



[http://www.hauntedhotsauce.com/haunted/Make%20 Your Own Tombstones.html](http://www.hauntedhotsauce.com/haunted/Make%20Your%20Own%20Tombstones.html)

## 13 Steps to Creating Your Own Creepy, Realistic Halloween Tombstones!

When I made my tombstones I didn't take step-by-step photographs and for that, I apologize.

What You'll Need:

- One 4'x 8' sheet of 1 1/2" - 2" thick styrofoam
- a ruler or yardstick
- lt. colored marker (grey marker works best)
- some string (for help drawing curves)
- jigsaw or serrated steak knife
- Razor knife or hobby knife (X-acto)
- sandpaper
- 1 gallon of med. grey flat latex exterior paint (Oops paint works great. Oops paint is what you get when Home Depot or Lowe's mixes an incorrent shade of paint and the customer decides not to buy it. They sell these gallons or paint at huge discounts! (Keep an eye out for these all year long)
- exterior plywood (for making bases for your tombstones)
- flat green or brown exterior paint (used to paint the bases whatever color your grass will be on Halloween)
- huge 6" or 7" nails or wooden dowels (used to secure the tombstones to the bases)
- 1 qt. exterior flat black paint (for painting shadows, mold and lichen on the tombstone and for creating a black tombstone "wash")
- 1 qt. exterior white paint (for painting highlights and "faux" raised areas on your tombstones)
- Also helpful is a drill w/ an assortment of drill bits

## **Step 1: Get a Sheet of Styrofoam**

At your local Home Depot, Lowe's or other home improvement store, buy a 4 ft. x 8 ft. sheet of thick (1 1/2" - 2") styrofoam. They're used for insulation. If they don't have the thick Styrofoam a.) ask if they'll get some or b.) buy 2 thinner pieces and glue them together using glue designed specifically for styrofoam. Liquid nails will melt the styrofoam and common Wood Glue (Elmer's) will not dry as the styrofoam keeps air from reaching the glue.

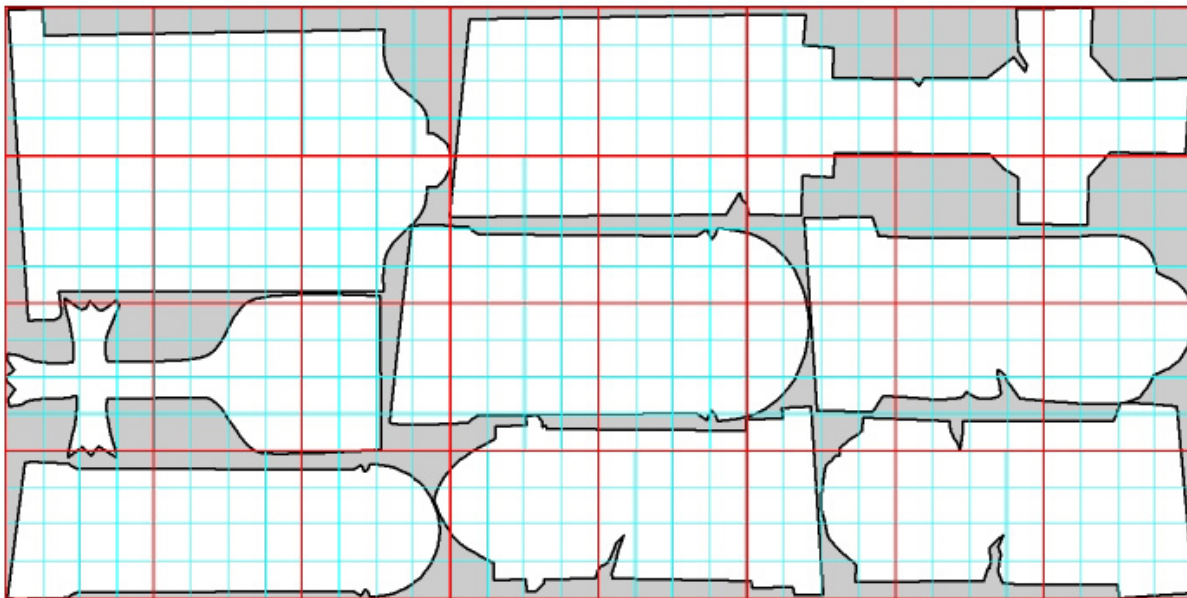
Some sheets of styrofoam have a thin layer of plastic (like plastic-wrap) on one side. If yours does, peel this plastic off (it should come off very easily). If you don't peel it off, your paint won't stick to the tombstone on that side.

## **Step 2: Draw a Grid (optional)**

If you wish to use the template I am providing or have made one yourself, very lightly draw a grid dividing the sheet of styrofoam into one foot squares with a light colored marker. Anything too dark will show through your paint. A chalk line can also be used for this and is easily erased later on.

