



How to make fake trees for reptile cages

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This article shows you how to construct artificial trees for use in a homemade reptile enclosure. These trees are quite small (about 16") but the principle can be adapted to any size tree or branches.

Having seen the price of fake trees in my local reptile suppliers I decided that it could not be too difficult to construct my own artificial trees. I did purchase the artificial leaves and materials but they were all together half the cost of one tree and I was able to make two with the material and still have some left over for the further snake cage decoration.

Materials:

The materials I used were

- flat rocks
- dead branches from local trees
- artificial vines
- liquid nails (wood to stone) and hot glue from a glue gun (branches) You could also used Araldite or any strong glue for both applications.

Tools required:

- drill and 1/8" bit
- sharp knife
- sand paper (an electric sander is good if you have one or can borrow one)
- sharp saw or power saw

Putting it together

The first step was to collect the branches and stone. I collect the branches from the side of the road. I didn't spend much time doing this but did manage to find one very interesting specimen.

The stones were collected from some fill at a nearby creek but I had the tools to be able to grind them and flatten the surfaces further. If I did not have these I would go to a local outdoor paving or tile supplier and get a flat stone or rock from them. Another good place to get such stone or rocks would be a garden supplies, or even your local reptile supply shop may have them.

The branches were then cut to size. I made sure they would fit into the cage which is only 18" high. Make sure you take account of the height of the stone when you are measuring the height and also be aware that you will need to not only fit it through the door but then manoeuvre it around once it's in the cage.

When cutting the branches, take into account the balance of the piece you want to sit on the stone. You may need to cut the end at a slight angle to ensure that it stands up balanced on the stone. This makes it easier to glue in place and also will not be toppled over as easily by one of your reptiles.



Starting pieces – the branch has been cut and sanded.

Once the branches are cut it is a good idea to put them into the oven for about 30-40 minutes at about 300° F (150° C). This helps to kill any organisms in the branch that can damage your animals. Soaking them in salted water for a few days and then drying them should also work to destroy many of the organisms.

If you don't want to collect branches for yourself you can purchase driftwood pieces from your reptile supplier or a local aquarium supplier. These are already treated so do not need to be heated in the oven or have any further treatment.

Having cut your branches and treated it, you are now ready to glue it to the stone. Wash the stone with water and pat dry to remove dust particles that will reduce the effectiveness of the glue in the wood/stone bond.

Apply a liberal dollop of glue to each surface, rubbing it around to make sure the glue is going to bond to both the wood and the stone.

Join the pieces and set them aside to dry.



Now comes the fun part of putting on the leaves. There are a range of items that you can use. I used a vine bunch that I purchased from the reptile supply shop and cut the vine pieces into smaller sections. You can also go to florists and get fake plants that can be cut to different sizes. Florists may even be a bit cheaper than your reptile supplier. Many of the artificial plants are both fabric and plastic.

Using a 1/8" drill bit (or a bit that matches the size of the plastic piece of the artificial plant that you are going to insert into the hole you make) drill hole where you want to insert the artificial plant. I found it best to drill upward and make the pieces dangle down as it gives a slightly more natural appearance. Vary the locations and sizes of the pieces to give it a better appearance.

Continue to do this until you have decorated the branch suitably. You may need to move some pieces and re-drill holes to get the best effect.

Once you are happy with the design and appearance of your artificial tree you can then start to glue the pieces into place. Go around and put each piece into it's hole. I used hot glue but Araldite, Silicon, Liquid Nails or any good glue will do the trick.

Let it dry and your 're ready to go. You could also place small stones around the base of the branch where it meets the timber to give a different effect.

Completed artificial tree.



Completed Artificial Tree

Mark Chapple is the Author of "How to Build Reptile Enclosures"

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