

Bead Basics



Basic materials and tools for making beads with polymer clay:

Clay colors of your choice

Inclusions and embellishments: embossing powders, glitters, herbs, mica powders, flakes, composition metal leafing foil, etc.

Glaze (Flecto Varathane - gloss, satin or semi-gloss - or Future Floor Finish)

Tissue blade and x-acto knife or disposable scalpel
Needle tools

Sculpting tools appropriate to the project that you want to complete.
Double-ended knitting needles or steel rods (esp. for tube and heishe beads)

Tools for embossing textures - stamps, fabric, shells, leaves, etc.
Deli wrap and index cards
Rolling tools - pasta machine and acrylic rollers or brayers

Work surface and baking surface
Oven thermometer

400 & 600 grit Wet-or-Dry sandpaper

Dremel tool or jeweler's lathe with buffing wheel or piece of old, soft denim to buff pieces by hand.



Making round beads is difficult for some (like me!) and it takes some practice to learn. If you want to get perfect shapes, Sue Lee's bead rollers make perfect rounds and tiny ovals.

See them at:
www.polymerclayexpress.com

Many ways of shaping and finishing beads from polymer clay

Welcome... I'm so glad you joined us!

Thank you for attending my class in basic bead-making techniques!

It is my hope that you are able to take what you learn in this class and do some further experimentation on your own. If you're already experienced at handling polymer clay, or if you've taken my "Great Starts" class, you probably won't have any trouble following the instructions. If you do run into something that has you stuck, feel free to email me at elizajc@thepolyparrot.com and I'll be glad to help you.

People have probably been making beads for nearly as long as there have been people. Beads have been used as decoration for clothing, homes, places of worship and even as currency on all continents. Most techniques for creating beads with other materials have been adapted for use with polymer clay. Blown or slumped glass, stone, ivory, wood, bone, and many metalsmithing techniques such as mokume gane, Etruscan filigrana and the imitated patinization of metals can all be mimicked with the clay. In this class, you'll learn some basic forming and shaping of beads, how to add powders, foils and waxes to the surfaces to achieve these imitations and how to finish the beads. Hope you'll have a great time with it all!

Thanks again, now

let's get to claying around !



Mokume Gane polymer beads mixed with vintage and modern glass.

Rolled beads from Premo Pearl colors mixed in Skinner blends.



The easiest bead.... Rounds!

The easiest bead to learn to make is the round, formed simply with the palms of your hands. It takes a little practice to find the right combination of the parts of your palms, the correct pressure and the direction of the turns that creates a good round bead, but once you find them, you'll have a terrific set of tools at your disposal. An easy way of creating beads of the same size is to roll a log of the colors that you want to use to an even diameter all along its length, then cut equal pieces of the log, either by estimation or by measuring. You can create graduated beads in the same way. Roll the beads round, then let them sit and cool before attempting to poke holes in them, especially if you want a large-diameter hole for stringing leather or buna rubber. Firmer clay will allow less distortion as you "drill" into the bead with a toothpick, needle tool, knitting needle or skewer. Drill first through one side, and when the point begins to exit the bead, remove it and insert it into the hole on the other side and drill through from the other direction. This creates smoother holes and a more even distortion of the round shape. Smooth most of the fingerprints by rolling lightly on a smooth surface with a small square of Lucite or a ceramic tile. You may need to repeat the clearing of the hole and smoothing of the surface more than once for each bead. Alternatively, you can cure the bead and then drill it with a drill bit in your fingers or with a Dremel tool.



Materials:

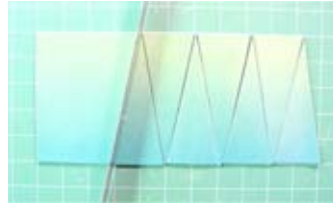
Clay rolled into a flat, even sheet - try different settings on the pasta machine. You can use a single color, a Skinner Blend, a textured sheet, or a sheet that's decorated with crackled leafing foil.

Tools:

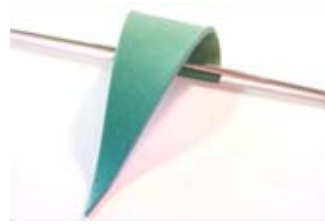
Tissue Blade
Knitting needles or steel rods or bamboo skewers
A work surface with a grid pattern



Lay the clay on your work surface and trim the edges so that you have a perfect rectangular shape, lined up with the grid.



