

# Fall Is Time For Fun

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or just let us know what you enjoy most about the plants and people who grow them. Contact [news@yankton.net](mailto:news@yankton.net)  
Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Janette Marker of the Yankton area has researched and made several hypertufa pots of peat moss, Perlite, and Portland cement for which she shares instructions. Hypertufa containers have an organic appearance and may be used for plants or to hold objects such as pinecones. As you see here, thickness of container and shape are open to personal preference once stability is achieved.

## Hypertufas — A Great Autumn Project

BY JANETTE MARKER

Did you like making mud pies as a youngster? If so, you may enjoy making a hypertufa pot to hold plants or objects. Hypertufa resembles porous volcanic rock and is made from materials bonded together. It can be formed into various shapes.

Fall is a terrific time to try a hypertufa project. I would recommend doing this project outside since it can be fairly messy. It may take a few hours to make several pots, and the curing (drying) time can take a few weeks. Best drying is done in daytime temperatures above 50 degrees F, or indoors. Your finished hypertufa pots can be used to display pinecones in winter and flowers next spring.

Choose the shape of the hypertufa from containers around your house that will become the form or mold for the hypertufa. Consider using plastic for your mold, such as a Rubbermaid container, plastic nursery pot, or plastic dishwashing pan. The smoother the inside of the container, the better the hypertufa will release from the form.

Internet hypertufa recipes vary, but I have tried using equal parts of these three ingredients: peat moss, Perlite, and Portland cement (not quick drying cement). In gathering your materials, Perlite and peat can usually be found in a store carrying gardening supplies. Portland cement is a little harder to find, and unfortunately comes in large, heavy bags. I found Portland cement at Menards. Read over instructions before you begin.

### Items you'll need:

Large mixing tub (wheelbarrow works well)  
Container for measuring equal amounts of your three ingredients  
Peat moss  
Perlite (or Vermiculite)  
Portland cement  
Dust mask  
Rubber gloves  
Safety glasses  
Old clothes

Trowel or hoe  
Plastic drop cloth  
Container(s) form or mold  
Cooking spray  
Watering pitcher, or nearby garden hose  
Trash bags with secure way to tie tightly

**Night Before Tip:** Sift through the peat moss, removing large sticks. Add water and stir for moist but not wet consistency. Cover peat moss with plastic and let it set until the next day.

### Step 1: Mix materials.

Wear eye protection, dust mask, rubber gloves, and old clothes. Project is best done outside, as it can be messy...back to the mud pie theme. Mix equal parts of Portland cement, peat moss, and perlite in a large tub or wheelbarrow with a garden trowel or hoe. Mix thoroughly. Add water gradually. The amounts to mix will depend on how many pots you make. Use your gloved hands to obtain a mixture similar to brownie batter. Let the mixture set about 10 minutes to make sure ingredients absorb water. You may need to add more water to keep mixture at the right consistency.

### Step 2: Form your hypertufa pot.

Make certain the plastic forms are clean and dry. Spray with cooking spray. Add hypertufa mixture to the bottom of the plastic form. (How much hypertufa mixture on the bottom depends upon the size of the form you have chosen; at least 3/4 inch for a small pot and 1-2 inches for large pot.) Press mixture firmly into bottom of form. Add mixture to sides of the form (at least 1 inch thickness), pressing firmly as you go. Take care to make the top edge look uniform (if desired), maybe adding a little extra mixture around the top edge. Make sure mixture is firmly pressed on all sides. Use a round dowel or PVC pipe to make 2 or 3 holes in the bottom of the pot for water drainage.

**Step 3: Cure slightly and then unmold your hypertufa pot.**

Place your hypertufa project in a plastic trash

bag, and tie securely to keep moisture inside. Leave the project in the bag for 48 hours in a shady spot, or inside if the weather is very hot or below 50 degrees. Carefully remove your hypertufa pot from the plastic mold. Using a wire or stiff bristled brush, rough up the outsides of the pot until you are satisfied with the look. Be gentle with the pot as it is still in a green stage. Lightly mist the hypertufa pot with water and place it back in the plastic bag, tying securely.

**Step 4: Hypertufa is ready for final curing and rinsing before use.**

Leave the hypertufa pot in the plastic trash bag for about 14 days. (Open the bag and mist the pot with water every couple of days if in a hot area.) Remove the hypertufa from the plastic bag after 14 days and let it sit outdoors to dry for a couple more weeks if temperatures are above 50 degrees F. If temperature is cool (falling below 50), cure the pot indoors. Rain or watering with a garden hose will neutralize the alkaline nature of the cement in your planter. Be careful not to let the container drain into your garden or lawn while rinsing. Best to rinse on gravel or rock area. This should be done a few times before planting.

Optional large trough version can be done in-ground. If you use the ground as your mold, find an out-of-the-way area. Dig a hole in the ground shaping it round, oval or square, 10 or 12 inches deep or more. Take care to make the bottom of the hole fairly level. Place a sheet of plastic such as a cut open trash bag in the hole. Spray with cooking spray. The plastic will protect your mixture from adhering to the soil. Prepare mixture and build it up on the bottom and walls of your hole about 2 inches thick. When mixture hardens after curing (about 2 weeks) you will be able to pick up the plastic and tear it away from your trough. Remember to rinse hypertufa with a garden hose before planting those pretty flowers!