Don't press down too hard or your tombstones will have these grid lines etched into them in inappropriate places. Don't use tape either because when you peel the tape off, the paint will stick there differently and that too will be visible on the finished piece.

If you're not using a template, you won't need a grid and you can skip step 2 altogether.



Dimensions of styrofoam sheet: 4 ft. x 8 ft.  
Red squares: 12" x 12" • Blue squares: 3" x 3"

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### **Step 3: Draw Some Tombstones**

Using the template as a guide, lightly draw the tombstones onto the styrofoam. It's not imperative that every line comes out straight (in fact, it adds realism if they don't) You should be able to "eyeball" the tombstones onto the styrofoam using the grid that you've drawn and the template.

To draw nice arcs, tie a string to the end of your marker and use the string as sort of a giant compass. Again, don't panic if they don't come out perfect...imperfections only add to the decrepit state of your haunted cemetery.

If you're not using a template, simply grab a ruler and lightly draw tombstone shapes on your styrofoam. Search the web (or the cemetery) for common tombstone shapes.

Refrain from marking too dark, too deep or from erasing. An incorrectly placed line might be easier to cover up with paint instead of trying to repair the damage done by erasing.

### **Step 4: Cut 'em Out**

I use a jigsaw to cut out the tombstones but even a simple serrated steak knife will do (if you can stand that infernal styrofoam squeaking sound). Lightly sand the outside edges w/ sandpaper to smooth 'em out. Save the styrofoam scraps for testing purposes later on in the process.

### **Step 5: Add the Epitaphs**

I'm not a big fan of those cutesy, funny epitaphs that many people carve into their homemade tombstones. My advice is to keep it simple, scary and believable. It can really get tedious carving an essay in styrofoam but if you're more ambitious than I, carve away.

Some people also like to carve funny names that don't always make sense until you read them aloud. (For example, Barry M. Deep or M.T. Tomb) Create your own names or search the web for sites that have them.

My epitaphs usually consist of a simple "DEAD" or "R.I.P." carved in a simple typestyle with a simple date carved underneath. Other options include carving a realistic sounding name with a "DIED" underneath followed by the date.

I did write a short rhyme for one of my tombstones that seemed to get a reaction. It goes:

"If you read this little poem, the corpse below you'll see at home." or

"If you read this little rhyme, then soon upon your flesh we'll dine"

You'd be surprised how many adults stopped just short of finishing the poem to avoid a visit from my "Peeker" zombie.

I print the epitaphs out at actual size from my computer, pin them to the tombstone with straight pins and carve out the epitaphs with a razor hobby knife (X-acto). Start at the outside edge of the letter and angle your knife in towards the center of the letter as you cut around it. When you're done, the piece that you discard and the letter that you've carved out should have a chiseled "V" shape to it. Practice carving some letters on scrap styrofoam before you carve up your actual tombstones.

It's also important to practice carving out letters with "islands" in them (A, B, D, O, P, Q, and R). Because of this island, you'll have to handle them a bit differently than the other letters. Start these "island" letters by cutting out the island first, angling your knife towards the opposite edge of the letter. Then cut the outside edge angling your knife towards the island.

If it all sounds confusing, try it once on some scrap styrofoam and it will quickly become obvious what I mean. And remember, if your letters don't come out perfect...so what?

### ***Step 6: Detail 'em***

This is where it gets fun. At this stage use your hobby knife (X-acto) to carve border lines, cracks, skull shapes, ghost shapes, bat shapes or whatever else you want. Keep your designs simple and remember, all of the "angle and island rules" described in step 5 still apply. You can also glue things to your tombstones. Some hobby stores sell cool ornamental wooden designs that add a nice touch without a lot of carving.

### ***Step 7: Attach Bases***

Cut rectangular pieces of plywood to fit the bottom of your tombstones allowing about 4"-5" excess on all sides. Place your tombstone on the base in the center and trace around the tombstone w/ a pen or marker. Remove the tombstone and drill 2 holes, one on either end, into the plywood within the traced area. The holes should be slightly smaller than the diameter of your large nails so that the nails have to be pounded into the plywood with a hammer but so the wood won't split. (If you're using wooden dowels instead of nails, make the holes just big enough to push the dowels into by hand and glue them in place.)

Turn your base over and pound in your two large nails from the bottom. You can do this outside in the yard and just pound your nails into the dirt. Pull your base up off of the ground and flip it over. You should now have the base with two large nails standing up vertically within the traced area. You can now put some Elmer's glue on the bottom of the tombstone and some glue on the nails and carefully press the tombstone onto the nails until it hits the base. Be careful not to bust the sides of your

tombstone with the nails. You may wish to drill holes into the bottom of your tombstones where the nails will go to make it easier. Stand the tombstone upright and let the glue dry before proceeding.

