

Translucent Chrysanthemum Cane®

By Elissa Powell

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Photos by Robert Burrill

Finished hearts made using the chrysanthemum cane.

An assortment of raw canes using this technique

The Flower: Nature's Masterpiece!

Artists throughout history have sought to emulate the flower's effortless beauty. Many accomplished polymer clay artists whom we all admire, through complex caning techniques, have succeeded in amazing us (witness Sarajane Helm's splendid article in the October issue of [Bead & Button magazine](#).)

I have devised my own version of the chrysanthemum cane. My motivation springs not only from a love of flowers but from a vision problem, making it difficult for me to focus on fine detail, plus a craving for instant gratification! My technique is quite simple, really, but the result can be extraordinarily complex, an intricate interplay of overlapping patterns and colors. Using this distortion technique, a simple jellyroll cane is transformed into a delicate rival to nature's own creation.

These illustrations will take you through each step of the process. A few extra pointers will insure an awesome result!

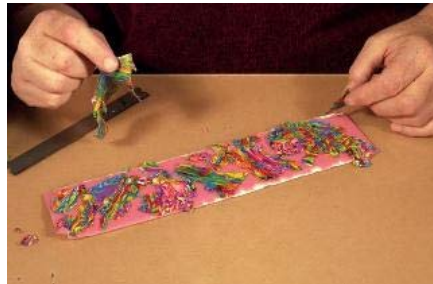
Start with a ten-inch strip of white clay (#5 setting.) Atop this add a strip of Premo Pearl at the #1 setting.



Atop the pearl, add a #1 strip of translucent clay. This time I tinted it pink.



Scrap clay can be very useful in creating interesting color accents. Randomly place some thin-rolled pieces atop the translucent clay, then roll the whole thing through the pasta machine at the thickest setting.



Roll the stack into a neat jellyroll log.



Now to begin the distortion process. I am using a credit card as my stiff edge, covered with a piece of paper to increase the drag. Place the card longitudinally along the log and begin to press down evenly, until you reach the center.



After the first pressing, give the log a quarter turn, and press again. Then give it another quarter turn and press, then another, each time pressing down to the center of the cane.



After the first four creases, this is what the distorted cane should look like.



Now continue the distortion process, pressing between two creases each time, then giving a quarter turn, for a total of eight creases.



Viola! Chrysanthemum cane!



I use scrap clay for the centers of my hearts and stones. Why waste the good stuff on the inside? Here I am covering a ball of scrap with a thin sheet of pearl and green mix. I then roll it between my palms to smooth it.



Slice the cane tissue-thin, but don't worry about not having complete slices! Now to slice the cane and



cover the ball. Perfect slices are of only limited use! Slices will overlap, and a more interesting effect is achieved when the pieces are irregular.

The tissue-thin slices are overlapped on the ball in an interesting, random-looking, pattern.



Now to a ball of pearl-covered scrap clay, I am adding slices of the same cane.



Once the cane is applied, I gently roll the ball between my palms to set and smooth the slices onto the ball.



Now to shape the ball into a heart. Gently begin to roll one end of the ball between your fingertips to elongate it. Rolling more tightly on the end gives the heart its point.



Now to give the heart its lobes. With the side of your index finger, gently press into the top of the ball. Not pictured: to give a heart a sharper crease, a folded piece of stiff paper (such as a business card) can be pressed into the top, folded edge down. Then smooth the lobes with your fingers.



The two hearts I made, ready for screw eye insertion and curing.



After curing, sanding, buffing, glazing, and hanging, the finished product!



Extra Tips

1. Use a soft clay. Distort the cane immediately after rolling while the clay is still soft, warm, and pliable. Allow the cane to rest at least $\frac{1}{2}$ hour before slicing, so the cane can cool and harden a bit.
2. To achieve the greatest translucent effect, make the opaque layer very thin.
3. Slice the cane as thinly as possible, then overlap the slices. Don't worry about perfect slices. Slight variations in thickness result in a very eye pleasing effect. Slicing the cane diagonally can help to create an even greater illusion of depth.
4. The same cane over different backgrounds can produce amazingly different effects! Tinting the translucent, or using skinner blends of tints, is another variation. Experiment!
5. For achieving the ultimate transparency, there are no shortcuts. Sand first with a 400-grit paper, then an ultra fine grit - such as 800 or finer. Then buff to a glass-like shine before applying a coat of Varathane®.
6. Don't sweat the small stuff! The most beautiful effects are achieved quite by accident! Most importantly, have fun!

