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Well here we are again, and hard as it is to believe, it is almost Fall! Back to school, harvesting in the garden, those delightful bright days and cool nights. Can you tell it's my favorite season?

We will focus this month on that workhorse we all love, the pasta machine.

First, Mary Lou wonders about price and availability:

*Hi Deborah,*

*I'm a beginner. Can you suggest a pasta machine for someone who has never used one let alone for clay?*

*I'm very much interested in getting my hands wet with polymer clay projects. Can I get one for \$100.00 or less?*

*Remember this is my first time. Do you suggest I should try some projects without the pasta machine before I purchase? I have seen some wonderful results with the pasta machine on HGTV and DIY.*

Mary Lou:

Not only can you get a fine pasta machine for under \$100, if you shop well you can get one that's outfitted with a motor!

I bought mine (no motor) online a few years ago, and I believe it was less than \$40, including the shipping! You might try [Prairie Craft](#), [Wee Folk](#) or [Clay Factory](#).

I offer these links assuming you're in the USA. If not, contacting the companies for international availability might help, as well.

My personal choice for brand was the Atlas, mainly because my husband already had one for, of all things, making pasta! (of course, you might even find a pasta machine in a kitchen or gourmet shop!)

You can do many wonderful things without a pasta machine, but it is so helpful for all kinds of smoothing and conditioning jobs, you will wonder how you ever managed without one! It is essential to me for making Skinner blends, and once you've mastered those, it's like a whole new world.

Continuing with the pasta machine motif, here is a letter from Alisa Lehman:

*Dear Polyzine,*

*I have a problem. My pasta machine often puts black streaks on my light colored clays. The machine is only a few months old. I have tried to clean and wipe all the visible surfaces. I sometimes manage to clean it by running a sacrifice piece of white though many, many times until the streaks stop.*

*But then as soon as I run some dark clay through the problem starts again. The streaks are always black, even if I had been using blue clay. Can anyone suggest a cure?*

*Thanks for a great magazine. I look forward to each issue.*

*Yours Truly,  
Alisa Lehman*

Alisa:

Take heart, for you are not alone in the struggle! I don't know of anyone who has used a pasta machine without getting the dark streaks from time to time. I do think you're on the right track, though, with the cleaning idea.

First of all, though, the dark streaks are probably NOT leftover clay, or they would change color as you change colors of clay. What you're seeing is more than likely grease left from the factory.

Since pasta machines are designed to roll a pasta dough, and not polymer clay, it's entirely possible that the clay is a tad too stiff, or perhaps too thick, and the additional pressure on the rollers pushes some oil onto the clay. Make certain your clay isn't too stiff or thick before you pass it through.

Also, make certain that you start rolling your clay on the widest setting and work your way down to the narrower settings.

To remove the grease from the rollers, I pass baby wipes through them, with the machine set at its narrowest. To make certain I get most of the grease off, I often add some alcohol to the baby wipe. It does a great job, and after I wipe the rollers, paying special attention to the edges, I can use the wipe on my hands.

Another baby wipe tip: after you've used them for hands or rollers, they are terrific for cleaning off tools and work surfaces, too. Use 'em up, 'til there's no use left! They are great to keep on hand.

Your idea of using white clay is also a good one. I have a piece (plain, white Sculpey) that I use only for running through the pasta machine after I use dark colors, whether I have grease marks or not.

Now that we have the pasta machine questions handled, Nina wonders about other tools:

*Hi,*

*My name is Azucena Kapel, (Nina), I am one of those crazy crafty persons who wants to learn a little bit of every thing, so here I am now trying to learn the poly clay, I have a pasta machine and some clay, have being playing trying to make an American flag cane, (is a little bit hard).*

*But I will like to know how and where to buy the little cutters with shapes (stars and hearts, and other shapes) but this cutter have a spring so when you cut them the clay comes out and it doesn't get stuck inside the cutter.*

*Thanks for your help.*

*Nina Kapel*

Nina, I think you are talking about Kemper cutters. They come in a variety of sizes, and different shapes, as well.

You're right; the spring and plunger mechanism is wonderful for getting the clay out. Dipping the cutter into a bit of cornstarch will also help ease release.

You can find the cutters at some craft stores, but I have had better luck with online stores, such as the ones mentioned above. [The Clay Alley](#) also carries them.

Well, that's it for this month. Keep the questions coming, y'all!

Deborah