

STERLING MODELS

Light weight sculpting compound

A light weight, low cost sculpting compound to be used for filling around rock castings and final terrain contouring over a Styrofoam, plaster cloth or other sub-base can be made from Perlite and setting type joint compound.

The advantages of using this material are:

- Low cost
- Light weight
- Adjustable setting time
- Easy shaping after it sets (but is still damp)
- Readily available ingredients

Starting with the ingredients:

The first is SETTING TYPE joint compound which can be obtained through building suppliers, stores such as Lowe's or Home Depot as well as some hardware stores. This material comes in an 18 lb. bag as a white powder and is used for drywall.

It is NOT the premixed joint compound that comes as a wet paste in a bucket. The difference is that setting type joint compound, after it is mixed with water, sets like plaster and then dries so it does not shrink. Because of this it can be applied in a thick layer without cracking. The premixed joint compound needs to dry to harden - so it shrinks and cracks when used as a filler. It will not work so it can not be substituted for the setting type.

The setting type joint compound is readily available in three different setting grades – Grades 20, 45 and 90. Grades of 210 – 300 can be special ordered.

Working time for grades is:

- #20 – 15 minutes
- #45 – 20 minutes
- #90 – 60 minutes
- #210 – 150 minutes
- #300 – 210 minutes

Because of its availability and working time I like to use #90.

The second ingredient is Perlite which can be obtained through farm and garden centers. It, too, is available at Lowe's and Home Depot in their garden supply department. It comes in packages ranging from 8 quarts to 4 cubic feet, the larger quantities being considerably cheaper per unit. It is used as a soil conditioner for potting soils.

The only thing to watch out for is that some brands sold in small packaging contain plant food – which should be avoided. Plant food (which is fertilizer) can react with the setting properties of the joint compound.

Use only 100% Perlite.

Making the compound:

Begin by mixing 1 part water with 2 parts joint compound, putting the water in a mixing bowl and adding the compound to it. Allow to set for 1 minute (this lets the plaster in the joint compound soak).

Stir in 2 parts of Perlite.

Depending on how thick you want the compound to be to work with - you can adjust by adding more water to thin it or more joint compound to thicken it. Trowel on with spreading tool of your choice.

Coming next:

Working with sculpting compound: