

HILL OF CALVARY

A tutorial by www.mustardseeds.typepad.com

Creating your own Hill of Calvary is a meaningful Easter activity that will teach the true meaning of the holiday. This grass garden features the hill where Jesus was hung on the cross and a small tomb where he was buried and rose again. It makes a very symbolic centerpiece for your Easter table, and its an incredible teaching tool for your little sprout. *Note: It's best to start your Hill of Calvary two weeks before Easter.*



SUPPLIES/SHOPPING LIST

- Potting Soil or Jiffy Mix--I *do* suggest picking up a bag of this. Wal-Mart carries it. It is used to start seeds and has a good "mulchy" consistency that holds moisture well.
- Gravel
- A few small rocks (2-3" size)
- 10-inch terra cotta dish
- 4-inch terra cotta pot
- 4-inch terra cotta dish
- Wheatberries for the grass--make sure they are organic and untreated. I got a big bag for under \$2 at Vitamin Cottage.
- A spray bottle
- Sticks (for crosses)
- Raffia or twine



STEP 1 - POTS & ROCK

Situate the 4-inch pot on its side inside the 10-inch dish. Use smallish rocks to hold the pot in place. Then, create a thin layer of gravel in the dish. (This is for drainage purposes).

Did you know that Jesus was called the "ROCK?"

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:2

- Why do you think they called him the ROCK?
- What does salvation mean?

STEP 2 – MAKE MUD, BUILD HILL

It helps to mix the dirt in a wheelbarrow or 5-gallon bucket. Use a hose to add water to the dirt and have the kids mix it all up. It's ok for them to use their hands! Make mud pies. Take handfuls of the mud and pack it all around the pot and in the dish. You will want to create a nice rounded hill.

Did you know that Jesus liked to make mud pies? He *did* and his mud pies healed and performed miracles. Tell the story from John 9.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”



STEP 3 – SEED

Spread a thick layer of seed over the ENTIRE soil area. You may have to kind of push it into the soil a bit on the steep sides. This is very important: Don't be stingy with the seed. If you want nice, dense grass, the seed needs to completely cover the surface of the soil.

Did you know that our faith is like a tiny seed? Jesus told a story to people about how we can grow a big faith with just a little seed of belief and trust.

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”
Mark 4:30-32

We are planting some tiny seeds here...and in just days we will see the grass begin to grow. Isn't that amazing?

STEP 4 - MORE DIRT, COVER SEEDS

Using some more mud, create very thin mud pies and cover the seed.

When you think of sin, do you think of something clean or dirty? This dirt is kind of like our sin. Because we had sin, we couldn't be with God. But when Jesus died on the cross, our sin was forgiven and we were wash cleaned. (NOTE: This is a great time to talk to your little ones about what "sin" actually is. Give examples and explore this topic.)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and the cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

...But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:11



STEP 5 - CROSSES *(This can be done now, or later during Holy Week.)*

Make three crosses out of collected sticks. Use hot glue to hold them in place and then wrap raffia around to secure it and hide glue. Note that the grass will grow faster and higher than you think. Make your crosses a little bit "jumbo" sized because they will need to be nestled down in the grass and yet, you still want to be able to see them.

Why are we making three crosses instead of just one? Who were on the other two crosses?

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Matt. 27:38

What was the difference between these men and Jesus? The men were evil and had really done something wrong and sinned. But Jesus was pure and sinless. He died on the cross for OUR sins.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:40-43

GROWING TIPS

- Water! Water! Water! Any time your little sprout wants to spray the hill, say, “YES!” This hill needs moisture to sprout and get rooted. Once the grass is growing, water once a day. I put mine in the sink and water with my water sprayer.
- Warmth! These seeds need warmth to sprout. You can put it in a sunny window or outside, but it's too cold still to leave it outside all night. If you don't have a warm spot, put it on a tray and under the tray put a heating pad.
- Terra cotta is porous and will hold moisture, which means you don't want this to sit directly on furniture. Rest the dish on a metal or plastic tray.
- When the seed first starts to sprout, it may “push up” the soil. Just water that area of dirt and it will settle back down.
- When your grass gets high, just mow with some scissors.



OTHER TEACHING IDEAS

- On Good Friday, wrap up a clothespin in white cloth and lay it in the tomb (Jesus). Then, cover the tomb entrance with the 4-inch dish. On the Eve of Easter, remove the clothespin, leave the cloth and leave the tomb open for your child to discover first thing on Sunday morning.
- Have each member of your family take a rock and write a personal struggle or sin on the stone with a permanent pen. Put the rocks in the tomb on Good Friday--the day Jesus died for our sins. Then, cover the tomb entrance with the 4-inch dish. On the Eve of Easter, remove the stones and throw them away. Leave the tomb open for the family to discover on Sunday morning. Talk about what “grace” and “forgiveness” means.

"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." Romans 4:25

- The path to the cross was paved by my sins. Cut a path in your grass leading up to the cross. Make a path with your “sin stones.” Then, put these rocks in the tomb...to once again die...with Christ.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

- On Easter, Jesus not only rose from the grave, conquering death, but he conquered our sin--FOREVER. Our sin is dead! Remember to emphasize the JOY and excitement of Easter. Especially for younger ones, I think it's important to emphasize the joy and miracle, lest they only focus on the sad part of the crucifixion.



Visit www.mustardseeds.typepad.com for more meaningful, Christ-centered ideas for Easter—books, crafts, decorations, recipes and more.