

# Paper Casting



## A way to recycle old newspapers

Traditional papier mache was a technique that used well-mashed paper pulp pressed into a mould. What is now known as papier mache is actually the process of sticking torn-up pieces of paper to a mould. To distinguish the two processes, the older method is usually called paper casting today.

All sorts of paper can be used for paper casting, but I have found old newspaper suits me.

1. Tear the paper into small pieces.
2. Place in an old saucepan with a good covering of water over a gentle heat. You will probably need to add more water later.
3. Using an old wooden spoon or piece of wood, start mashing the paper. As the paper soaks up more and more water it will start to disintegrate and expand.
4. Check the consistency of the mash and add more liquid if it appears to be drying out. A 20cm pan can take over a litre of water.
5. When the mash looks well broken down, so that it is difficult to make out individual bits of paper, pour it into a suitable storage container to cool down. I use an old 5-litre paint bucket. Do not be tempted to make too much and store away for future projects, as I have found that the paper pulp gets very smelly after a week or so. I have found that plastic moulds are best, as they release the dried paper shape most easily and I have made my own for my model building designs. I suspect jelly moulds might work, and it is worthwhile looking out for any interesting shapes among old plastic packaging, as long as the intended 'mould' is sturdy enough. Vacuum formed shapes are very good, as they are normally intended for viewing on one side, and the reverse side makes a good mould. The mash can hold a lot of water, so it is a good idea to place the mould on a shallow container such as a tray to catch any that drains off while you work.
6. Using your hands gather a loose ball of mash and press it into the mould. This is really tactile and fun, as you get the feel without the mess of other casting materials.
7. Continue to fill the mould, and start pressing down to remove excess water (this is why your mould needs to be sturdy!), and also to get the mash into the finer details of the mould.
8. When you are happy with the thickness of the mash and it has filled every crevice in your mould, you can place the mould on its tray in a warm place such as an airing cupboard, and leave to dry.
9. Drying time varies depending on the thickness of your paper pulp, but I have found that after a couple of days it is possible to remove the casting from the mould if you are **very careful**. You can now turn it upside down on the tray and place back in the cupboard. At this stage it could be placed on a metal tray and put into an oven on a very low setting to speed up the drying process (see below).
10. Once the item has dried out completely you can remove it from the tray, and you will be amazed at just how light it is. What you do then is up to you. I tend to paint on a thin coat of light-coloured emulsion to seal the paper before painting properly. I have also tried creating small less detailed items which can be shaped in a mould, taken out while still damp, and then placed in a very low oven for at least 2–3 hours to dry out. I am not so keen on the baked effect, and you may have to beware of warping on very thinly moulded items, but at least you don't have to wait a week.

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## Additional notes

I don't add glues to my paper pulp mixes; I've not yet found any need unless I want to apply paper pulp (mash) to the outside of a model or casting to help it to stick. If you wanted to try it you could begin by using small amounts of PVA (non-washable) or even wallpaper paste, and you'd need to experiment to find the right ratios to suit your needs but beware of adding too much! Do remember that wallpaper paste contains fungicides. I don't grease or use any releasing agents on my moulds either as plastic moulds usually release the casting quite easily. You might want to consider it, however, if your casting is going to be very complex and detailed, or the mould you've found isn't plastic and you have concerns about getting the casting out. Another method would be to line your mould with something like a single layer of clingfilm or foil (neither of which is very environmentally friendly!). The choice is yours.

There's a lot of fun in experimenting!