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Questions and Answers

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Dear Readers:

Welcome to the question and answer page. If you have a question, [mail it in](#) and I will try to answer it. Even if I can't answer it, I will publish it, and someone in the polymer clay community will know the answer and write to tell me.

I look forward to your questions!

Deirdre

Dear Editor:

I've been playing with polymer clay for about a year now, and something has confused me about it right from the start. I hear on the craft programs to bake "according to package directions."

I've read how dangerous the fumes can be when the clay is burnt, which I'm assuming would happen if it were overbaked, just like a cake or anything else put in the oven at the proper temperature then left there for too long.

Here's my confusion: I'm reading and hearing now about baking the piece longer will make it stronger. I've read instructions that have me baking a piece for an hour instead of the recommended 20 minutes printed on the package.

Here's my question: How long do you bake the clay, once and for all? Also, can it overbake and burn causing those terrible fumes I keep hearing about?

Yours in crafts,

Katy in Cincinnati

Have a little fun, make a little mess!

[KTCrafts](#)

Dear Katy:

Excellent questions, and ones I am sure many people would like to know the answer to.

There are two different elements involved in curing polymer clay: the temperature and the time.

The temperature of your oven determines whether or not your clay is getting cured. Too low a temperature, and the clay stays raw. Too high a temperature, and the clay burns.

Temperatures for curing polymer clay should be between 265 and 290 degrees F. Some people even cure at 300 degrees F, but **do not** cure at temperatures higher than that. If you do, the clay can burn, and in burning, can emit toxic fumes. I've turned clay brown and black at 300 degrees F, and I've burnt clay -- there was smoke and all -- at 325 degrees F. It stinks and it's not good for the lungs.

Time, however, is a good thing! Time is important because many ovens have fluctuating or cycling heat sources -- the heat comes on, the oven reaches a certain temperature, the heat shuts off, the oven cools, the heat comes on, and so forth.

This cycle of heating and cooling fails to keep the clay at a consistent internal temperature. Therefore, while you've left your piece in the oven for 20 minutes, the inside of the clay has hit the required temperature for only 5 or 10 minutes. The outside of the clay may be cured perfectly, since it heats up quickly and gets the most exposure, but the internal clay is more than likely still raw or only partially cured, and is, therefore, weak.

Leaving your clay in the oven for as long as an hour guarantees that every molecule of clay has reached the proper temperature for the proper amount of time.

So more time doesn't make the clay stronger; rather, more time keeps the clay from being weaker. If you bake the clay for 30 minutes and the entire piece is properly cured, more time in the oven won't make it any stronger. But if you bake a particularly thick piece of clay for one hour, and the inside still isn't cured, the entire piece will be weaker than the 30-minute but thoroughly cured piece.

I hope this helps!

Deirdre



To the Editor:

I am having trouble getting all my cane slices to come out the same thickness. A ruler is only partially effective, and the unevenness is difficult to sand off the finished product. Is there a gadget on the market for creating even slices?

Rochelle Paris
New York

Dear Rochelle:

Oh how I hate cutting cane slices. I always start out narrow at the top and end up with a big fat wedge at the bottom.

There are some ways to cope with this problem, however! First, stand straight over your cane and look down upon it as you cut. You are more likely to get a uniform slice this way.

Another method is to cut your cane slices by holding the cane straight up in one hand and cutting across the top with the other. I've seen people do this, and it works for them, but I've never had any success with this method.

Finally, there are cane slicing contraptions for sale out there. [Poly-Tools](#) has a brand new slicer on the market: the [Super Clay Slicer](#) available at a very reasonable price.

The first cane slicer to be introduced to the market, the [JASI slicer](#), is also available. E-mail [Judith Skinner](#), the woman who also invented the Skinner blend, for more information about this slicer.

Good luck with your canes!

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

I would like to know what Varathane is?

Also, I went to Home Depot today to get sandpaper that had grits of 800,1000,1200 and 1500 and the best I could get at the store was 400 and 600 grit. Could you please tell me where I can find sandpaper finer in grit than 600.

Where can I find a good buffing machine that will polish polymer clay well?

Sandy

Dear Sandy:

Both Varathane and a good buffing machine can be purchased at the Home Depot. Varathane is a strong finish that will protect your polymer clay items from damage. The buffing machine can be found in the tools department, under the name of "bench grinder". Take off the hard wheels and add muslin buffing wheels, which can be found in the same section of the store.

For your sandpaper, however, you need to go to an automotive store, so you can purchase wet/dry sandpaper in the grits you want. Only automobile buffs (and polymer clay artists) use such fine grit sandpaper.

Deirdre



Good afternoon:

I have a gorgeous handmade Fimo sculpture that was made for me as a birthday present about 15 years ago.

It fell on the floor this past weekend and broke in two.

