

## Feather Beads by Emma Ralph

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These beads are the culmination of my experiments with Natasha or 'Inside Out' beads. While I always loved the process of making Natasha beads, I wanted to find a way to control the end result more and to move away from the random look that cutting into clay scraps typically produces. Don't get me wrong, that wonder of not knowing just what you are going to get when you make those cuts is still very appealing, but I thought it would be great to have more control sometimes.

A solution came one day when I was playing around with [Elissa Powell's Chrysanthemum Cane](#). I experimented further with the idea of indenting canes in various ways. I found that the following way of indenting canes produces very attractive Natasha beads.

Some of the steps in making feather beads may seem rather crazy and destructive – all I can ask is that you trust me!

## Materials:

- Bull's-eye cane, reduced to 1.5 cm diameter
- Old credit card
- Tissue blade
- Toothpick / Needle tool for piercing
- Brayer

## Step One:

Shape the bull's-eye cane by hand to make it square. Once you have roughly shaped the cane from a cylinder to having four definite sides, use the brayer to refine the cane sides further.



## Step Two:

With the credit card, make indentations all along one side of the cane in much the same way as you would use a tissue blade to cut slices.

Space each indentation approximately 5 mm apart and push the credit card down so that the indentation goes about one third of the way down through the cane.

If you push too hard and accidentally cut through the cane with the card, don't worry, just carry on and push the cane back together gently when you have finished.



### Step Three:

Flip the cane over and repeat the process on the opposite side. Try to make these indentations sit between the last ones. You will most likely get a few breakages in the cane, but don't worry – it will be fine!

Okay, you guessed it – we now do the same to the other two sides of the cane, so all four sides have indentations! By now the cane will look rather like a dead bug, but this is just what we want!

### Step Four:

When you have made all the indentations, gently push the cane back to a square shape again. Use your brayer to gently give more definition.

### Step Five:

Cut sections of the cane about 2 cm long (or however long you want your beads to be). Each section now only needs to be made into a Natasha bead.

To create a Natasha bead, cut the bead lengthways down the middle with the tissue blade. Turn each half onto its side and cut again down the middle, splitting the bead into four lengthwise quarters.



### Step Six:

Each quarter must now be rotated a full 180 degrees and put back into place, effectively turning the bead inside out.

The patterns of the cut sides will now be visible. Each side should match up and the feathering pattern will emerge.

How to make Natasha beads can be confusing, but there are some [great tutorials](#) on the Internet that give full instructions on how to rotate and assemble

the beads.



### **Step Seven:**

When the bead is assembled, smooth the seams carefully and brayer into shape.

Pierce the beads and add bead caps with coordinating color clay if you wish or maybe change the shape in other ways. When you are happy with your final beads, all that is left to do is bake, sand and varnish.

Experimenting with the spacing and the depth of the indentations can provide a variety of patterns when making feather beads. You can also change the look of the beads by varying your color palette in the original cane; high contrast bull's-eye canes work very well, but it can also be fun to experiment with other canes, Skinner blends and so on.

I hope you enjoy playing with this new twist on a classic polymer clay technique. If you have any questions or suggestions about making feather beads, then please feel free to [e-mail me!](#)