

Mosaic Birdbath

Written by: Dottie Baltz

What you will need:

12" terra cotta saucer
white pva glue or terra cotta sealer
81 blue 3/8" glass tiles (approximately)
102 white 3/8" glass tiles (approximately)
85 green 3/8" glass tiles (approximately)
water resistant tile adhesive
sanded grout, gray color
liquid fortifier for grout (optional)
outdoor penetrating grout sealer
foam paint brush
paper towels
tile nippers
plastic knife
utensil for mixing grout
rubber gloves
several soft cloths
sponge
bucket with clean water
safety glasses
dust mask
cover for your work surface
outdoor acrylic paint (optional)



Instructions:

1. Rinse terra cotta saucer with water to remove any dust and debris. Allow the saucer to dry overnight before sealing.
2. Seal all surfaces of the saucer with a terra cotta sealer or a 50/50 solution of white glue and water. Allow to dry at least two hours before gluing on mosaic pieces.
3. Using the plastic knife, apply the adhesive, in a thin layer, to the back of each tile piece. Press the tile, adhesive side down, to the saucer. I find it easiest to start gluing from the outside of the pattern and work my way in. Allow no more than 1/4" (25 millimeters) between the pieces and try to keep the distance the same between all the pieces. This will add strength to your project and be more pleasing to the eye. The outside ring of the base of the saucer will require approximately 43 blue tiles. Inside that ring will be another ring of 38 blue tiles. These totals are approximate and are determined by the size of the saucer and how much space you have between each tile. It's always a good idea to have extra on hand just in case.
4. The next ring consists of 21 white tiles set on the diagonal as well as 21 white tiles that have been cut in half, on the diagonal, by using the tile nippers. To cut the tiles, simply place the tile between the blades of the nippers and press down on the handle until the tile breaks.
5. The next inside rings contain 20 green tiles and 13 green tiles. The middle will be white tiles cut to fit in the space allowed. The outside rim of the saucer will consist of approximately 48 white tiles and 52 green tiles.

6. Once all the tiles are in position, allow the adhesive to dry for at least 24 hours or according to the manufacturer's instructions for the brand of adhesive you purchased, before grouting.
7. Cover your work surface with a sheet of plastic or newspapers to protect your work surface from the grout.
8. Put on a dust mask before you begin mixing the grout. You do not want to breathe in the dust from dry grout as it can be harmful to your lungs. Mix the sanded grout with water and/or a liquid fortifier according to the manufacturer's instructions. Start with half the liquid recommended on the package and add more liquid slowly until it's the right consistency. Sanded grout must be used for outdoor applications and the liquid fortifier helps to strengthen the grout as well as helping to repel algae and stains. You can remove the dust mask once the grout has been mixed and is no longer dry and powdery. Your grout should be the consistency of peanut butter when completely mixed. Too wet and the grout will be weaker and harder to clean-up. Allow the grout to sit for 5-10 minutes before applying it to the saucer. If you purchase pre-mixed grout, make sure it is sanded grout and for outdoor use.
9. Put on rubber gloves and apply the grout by hand, or you can use a plastic putty knife. Press the grout between all the pieces and smooth with your fingers. When applying the grout to the rim of the saucer, make sure the edge of each tile is completely covered and that the edge is smooth to the touch. Allow the grout to sit for 20-60 minutes, or until it begins to dry, and then wipe off any excess grout with a dry cloth.
10. Allow the grout to sit for an additional 30-60 minutes, then fill a bucket with warm water. Wet your sponge, wring it out and then wipe off any haze with the sponge. Clean your sponge often. The drier and cleaner the sponge, the easier the clean-up. You may have to wipe your piece several times over the course of an hour or two before you are totally finished. If you constantly have a film forming on your piece, then either your sponge was too wet, too dirty or you need to let the grout dry a little longer before wiping it down with the damp sponge. After several hours, buff the tiles with a clean soft cloth to remove the last if the film.
11. Allow the grout to dry at least 24 hours before sealing with an outdoor penetrating sealer. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for more information on how to apply the sealer. In general, you will need to apply the sealer to the grout with a foam paint brush. Allow the sealer to dry for 5-10 minutes, and then wipe the excess off with a paper towel. Allow the project to dry for two hours, and then apply another coat of sealer in the same manner.
12. At this point, you can leave the outside unpainted, or you can paint it with an outdoor acrylic paint.

Maintenance:

Your new mosaic birdbath will need to be cleaned weekly by scrubbing it with a brush or sponge and clean water. If you have any algae stains that can not be removed with a good scrubbing, pour in a capful of bleach and then fill the birdbath with clean water. Cover the birdbath or bring it inside so the birds don't get into the bleach water. Allow the bleach solution to remain in the birdbath for one hour or until the stains disappear. Rinse well, dry, and then refill with clean water.

Since this birdbath is made using a terra cotta saucer, it will need to be brought inside for the winter or it will chip and crack with the freezing temperatures. Grout sealer should be applied once every year or two to extend the life and beauty of your birdbath.