Using the grid to align your knife, cut triangles from both directions.



Coax the wide end of the triangle into curving around the knitting needle. Be careful to smooth over your fingerprints as you go.



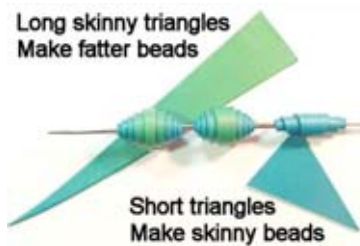
Keep the strip that's on top aligned halfway between the sides, winding the clay onto the needle.



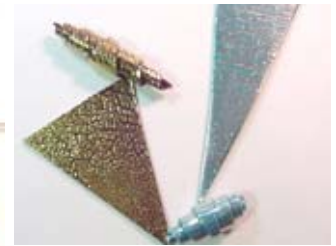
Smooth any visible fingerprints and make sure that the end is well-adhered to the layer underneath.



If you use a Skinner blend, half of your beads will have one color on the outside and the other half will have the other color.



Experiment with sizes and shapes of the triangles to get the look that you want in the finished beads.



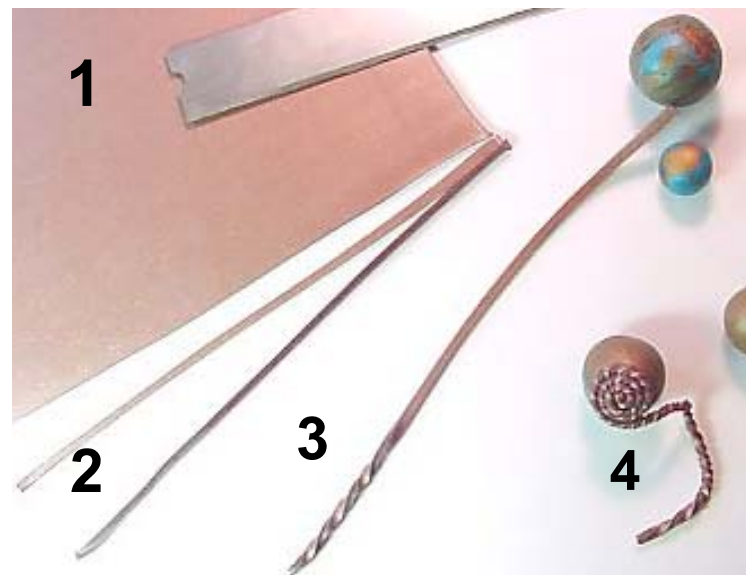
Here are some that had leafing foil crackled on the surface of the clay. These will need sealing or the metal will tarnish.

"Beehive" Beads - Mike Buesseler

Materials and tools:

"Metallic" clay (Premo Pearl) rolled many times to align the mica particles. You can use a single color or a Skinner Blend.
Scrap clay
Sharp blade, lucite square & needle tool or knitting needle.

1. Roll a sheet of Premo Pearl clay through the pasta machine 12-14 times to align the mica.
2. Cut strips from one edge that are approximately as wide as the sheet is thick.
3. Twist the strips as loosely or as tightly as you wish.
4. Curl one end and apply it to a ball of scrap clay. Wind the strip around the bead until it's covered, twisting the strips and adding on strips as necessary.
5. Roll the finished bead slightly in your hands to warm the clay and make sure the strips stick well to the scrap clay.
6. You can roll the bead further with a Lucite square so that the surface is completely smooth... the beehive design will show in the mica shift.



Skinner blend with the beads that came from it.



MB's "Beehive" beads - some rolled smooth.

For lots more magic tricks, get Mike Buesseler's wonderful videos!



Using the Carl Hornberger-style oval bead roller



Make a log of clay in the colors of your choice that is the same diameter as the space between the trough and the paddle.



Cut a piece from the log about two-thirds as long as the paddle is wide.



Lay the log at one end of the trough, and with the paddle, roll the clay to the other end.

