



Beginners' Corner by [Deborah Hayes](#)

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Happy New Month!

My baby brother used to say that on the first of each month, and it gave a feeling of celebration to **any** month. However, March is special in our house; Sweet George and I both have birthdays at the end of the month, and our twins are about a week ahead of us. Our dog Louis will be five this month, too! Cake, anyone?

Spring is a time of beginnings and re-birth, so what better time to welcome new folks into the world of wonder that is polymer clay?

This month, Lucy came out of lurkdom to ask:

I read about polymer clay a few months ago, bought a couple of books, even picked up a small toaster oven at a garage sale as recommended in one of the books. Then I found your group. Now I'm terrified to start. The books made it sound so simple - buy some clay, work it, shape it, bake it, paint it.

But your group sounds so professional and far beyond my reach...What is a cane? If you're going to paint the clay, does it matter what color clay you use anyway? What does a pasta machine do? My ignorance is overwhelming. Thanks for your patience.

Uh-oh, Lucy—sounds like you have "The Fear." Fret not! Every polymer clay artist I know suffers the fear at some point. In my case, I bought tons of clay and tools, **and** a pasta machine, and then didn't do a thing with any of it for months! Really!

The good news is that working with polymer clay is just plain **fun**. All you have to do is de-threaten it by opening the package and holding it in your hand. Then, start manipulating it with your hand and fingers, and roll it on your work surface. "Moosh" it into a ball and flatten it again.

Sooner or later (if you're like me) an idea may come to you, or you may see a shape or bead inside the clay. Or, you may see in it the beginnings of a sculpture of some sort...when that happens, go with it. If nothing else, you will have a package of conditioned that is closer to ready than when you opened the pack!

Now, for the technical questions:

A cane is simply an arrangement of long bars or rods of clay into another rod or bar, so that the design they form is visible when you cut crosswise. You can do this by stacking the individual logs themselves, or combining several logs that have already been arranged into a pattern. You can roll two sheets of color together in jelly roll fashion, and that is also a cane. If the design runs the length of the rod, and can be seen in each slice, VOILA! You have made a cane.

To see a basic tutorial on making canes, visit [byrd Tetzlaff's Cane Theory](#) article in the October 2001 issue of *Polymer Clay Polyzine*.

As far as painting goes, if you do plan to paint after curing the clay, it doesn't matter much what color you start with. You can get some great effects by using heat-cured oil paints. You can use these either before you cure it, or after. The paint doesn't dry, but cures, as the clay does. If you prefer to paint your cured piece, you can easily do that with a good quality acrylic, too.

However, I don't routinely paint my items, I used a strong, flexible clay like Premo or Fimo, and then sand and polish after curing. I might even add a coat of polymer clay glaze or Future.

A pasta machine is simply used to make flat, uniform sheets of clay. It is easier and more reliable than using a rolling pin, and LOTS faster, too. You can roll two colors together, folding after each roll, and get a great marbled design. You can also use the pasta machine to press metal leaf sheets into your clay, crackling it as the clay stretches.

Although not a vital piece of equipment in your studio, once you get one, you will always wonder how you got along **without** yours! And of course, after that there are pasta machines with motors, with wider rollers, and with noodle cutters. Clay hair, perhaps?

Sydney is wondering about using PC in the kitchen:

I understand the importance of not using the same kitchen items for clay and food. But I've seen examples of clay on the handles of utensils. Is it safe or is it strictly for decoration?

What **does** happen if you accidentally use a clay item in the kitchen?

Well, Sydney, this topic just happens to have been on the newsgroups a lot lately. Although rated non-toxic, polymer clay is **not intended** to be eaten.

Use common sense. Clay on the handle of your fork would be alright, clay on the tines would not. You could decorate the handle of a mug, perhaps, but you wouldn't want to put clay on the rim. Don't use polymer clay on anything that will be in contact with food or mouths.

That said, there are cases reported of artists accidentally eating a piece of polymer clay, instead of the nearby grapes, for instance, and pets, mine included, have been known to eat what falls on the floor. No ill effects to report so far. I'd like to suggest you check one of our back issues, for a succinct article on this very matter by our own Tommie Howell: [Keeping Safe and Exclusive](#)

Regarding the frequency of our publication, we are proud to have a new issue out each month. You can also access prior issues from the Polyzine main page.

Next question is from Steve

Dear Polyzine (Deb?),

I am pretty new to all of this polymer stuff, but think it pretty nifty, I have a friend in New Zealand and have made several versions of Green Stones.

The only problem is that in America they seal the work with water based Varathane.

Do you know if this is available in Oz? Or do you have any suggestions. I have scanned the things that I have made using translucent with green.

Yep, Steve, you got the name right. This **is** Deb.



Thanks for sending me the pix of your green stones. I am unfamiliar with "downunder" trade names for US products, but for info on the availability of Flecto Varathane, you can inquire at [Flecto's web site](#).

If you would be interested in glazes made both by the makers of Fimo and Sculpey products, as well as clay, tools and a great gallery I would suggest you visit [Zigzag Polymer Clay Supplies](#) (and say "hey" to Petra for me!)

I would also suggest you check with her to inquire about the availability of Johnson Klear, which is the UK name for the Future floor polish we also use as a polymer clay glaze here in the States.

And that is about it for this month. I need to get out to the garden and get the lettuce going...and the peas, and onions and garlic and radishes...

I'll see you next month, with dirt under my nails!

Deborah