### ***Step 8: Paint 'em Grey***

Use med. grey flat latex exterior paint. Paint everything except the base including inside the letters that you've carved. (Oops paint works great. Oops paint is what you get when Home Depot or Lowe's mixes an incorrect shade of paint and the customer decides not to buy it. They sell these gallons of paint at huge discounts! Keep an eye out for these all year long) Paint a few of the styrofoam scraps grey too so you can use these to test further steps.

### ***Step 9: Give 'em a Black "Wash"***

This is a messy step and should be done outside. Make a wash out of exterior flat black paint and water. If I had to guess, the proportions might be 1/4 cup of black paint mixed into about 2 cups of water. Grab one of your grey scrap pieces and apply some of the wash just to see what it's going to look like. If it seems too dark, add more water to your wash. Too light? Add more black paint.

When you feel that you've got the right mixture, cover your tombstone entirely with a coat of the wash. As the wash runs down the tombstone, it should sink into the details, letters and cracks that you've carved making them more pronounced. At this point the styrofoam should start to look more like stone. Make sure that you get the letters good because you want them to be the darkest areas. (I sometimes lay the tombstone on its back, fill the letters with wash and then lift the tombstone to its upright position letting the wash run down.)

Feel free to be a little creative here...drip wash into the cracks, etc. Your brush strokes should be up and down not left to right and remember, make sure that your tombstone is standing when you apply the wash to simulate the natural effects of dirt, rain and grime washing down vertically over the tombstones over many years.

If you feel that the wash is too dark you can always brush clear water over it before it dries to lighten it a bit.

When you're satisfied with your wash. Let the tombstones dry. If after they dry they seem too light, feel free to wash 'em again or for added depth, apply a second coat of wash to only a few areas. Blend wash layers with clear water.

You must let them dry COMPLETELY before proceeding to the next step.

## **Step 10: Add Highlights and Shadows**

Next we'll use a painting technique called "dry-brushing" to add highlights and shadows that will make your tombstones look even more 3-dimensional. Dry-Brushing is a technique where you dip the tip of your brush in paint and wipe almost all of it off before painting your tombstone. The brush should be almost totally dry (thus the name, dry-brushing) as you lightly move the brush back and forth across an area painting only the raised areas. Practice on scraps before you paint your actual tombstone and when you do paint your tombstone, start on the back until you feel that you've got it down.

Stand your tombstone up facing you and imagine that there's a light source above and to the left of it (at about 11:00 if you were looking at a clock)

Take a clean brush, dip the tip of it in your white paint and wipe 99% of the paint off on an old towel. Then add subtle highlights to the top left areas of your tombstone where you feel that your imaginary lightsource would hit the tombstone. Add subtle highlights to your epitaph letters to make them easier to read. Highlight cracks and skulls or whatever other details you've carved or glued onto your tombstones to add more contrast.

Next do the same thing w/ a fresh paintbrush and the black paint except this time, add shadows in the bottom right areas opposite the highlights where you feel that the imaginary lightsource would not hit your tombstone. Refrain from adding shadows around your epitaph as this usually makes it harder to read.

Now highlight any areas on the bottom of the tombstone that you wish to appear raised like "steps". If you'll look closely at my photos, you'll see that the raised "steps" on the bottom of my tombstones aren't actually raised at all, just painted to look that way. In this case I use a straight piece of wood to mask off the area and to get a good, straight edge. I then dry-brush a white highlight on the top of the area that I wish to appear raised and subtly shadow the area at the bottom. (If you wish, you can actually add these raised 3D areas in styrofoam in the "detail" step 6.)

A couple general rules: when painting areas that you wish to appear raised: Top left highlight/bottom right shadow

If you want areas to appear sunken: Top left shadow/bottom right highlight

I can't stress enough the importance of practicing on your scraps before you paint your actual piece.

It's easy to overdo the highlight/shadow step too so refrain from doing that. It's better to skip the highlight/shadow step altogether than to add harsh white highlights and jet black shadow areas to your "already close to realistic" tombstones. Always practice a bit on the scrap pieces of styrofoam if you're unsure.

### **Step 11: Add Lichen**

Lichen is an algae/fungus that grows on stone and rocks as it is exposed to rain and other elements. In areas of your tombstone where you think water might gather and run...very subtly dry-brush some black moving your brush from top to bottom in the very same way that the water would travel. For the bottom corners of your tombstone, dip your brush in black, wipe some of it off and push the tip of it onto your tombstone repeatedly creating a black stipple effect. The areas at the bottom should be the darkest as these would be the areas that the water would pool the longest thus giving the lichen the longest opportunity to grow.