This piece meant an awful lot to me. The break is clean so I'm hoping to glue it back together. However, I'm concerned that - if I use the wrong glue - I could make a complete mess of things.

Any suggestions?

Thank you!
Cheryl

Dear Cheryl:

How horrible. I am so sorry!

On the good side, however, you can mend the break with Zap-A-Gap, a quick drying cyanoacrylate. Place several thin beads onto one side of the break, press the two pieces together, and in 20 seconds you will have a firm hold.

You can buy Zap-A-Gap at your local model shop, where they sell trains and planes and things like that.

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

I live in Central Florida. Do you know of any classes that are given in such places as Ocala, Tampa, Orlando or can you direct me to a place that would know. Thanks for any help you can offer.

Joan

Dear Joan:

The first place to look would be the [National Polymer Clay Guild](#) website -- they have both local guilds and workshops listed.

Also, you can place a free classified ad at [Polymer Clay Central's classified ads section](#). You can use this service to find people in your area who are interested in polymer clay, and if you get enough people, you can purchase a workshop from any of the polymer clay instructors. It's a lot easier than you might think!

There are also a lot of [bead guilds](#) that might be hosting a polymer clay workshop. Finally, Ellen Poitras, a polymer clay doll artist, lives in Orlando. She can be reached at [her e-mail](#) or [her website](#).

Good luck in your search, and don't forget, you can always form a guild just by posting notices in the local Free Shopper, at grocery stores and libraries, and at art supply stores.

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

Ok, I read on several internet sites that the Atlas pasta machine was the #1 recommendation for clayers. Thanks! Got one and love it.

Now I need a digital camera to take pictures of my very small pieces 1"x 3/4" to email to my (out of state) parents. Any recommendations? I would like quality pictures for minimal cost.

Thank so much!

Tejae

Dear Tejae:

What I don't know about digital cameras could fill several volumes. A lot of people I've heard discussing their cameras swear by the Sony Mavica.

Does anyone have other suggestions?

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

Could you please tell me how to get started making poly clay fairies. I have looked for books on the web and can't find anything.

Please help.

Thank you,
Theresa

Dear Theresa:

There are so many different ways to get started! You can simply start to sculpt on your own, you can design ahead of time, then sculpt to the design, you can use templates in books to design a fairy, and the list goes on and on!

If you want to create a human-like fairy, then you want to read books that teach you how to sculpt the human form in polymer clay. There are several different books that can teach you these techniques, including Susan Dunham's book, *Sculpting & Making a Toddler Doll* if you are interest in making a baby fairy, or Sue Heaser's *Making Miniature Dolls with Polymer Clay. How to Make Clay Characters or Friends and Family in Polymer Clay* by Maureen Carlson can also help.

You could also use molds, such as [Parker Levi and Kent's Mini Molds](#). Also, check out [Regina Edmonds' Push Molds](#). For non-human-like fairies, you can check out Julie Sharp's *Making Fairies and Fantastical Creatures*, which you would have to adapt for using polymer clay. Also, go to e-bay and do a search for "fairy" or "faery" to see what other people are doing.

Good luck!

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

I am creating wings and seek the most transparent clay - I have tried Sculpey III and it bakes yellow (not clear), any help?

Also, I noticed in the March 2002 newsletter, an answer to a Spanish question. On a recent once in a lifetime trip to Mexico, a friend found a magazine called "Pasta francesa el Mundo de las Manualidades". I do not read or understand Spanish; however, the pictures are excellent for ideas. I noticed that the cover indicated "Numero 6 - 1998".

There is obviously a series. Can you help me find out how to get a subscription? back issues? etc.?

Thank you -
Debie Boyd

Debi:

You can also obtain translucency with Sculpey III, but it needs to be baked at a lower temperature than regular Sculpey III. Drop the temperature 10 degrees and bake a test wing, then drop another 10 degrees and test, etc. until you find the right combination of cured and color.

Also, we will be having the most amazing tutorial in June on how to make transparent wings. Look for it.

As regards your Spanish publication question, I had a friend check out the publication, but she thinks perhaps you have the title of the article, rather than the publication, since the translation is "French Pasta The World of Tasks."

She recommends checking out the Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico or La Universidad Nacional Autonoma websites to run a search for the article and find the journal that way. I don't know how to do those searches, myself, but contact a Spanish professor at your local university and s/he can help you.

Deirdre



Dear Editor:

There are two of us who get together and try everything at least once. We are starved for other polymer clays artists around the Broward County area in Florida.

We would like to start a guild or at least get together to get the juices flowing. We both have studio settings so space is no problem . We're informal. We would like your help in passing the word on.

[Nancy Greene](#)



Dear Editor:

I'm looking for small dog and cat molds-I've been several places on the net-whole salesupplies and spirit crafts--but that's all I've found. Can you help me????

Andrea Candelaria

Dear Readers:

Anyone have dog and cat molds?

Deirdre



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