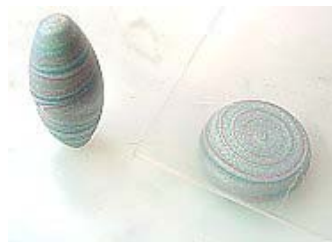


... and put it back at the starting end, being careful to not turn it around and get that "U" shape dipping in the other direction.

Pick the bead up.....



Repeat the rolling until you get the level of patterning that you like. It takes very few passes to get the perfect shape, but it could take a dozen to get lots of pattern.



A patterned bead can be pressed flat top to bottom to make disks with spiral designs. Any oval can be pressed side to side for an interesting shape.

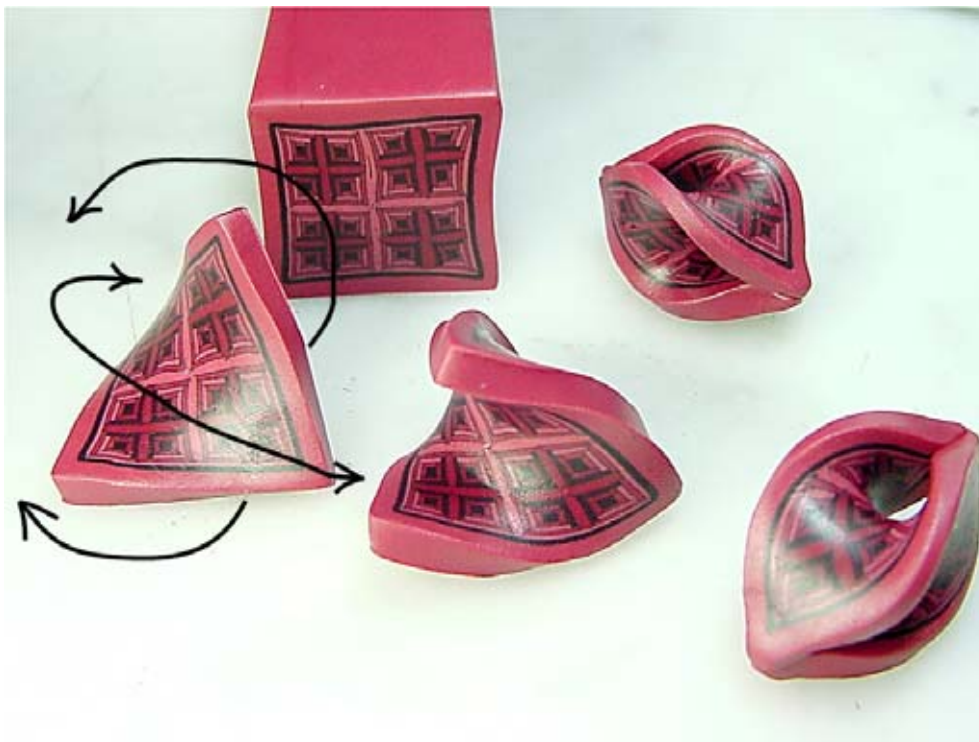


Drill holes while pressing to minimize distortion. Drills can be made top to bottom or side to side.



The oval can be shaped and drilled before curing, or cured as they are made.

Mike Buessler's Mobius Bead



Mike Buessler has come up with some of the most innovative ideas regarding polymer clay and making jewelry. The "mobius" bead is one of them, named after the demonstration of a strip of paper twisted once and glued so that the inside is the outside and vice-versa. This bead has no "right side."

Start with an even slice of a square cane. Warm it slightly in your fingers, then begin smoothing diagonally opposed corners toward each other. Use a smoothing motion to avoid fingerprints - this is important because this type of bead is very difficult and time-consuming to sand and buff after it's cured. Curve the points gradually, easing them gently toward each other. If the clay becomes sticky, put the bead aside for a few minutes to cool. Make the points meet as precisely as you can and use a firm pressure to stick them together.

Let the bead sit and rest for a while before you cure it so that the points that are stuck together bond even more solidly. The bead will also relax into its shape better, lessening the chance that it will want to pop apart when you drill the hole through it.

If it needs sanding after curing, you can wrap a small dowel or skewer with sandpaper to get into the tight curves.