.

Place your mould on the vibrating table, for safety reasons you may want to turn your cement mixer off when reaching in with your jug.

You should fill your mould gradually as it is vibrating, to reduce air bubbles from the bottom of the mould.

As you gradually fill the mould its a good idea to shake and tap the mould against the table.

You should only need to vibrate your mould no more than 20 seconds after you have completely filled it, you should by this time be able see the air bubbles rising to the surface of the concrete.

Once you have completely filled the mould the idea is to be able to prop them up straight so that the ornament sets nice and flat when drying, you may want to use your trowel to help do this but make sure you mould is in a stable position first. I have known some people make their own racking systems for holding multiple moulds, but some people prop them against a wall if the shape of the mould will let them or you can bed them in pits of sand. You won't know at first what works best for you until you try different different methods.

(You may need some assistance moving your moulds depending on the size, as the moulds quickly become heavy when full)

STEP THREE STRIPPING YOUR MOULDS

Your ornament should be ready to remove from the mould within 24 hours, Check that the ornament feels dry enough to strip, a good indicator of this is that you should barley be able to mark the concrete with your finger. If it isn't dry enough, there's a chance you may break the ornament when peeling the latex from the ornament.

Carefully remove the fibreglass sections from the mould, take care with detailed and thinner parts of an ornament as the concrete might not be strong enough to take any unnecessary force or pressure.

You will now need to lightly smother the latex in washing up liquid, this will help release the latex from the ornament and stop it from sticking to itself. You can add water to the washing up liquid to make it last longer.

Carefully peel the latex from the ornament, remember to take care with thinner and more detailed areas.

Once you have removed the latex you will notice that the base of the ornament may have a small amount of sharp over-hanging concrete at the base, you will need to use your rasp to carefully smooth the edges to get an even finish at the base of your ornament. The concrete should be soft enough at this time to easily remove any unwanted concrete. The longer you leave it the harder it will be to remove, so try and do it as soon as you remove it from the mould.

YOU'RE ALMOST FINISHED

You should now have your very own garden ornament.

It's now a good idea to put your ornament in a dry place to let continue to dry thoroughly. Concrete may take up to several days to completely cure and will continue to get stronger over this time.

There are lots of different websites you can sell your ornaments on such as

Ebay
Gumtree
Preloved
Etsy

Also you can sell your ornaments at :

Garden Centres
Craft Fairs
Carboots
Jumble Sales

Caring for your latex moulds

After some time it is a good idea to clean your latex moulds to retain their quality, over time latex will begin to perish, so it is important to look after them as best you can, always remember to keep them away from direct sunlight. Eventually you may notice a build of unwanted concrete in and around the latex, You can simply clean them patio cleaner or brick acid, it will not harm the latex. You simply submerge your latex into the patio cleaner for around 5-10 minutes, carefully remove the latex and make sure you wear gloves and protective goggles to avoid contact with your skin and eyes from the patio cleaner. Rinse the latex with clean water to remove the patio cleaner, you should wipe the latex with a cloth to help it dry and remove any further imperfections. Leave the latex to dry thoroughly until you are happy it is completely dry before you decide to cast in it again. If the latex is still damp on the inside, .