## Dibbles & Bits

• The 2013 American Garden Awards for flowering annuals were chosen by breeders across the country and were voted on by the American public. Consider to Google these names for photos for your garden next year. 1) Verbena 'Lanal Candy Cane' was chosen for its flower pattern and superior weather tolerance. 2) Zinnia 'Zahara Cherry' blooms all season in landscape beds or containers and is disease resistant and drought tolerant. 3) Impatiens 'Sun-Patiens Compact Electric Orange' was selected for its orange blossoms and grows well in garden and containers, sun or shade. More information on All-America Selections of vegetables and flowers that are independently tested around the country for superior home gardens: [www.all-america-selections.org](http://www.all-america-selections.org)

• South Dakota Extension (SDSU) website has some topics of interest in the gardening section: 1) Why are leaves turning color early? Dr. John Ball, state forester comments on environmental reasons and insect and squirrel damage. 2) What is the predicted first fall frost date? For Yankton County the date over time has been between September 24th and 30th. More topics at <http://igrow.org/gardens/garden-ing/>

• When grouping outdoor or indoor plants, textured leaves are eye-catching. Placing one kind of eye catching textured leaf plants in a group makes a focal point. Restraint holds the focus. Large or intricately textured leaves tend to draw the viewer closer, which makes the space feel personal or intentional. Tropical plants can remind us of vacation warmth in winter. More of these ideas can be found in July / August Horticulture magazine.

## Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

This blog is an interactive site for people of our USDA Zone 4-5a region to exchange ideas about plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed or share a comment about plants?

• Area gardeners share tips to make gardening easier, attract birds, enjoy beneficial bugs, and make trellises for flowers.  
• For what's blooming around the United States and elsewhere see "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" September 15th link.  
• See local nursery agave in bloom after 35 years.  
• How does a local gardener raise Mason bees to increase fruit tree pollination?  
Check our blog at: [www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com](http://www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com)

## Nurseryman Shares About Spare Time With Plants

Jay Gurney of Yankton Nurseries works all day in some aspect of his plant business. Because of his innate curiosity with plants, we see how he dabbles with plants for fun.

He's a fan of succulents, cacti, and cactus-like plants. He points out that these plants are different from many annuals, perennials, grasses, and trees around us.

"Succulents, cacti, and cactus-like plants grab water the day you water, and in nature, are not around water until the next rain. Rain is seasonal and sparse where these plants are found naturally. This characteristic influences their growth and care needs as houseplants."

### HOW THEY DIFFER

Pencil cactus shows differences to other plants. It's a cactus relative with milky sap that grows in well-drained, almost dry soil. Jay waters it infrequently, but more in summer because that's when the pencil cactus grows. It has grown in a back greenhouse for twenty years or more. With his pruning technique over time, he has trained the houseplant into a ten-foot tree.

Then he shows another way many succulents, cacti, and cactus-like plants differ from other plants. "See the small pot this cactus grows in," he said. "The roots weigh about five pounds and the rest of the plant weighs about forty pounds. This proportion of the plant above ground is much greater than its roots." Small volume of pencil cactus roots is the opposite of native grass, for example, which has a great volume of roots to green grass.

Succulents, cacti, and cactus-like plants differ in how they take in some of their moisture and nutrients as they adapt to near desert natural environment. Modified stems and leaves take on some functions of roots such as the succulent jade plant. "People call the plant 'top heavy'," he said. It has proportionally more plant above ground. "Most people don't trim their jade plant. I cut off the ends of the plant. That causes the stems to branch and makes them fuller. It thickens the main trunk."

He uses the different water requirements of weeds than succulents to address a common nursery problem, weeds in pots. He points to dead weeds on the soil in succulent containers. "These weeds need moist soil to grow. Succulents don't."

### CACTI FROM SEED

Gurney has a tray of small cacti he had started from a pack of seed. "You keep the soil moist while they are sprouting. When I sowed them I sprinkled cactus seed on the on soil and didn't cover them. I kept the soil moist about five - seven days until sprouts appeared. Then on, I watered only when the soil is dry. They get thorough watering. Water drains through and [cacti] don't set in water. Cacti also need full sun or as much as possible to look good. Jay suggests placing them on a windowsill or bay window in winter. [In summer] cacti respond well to being placed outdoors in full sun in the hottest conditions we have."

Cacti grow from seed but don't generally grow well from cuttings, according to Jay.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Many succulents can be propagated. Jay breaks off a piece, waits for the wound to heal, and then plants it. Note the roots are already forming.

"Some have offspring that you can harvest [to plant]."

### SUCCULENT CUTTINGS

Succulents often grow from

cuttings. "You make a cutting but don't plant it for a few days. The wound needs to heal like a scab on a cut. When you plant it roots will form." He keeps soil

moist until roots form and from then on only waters when soil is dry.

"You can take succulent cuttings any time of year, but it's tough in winter due to lack of sun intensity and low temperatures." Jay has a large collection of stock succulents and harvests cuttings to grow plants. "Baby toes are hard to grow and easy to overwater," he said.

"The potting medium I use for cacti and succulents is the same I use for a tree, a rosebush, or petunia," he said. "It's a loose, porous medium. You can provide a little fertilizer when you water. A sign of too much water is when you see green algae on the soil."

For care of cacti, succulents, and cactus-like plants as houseplants, Gurney stresses that the soil is dry before watering and then to water until water drains out the bottom of the pot.

"They tend to grow in summer and not much in winter. In summer, you water them a little more and less in winter."

Dish gardens that contain several succulents and cacti are popular. "You can take them outdoors in summer in full sun. When you bring the dish indoors, find a sunny window and consider watering as little as once a month," he said.

In a spare moment, Gurney surveys a marine aquarium that now houses a miniature garden at his nursery store. "My son Michael and daughter Emily found moss, various small plants including cacti and succulents, and other natural materials to build the miniature garden. Basswood becomes a small tree in the garden and stones add color and texture. Sometimes a clay fairy surveys the garden at the end of a busy day."

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