

# Halloween Creations

<http://www.halloweencreations.com/gravestones.htm>



**Gravestones** are simple to make. They can be simple headstones or giant monuments, detailed with moldings and intricate designs, or made to appear weathered and neglected. They can be painted any color you wish with an exterior grade paint, which should keep them weather-proofed. I've painted some of my stones with fluorescent paints and lit them up with black lighting to create an eerie, glowing effect.

Whatever you are trying to achieve, here are some methods that worked for me. Once you get the basics down there's no limit to your detail and creativity!

Here's how I build gravestones. Start with these materials:

1. 2" thick Foamboard insulation
2. Small hacksaw or similar cutting tool
3. A Dremel Tool or similar item
4. Long nails, 3 or 4 inches in length
5. Scrap pieces of 1/4 inch thick plywood, cut in 2 inch by (length of your stone) pieces
6. Caulking gun and Liquid Nails brand adhesive
7. Assorted exterior grade paints

**Start** by selecting the brand of Foamboard you want to work with. There are lots of different kinds available. I buy mine at Home Depot, only because they carry a certain kind of Foamboard that I think is easy to carve and shape. Some kinds of Foamboard

have a styrofoam texture, and I avoid these because they break apart in chunks when you try to cut them.

They come in standard 4 feet by 8 feet sheets, so if your vehicle is small, bring a hacksaw to cut the sheets in half so they will fit in your car or truck. There's a great tool you can use to do this. I'm not sure what it's called, but it looks like a plastic handle that holds a standard hacksaw blade.

Foamboard also comes in different thicknesses - find the 2 inch thick stuff, it creates more realistic props. It should also be noted that the Foamboard sometimes comes covered with a foil backing, which is a pain in the ass to peel off. I've viewed some Websites that say this coating needs to be taken off, or your paint job might be ruined. In my experience, take off as much as you can, use enough paint, and you should have no problem.

Begin by laying the Foamboard on a flat surface and drawing the shapes of the stones out with a marker. It always helps to draw your designs out on paper first.



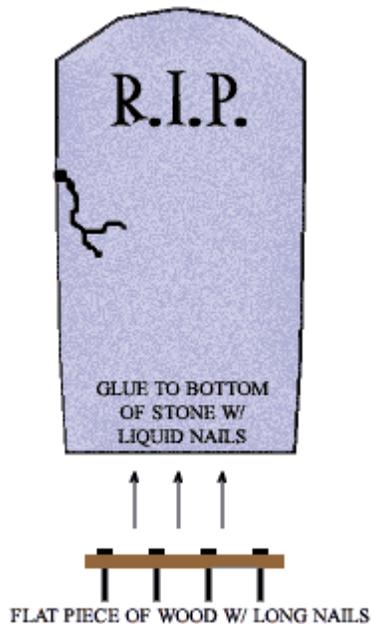
If you need inspiration, search for tombstones on the Web, or, even better, visit your own local cemetery and take pictures of the stones that interest you. Once you have the shapes drawn, cut them out using your hacksaw tool or Dremel tool. The tool I use, a Rotozip drywall cutter, is displayed on the left. I like it because it has a depth gauge. **SAFETY ALERT: when you cut and grind this stuff it produces a very powdery**

**cloud of dust that goes everywhere - do your work in the garage and wear safety glasses and a dust mask. I guarantee you, breathing this stuff is not healthy!**

Once you have the shapes cut out, you can start carving in cracks, epitaphs, death heads, whatever you like. Additionally, if you want more detail, you can cut scrap pieces of the Foamboard to use as molding accents, trim, and other details. Glue these pieces on your tombstones with Liquid Nails brand adhesive, or any other type of glue that adheres to foam products.



When the glue has had enough time to dry, the stones are ready to be painted. Use an exterior grade paint to weatherproof your stones. Do the cracks and engravings in black with a small brush first - don't worry about neatness, just slap it in there. When the engravings are dry, you can apply the base color with a small, flat roller, which will not allow the paint to seep into the cracks and epitaphs. Use different colors & patterns to create texture.



Now you need a way to place your stones upright.

Some Websites have suggested placing a small section of 1/2 inch PVC pipe inside a hollowed out stone, then mounting the stones on pieces of rebar, which are pounded into the lawn like tent stakes. I'm sure this works great, but I didn't want hollow stones, so I took some scrap pieces of 1/4 inch plywood that fit to the bottom of my stones, pounded some long nails through them (it might help to drill pilot holes in the wood first), then glued the piece to the bottom of the stone with liquid Nails.

It works great so far- I haven't had to reinforce this method for over three years. One drawback: the nails are sharp! When you put your stones in storage, be sure to keep them somewhere where nobody can trip over them or bump into them. For taller stones, like the large crosses, I had to buy a few 2 foot-long metal

dowel rods, sharpen the ends with a grinder or file, coat them with Liquid Nails, and carefully insert them into the bottom of the crosses, trying not to punch through the exterior of the stone. It helps to hold the stone flat against a wall when doing this.



Now that you know the basics, you can start building elaborate tombs and monuments as well! Just remember, unless you plan on leaving your stones up all year, which I'm sure your neighbors would love, keep in mind you need lots of room to store all your props. It won't be long before you have a yard full of graves!