

# Being [with] Trees: Mold-Making and Casting From Nature

📷 [@beingwithtrees](#)

## Art in Nature Series

*Barrington Land Conservation Trust X Kendall Reiss*

### Date, Time, Location:

Saturday, October 19, 2024 | 9am – 12pm | Sowams Woods, Barrington, RI



Photos of Sowams Woods by Kendall Reiss on August 5, 2024

### Workshop Description:

With their ability to sequester carbon and provide clean water, forests are integral to understand earth's climate and cultivate sustainable (eco)systems. Among indigenous tree-species reforestation efforts in Porto, Portugal, networks of old growth forest throughout the Southern Appalachian region of the United States, pine-esker forests of Punkaharju, Finland, and an indigenous tulip tree elder in her hometown of Bristol, R.I., artist Kendall Reiss locates sites of artistic engagement and field research. Her work takes many forms, jewelry, objects, conversations, writings, rituals, exhibits, shared understandings, community workshops; all mycelial threads that support an ongoing collaboration in which trees are participants in artistic creation and biologic exchange.

Join Kendall and the Barrington Land Conservation Trust at Sowams Woods for a Being [with] Trees community workshop. Following a short introduction, workshop participants will work with two different types of alginate mold making material to produce molds from the trees, rocks, pinecones, and natural materials found among the Sowams Woods. From these molds, participants will cast objects & wearables in concrete.

### History of Sowams Woods & The Pokanoket:

From the [Barrington Land Conservation Website](#)

*Sowams Woods is part of the ancestral lands of the Pokanoket people, which covered all of the East Bay and parts of Seekonk, Swansea and Rehoboth. In Pokanoket, the word "Sowams" refers to the southern section of their homeland. The Pokanoket people of today played an essential role in preserving Sowams Woods, which they consider a sacred area. The seven colors of the trails represent the colors of the Pokanoket's Rainbow Shield. The Pokanoket people have long been environmental stewards who believe in respecting the creations of the Earth and in the value of their connection to the land.*

Further Resources on The Pokanoket Tribal Nation & Sowams Region:

- Pokanoket Nation Website: <https://pokanokettribe.com/>
- Sowams Heritage Area Website: <https://sowams.org/>

### **Workshop Prompt:**

Meander your way through the Sowams Woods. As you move through the landscape, take notice of the trees among you. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Find one particular tree being whom you'd like to get to know better. Maybe move closer to this tree. What do you notice? What textures, patterns, marks do you see on the surface of the trees bark? What does the architecture of the trees branches look like? Upright, weeping? Introduce yourself. Share gratitude. Perhaps place your hand or body gently against the tree's trunk. What do you feel? Ask for permission. Ask the tree if you might sit a while together. Listen for the answer. Write things down. Sketch. Breathe. Commune. After a little while, ask if you might collaborate with this tree being. Listen for the answer. Look up and look down. Are there any bark, seeds, branches, or other tree materials on the ground around the tree? Rocks? Other detritus? If yes, ask if you might collect it. Listen for the answer. These materials can be used to make molds, too. Or, perhaps ask if you might make a mold directly on the trees trunk. Listen for the answer. Share gratitude. Make an offering. Be kind.

### **Step-by-Step Mold Making Instructions:**

Below, you will find step-by-step instructions for making alginate molds and casting concrete objects in alginate. Alginate, a mold-making material derived from algal seaweed, is commonly used in body casting processes, as it is a safe, hazard free option. Alginate molds dry out in about a dozen casts or about 24 hours, so go for it until the material begins to dehydrate. You'll see a visible change in the material.

### **Steps (for Alginate): [Alja-Safe](#)**

Step 1 – Choose an appropriately sized vessel for your mold. Remember the more space, the more material!

Step 2 – Measure out equal parts of alginate & water. With warm water the alginate will set-up faster. Colder water will prolong the set-up of your mold.

Step 3 – Mix the alginate & water together to make your mold.

Step 4 – Plunge the object you wish to cast into the alginate mold and keep it still. Allow the alginate to harden; this will take a few minutes. Use a finger to feel the material to help you determine when it's fully set-up.

Step 5 – Once the material is set up, wriggle your object out of the alginate mold carefully, so as to minimize any tearing, or mold distortion.

Step 6 – If you're using concrete, it's time to mix your casting material.

### **Resources:**

- [Reynolds Advanced Materials: Alja-Safe](#)
- [Alja-Safe Technical Bulletin](#)
- [Safety Data Sheet \(SDS\) for Alja-Safe](#) (Reynold's Smooth-On product)
- [Alginates – Seaweed & Production Info](#)
- [What is Alginate?](#)

### **Steps (for Acrobat): [Alja-Safe Acrobat](#)**

Acrobat is a fiber reinforced, non-sag version of alja-safe. Acrobat is thicker and can hold a vertical surface, perfect for molding the trunk of a tree! Acrobat molds dry out in about a dozen casts or about 24 hours, so go for it until the material begins to dehydrate. You'll see a visible change in the material.

Step 1 – Choose the object you will make a mold of. From that object, determine the appropriate amount of material you will need. If you're casting a small piece of bark, the amount of material you will need will be

much less than if you are molding a larger object (a portion of the tree's trunk, for example). Remember the larger the mold, the more material required, the more costly! You can "eyeball" the amount of mold material, or you can do some rough math by calculating the objects volume. Reynold's Advanced Materials has a really great calculator tool you might find useful: <https://www.smooth-on.com/support/calculators/>

Step 2 – Measure out each part needed for your mold: Alja-Safe Acrobat & water. You will need 1.5 parts Alja-Safe Acrobat to 1 part water. With warm water the alginate will set-up faster. Colder water will prolong the set-up of your mold.

Step 3 – Mix the alginate into the water to make your mold (1 minute). Use a timer for your mixing process.

Step 4 – Use your hand, or a spatula, to coat the object with Alja-Safe Acrobat. Build up a thick layer on your object (approx. .5") and allow the alginate to harden (5 minutes).

Step 5 – Now it's time to measure and mix your concrete.

#### **Resources:**

- [Reynolds Advanced Materials: Alja-Safe Acrobat](#)
- [Alja-Safe Acrobat Technical Bulletin](#)
- [Safety Data Sheet \(SDS\) for Alja-Safe Acrobat](#) (Reynold's Smooth-On product)
- [Life Casting Tutorial: Making a Mold of Your Face with Reinforced Alginate](#)
- How To: [Molding a Face with Alja-Safe Acrobat Fiber Reinforced Alginate](#)

#### **Step-by-Step Concrete Casting Instructions:**

##### **Steps (for casting concrete objects with Rockite): [Rockite](#)**

Always use a clean container. Never add sand, gravel or other foreign substances to Rockite. They weaken the cement and affect setting. Mix no more cement than you can use in 10 minutes. Rockite may be used in either fluid consistency for pouring, or plastic consistency for application with putty knife, spatula or cement trowel. Either consistency produces the same high strength.

Mixing Rockite: Fluid (Pouring) Consistency: **WITH A N95 MASK!**

Step 1 – Put on your N95 mask.

Step 2 – Mix Rockite with water to a thick paste. (If you wish to measure, the correct water addition is 4 oz. per lb. or 1¼ pints for 5 lbs. When using this method, measure accurately.)

Step 3 – Let this mixture stand for about one minute. Then stir thoroughly scraping the sides and bottom of the mixing container. At this point, the mixture will become more fluid. The proper consistency is like heavy batter, just fluid enough to pour, but not watery. Keep the mix thick. This makes stronger cement.

Step 4 – Add water very sparingly. If the mix is thin, add more Rockite promptly to thicken it. Do not use too much water. Do not exceed 4 oz of water per lb of Rockite.

Step 5 – Once properly mixed, pour the Rockite into your alga-safe and/or acrobat mold(s). Tap the cup on the table to help any air bubbles evacuate the mold.

Step 6 – Allow cement to harden for at least 30 minutes before excavating your object.

#### **Resources:**

- [Rockite Safety Data Sheet \(SDS\)](#)
- [Rockite Technical Bulletin](#)
- [Rockite Directions](#)
- [Alginate & Cement](#)