KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Hypertufa”

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Tufa is a kind of natural limestone used through the ages for structural foundations and buildings. In early English history, tufa was carved out and made into livestock troughs. By the 1800’s, new materials made tufa troughs outdated and so the tufa trough became a planting container in the English cottage garden. Plantings of flowers, vegetable, and herbs made their way into the tufa trough. Think of those well-worn troughs in, “The Secret Garden” or “Pride and Prejudice.”

Today hypertufa, not tufa, stone is used to make those planting containers of old.

Hypertufa! Hypertufa! Just what is hypertufa? Hypertufa is a man-made porous rock that YOU can mix up and make into a relatively inexpensive garden container when you are in the mood for a DIY project… AND in need of another planter because you had too much fun at the garden nursery! Hypertufa looks like rock, can be cast into almost any shape, is very light weight and can withstand a bit of our Central Oregon freeze and thaw.

There are many recipes for hypertufa with the basic ingredients of Portland cement, vermiculite, perlite, water and fibers. Portland Cement?! Well, this nilly did not know that “Portland cement was invented in England in 1824 by burning finely ground chalk with finely divided clay in a lime kiln until carbon dioxide was driven off.” “The product was then ground and named after the high-quality stones quarried at Portland, England.”

Not Portland, Oregon. Sheesh!

With hypertufa you are only limited by your imagination. Big planter boxes, small pots, big pots, a graduated line of pots, or perhaps no pot… but a bird bath, or a turtle to enhance the hardscape in your garden.

Do not substitute concrete for Portland cement. Portland cement is an ingredient in concrete but is not interchangeable in most recipes. Some recipes will suggest using reinforcement fibers to add extra strength and it is a good idea to do so. A sad outcome it would be to design and make your first pot only to have it fall apart at the first sight of rain.

Using a large plastic container and wearing rubber gloves, combine equal parts of your recipe ingredients. Gradually add water and mix with your gloved hands until you can make mud pies. The mixture should hold together but should not drip with water. You are now ready to begin molding your creation.

Molds can be made from anything: a box, an old container, or a bowl. By lining it with plastic wrap you can keep the hypertufa from sticking to your mold. I used a cardboard box and with my hands, I shaped the mixture to the outside of my mold. Another time I made hypertufa pots, I used a square box, partially filled it with hypertufa, then place a second smaller box inside my bigger box. I filled in around the inner box to give thick walls to my hypertufa creation. Do remember to add drainage holes to the bottom of your creation if you are using as a pot for planting. Decorating the outside with a press of leaves, pine needles, and pinecones dressed out my new pot with added design.

The pot should dry and harden for about a week, then taken off the mold and set in the shade to cure for another 3 weeks. Before planting in your new planter, fill it with water and let the water drain and leach out the alkali in the Portland cement. Your project is ready for planting and is sure to find the perfect new home in your garden or back deck.

What a way to break into summer!

For recipes and more information about hypertufa and other gardening topics visit our website at [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click the KPOV tab on the orange bar. Thanks for listening to “Gardening- Get Good at it!” on KPOV, The Point.

Resources

“What is tufa? History of Architecture”

<https://quatr.us/architecture/tufa-history-architecture.htm>

“Making Hypertufa Pots”

<https://easttexasgardening.tamu.edu/2014/07/27/making-hypertufa-pots/>

Make your own Hypertufa Container

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/lincoln/sites/default/files/hypertufa_container.pdf>

Use hypertufa to make container that look like stone

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/lincoln/sites/default/files/hypertufa_container.pdf>

Hypertufa Recipes

<http://www.thehypertufagardener.com/the-procedure/recipes/>