### **Step 12: Paint Your Base**

If your grass is green on Halloween, paint your base green to match. If your grass is brown on Halloween, paint your base brown. It's not super important that it matches perfectly because when you display your tombstones in your yard, you'll want to cover the bases with leaves and debris anyway.

### **Step 13: Display Your Tombstones**

Let your grass grow for a few weeks before Halloween if you can. This adds to the creepy, unkept look of your cemetery.

Display your tombstones at least a few days before Halloween or your party. This gives your long grass time to recover from all of the trampling that you've done while setting up your cemetery.

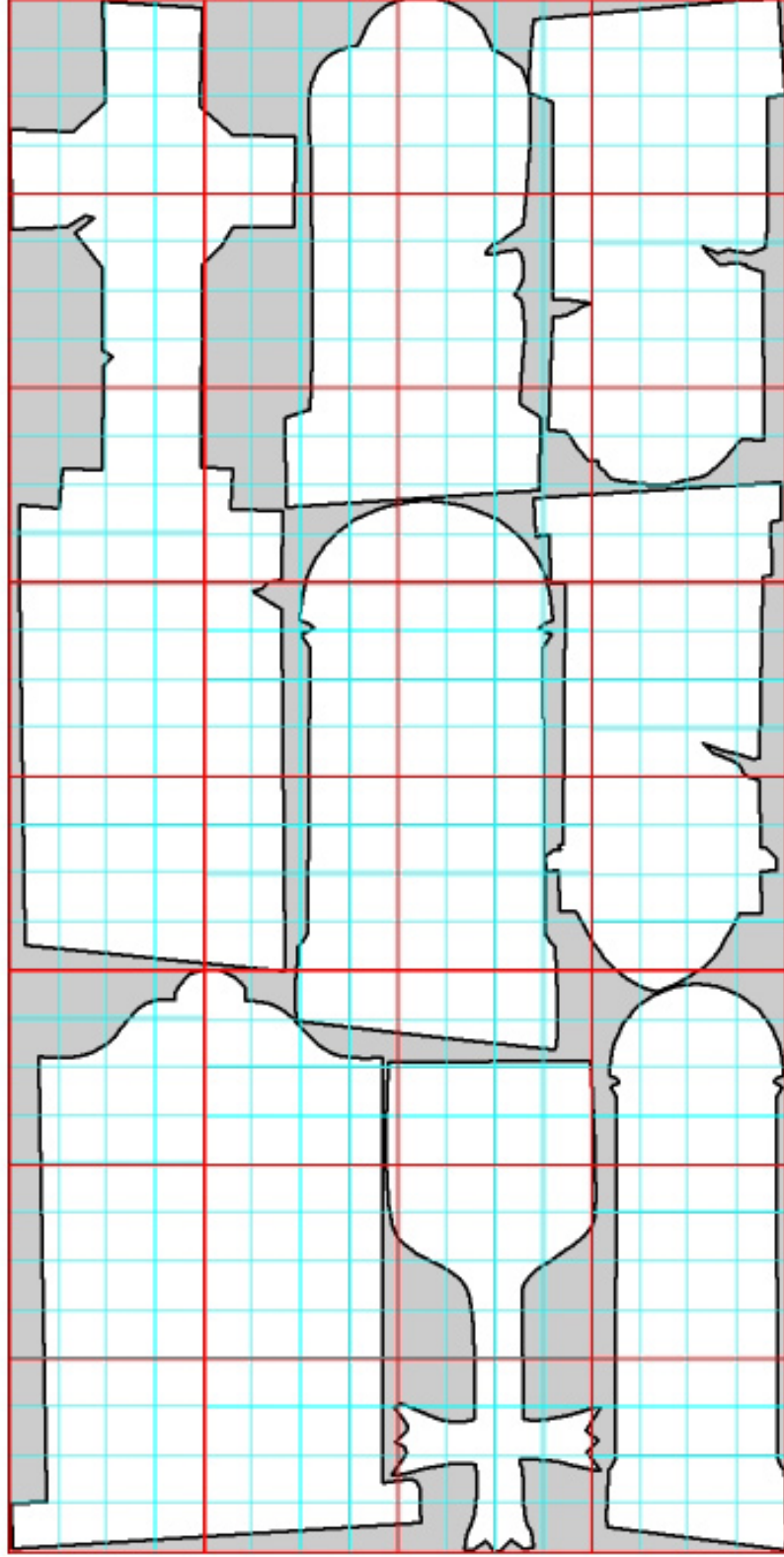
Cover your bases with the same natural leaves and debris that would be found in the area.

Drag some old dead branches into your cemetery to add to it's unkept state.

With my drill, I use 3" coarse thread drywall screws to screw the 4 corners of the bases into the ground. This doesn't make them theft proof (unless I hit a root) but it does tend to keep them standing if things get breezy.

That's it!





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