

# Tombstones in a Nutshell

*Safety: Always be careful when using tools. Anything that melts foam i.e. hot wire tools, hot air guns, acetone, or a rotary tool at a high speed, will give off some fumes that are probably terrible for you. When melting foam, work with plenty of ventilation, e.g., outside and wear a quality respirator.*

- 1. You can use many different kinds of materials, but the most popular choices are expanded polystyrene “EPS”, e.g., Styrofoam, or extruded polystyrene “XPS”. You can use leftover packing material or buy larger sheets at home improvement stores - it's often used for insulation in walls”. If you want a thicker stone or a more interesting shape, you can glue pieces together.**
- 2. Cut or drill channels and glue in two lengths of 1/2" PVC pipe. You can pound short lengths of 1/4" rebar into the ground as stakes, and slip the PVC pipe over them. This will hold your tombstone in a secure, upright position. Note that foam is finicky about the type of glue. Home improvement stores sell "foam projects" glues and many haunters use Gorilla Glue. You may be tempted to do this step later, but this is where things are most likely to go wrong, so it's best to get it out of the way before you've invested a lot of effort in carving your tombstone.**

3. Cut the outline shape. You can use all sorts of cutting tools, like hacksaws, jigsaws, drywall saws, and serrated kitchen knives. If you're going to do a lot of foam cutting, you might want a hot wire-cutting tool, which makes less mess. Consider using the scraps for practicing the next step.
4. Print out your carving template, spray the backside of it with a light coat of an adhesive, and affix it to the front of your tombstone. *Don't spray the adhesive directly on the foam.* Carve through the template. Common techniques are to use a hobby knife, e.g., X-acto, or a small rotary tool, e.g., Dremel, with a router attachment. Start with simple bold text. Small details are hard and generally won't show up well. Remove your template.
5. Age your tombstone by carving cracks. Scrap, scratch, and chip the foam. Sand down the sharp edges and corners to make it look worn. You can use a heat gun to change the texture of the foam *Beware of fumes.* Some even splash a little acetone on the foam to etch the surface. Small imperfections and mistakes can be filled with spackle, wood filler, or Bondo and sanded down.

6. Some haunters use Monster Mud or a masonry paint e.g., Drylok to give the tombstone a stronger, coarser texture. Paint the first few layers with exterior latex house paint. Avoid spray paint for the first coats, as spray paint contains acetone which will eat away at the foam. Use contrasting colors for the layers e.g., start with a dark black. Make sure the first layer gets all the nooks and crannies in the carved areas. Avoid getting subsequent contrasting layers into the carved details and you're epitaph will stand out nicely. Also make sure you paint all sides of the work, including the bottom, to seal it from water.
7. Age with additional layers of contrasting colors. You can use watered down paints, spray paints, air brushing, sponge painting, tea staining, or dry-brushing. Some haunters speckle the finish with little droplets of light and dark colors to simulate granite. Others use feathers to paint veins to simulate marble. You can add bits of lichen or spots of color to suggest moss growing on the tombstone. **Experiment and have fun!**