

Fine Gardening Project Guides

# Container Gardening

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## Make Your Own Hypertufa Container

Hypertufa looks like stone but weighs less and takes whatever shape you want



By [Michelle Gervais](#) | [Fine Gardening - Issue 98](#)

Containers made from [hypertufa](#) are wonderful for displaying [rock-garden](#) plants or [succulents](#). Over time, the hypertufa ages gracefully, collecting a patina of mosses and lichens. In this article you will find the recipe and instructions for making hypertufa.

The process I use to mold containers is much simpler than the usual box-in-box method that sandwiches hypertufa and some metal mesh in a frame. Instead, I simply pack hypertufa around an overturned plastic pot or planter. And because it's so easy to work with, hypertufa can be molded into many sizes and shapes.

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## Supplies

- mixing tub
- container for measuring
- peat moss
- perlite
- portland cement
- concrete reinforcing fibers
- dust mask
- rubber gloves
- trowel
- plastic drop cloth
- plastic container for a mold
- wire brush

## The recipe

- 1 part portland cement
- 1½ parts sphagnum peat moss
- 1½ parts perlite

To add strength, I add a small handful of fibermesh, a synthetic concrete reinforcing fiber, to each batch, which is easier to work with than sheets of wire mesh embedded in the hypertufa. You can find fibermesh at masonry-supply stores or online.

## Step 1



**Measure and mix** the peat moss, perlite, cement, and a small handful of reinforcing fibers in your tub. You'll kick up plenty of dust at this stage, so be sure to wear your dust mask.

- **Add** the water while stirring with your trowel. Test the consistency frequently, as it's much easier to add water than it is to readjust the dry ingredients. When a squeezed handful retains its shape and doesn't release more than a few drops of water, the mix is ready.

## Step 2



**Mold** the mixture around the chosen object, which has been placed upside down on the plastic drop cloth. Avoid objects with a pronounced lip, since it would make the object difficult to remove from the finished container.

- **Pack** the mixture up around the sides of the object, tamping it down firmly to bond the hypertufa to itself and to avoid a crumbly texture. A 1- to 2-inch layer on all sides will create strong walls.
- **Flatten** the intended bottom of the completely covered object for stability, and shape the sides to a desired form. Then poke your finger through the bottom to create a drainage hole.



## Step 3



**Wrap** the container in the plastic sheeting, and place it in a shady spot for about a day to let it harden.

## Step 4



**Remove** the wrapping after the hypertufa has had a day to harden. The mixture will be firm but still soft enough to work with. Turn the container over, and remove the mold.

- **Brush** the sharp edges and the smooth top, if desired, to give a rougher, more natural look to the container.



## Step 5



**Rewrap** your container, and place it in a shady place for another two days. Then unwrap it, and soak it with a hose periodically over the period of a few weeks to leach out the residual lime from the cement, which would harm plants.

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*Photo: Michelle Gervais*

## Design tip

To dress up your container, place evergreen sprigs or thick leaves around the rim of the mold before you start building the sides of your container. Lift them gently from the rim when you remove the mold.

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*Michelle Gervais is an assistant editor.*

*All photos, except where noted: Steve Aitken*

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