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Covering an Altoid® Hinged Box by Desiree McCrorey



I've had such fun covering Altoid® mint boxes. My love and fascination for covering them is so great, it may equal my love for covering light switch plates!

One common question I've been asked is how to make the clay stick to the metal surface of the box. Perhaps you need to develop a strong dislike to strong mints. ;-)

Actually, I think it helps. When I started covering these boxes, I didn't handle the boxes that much because I didn't eat the mints. After tearing off the shrink-wrap, I immediately dumped out all the mints and washed the empty boxes in hot soapy water to remove the powdery residue. Then I carefully dried the boxes and immediately covered them with clay.

If you have Altoid® boxes that have been frequently handled (picked up, opened, closed, etc.), they're likely covered in just enough hand oils, powdery residue, dust and dirt to make it difficult for the clay to stick well. I'll bet if you clean the boxes and your hands before covering the boxes, you'll have no trouble making the clay stick.

The other critical aspects to assuring the clay sticks to the box surface is to make the cover fit like a glove and remove any trapped air. I think it also helps to use clay that is as soft as Premo®. Softer clay tends to stick better to itself and anything else it touches.

Here are the steps to cover a standard sized Altoid® mints hinged lid box.

Supply list:

- wax paper
- Premo® pearl clays
- pasta machine (I used a Mercato® Atlas)
- Altoid® tin (empty and thoroughly washed and dried)
- Lucite roller
- thinnest possible sewing needle or pin
- tissue or NuBlade®
- 7/8ths inch hole punch
- 3/16ths inch (size 6) hole punch
- X-acto® knife with #19 blade
- X-acto® knife with #11 blade
- optional: fine-nosed tweezers
- optional: wet/dry sandpaper (400, 600, 1000 grits)
- optional: Future® acrylic floor polish or Flecto Varathane®



Tools for turning the tin into a polymer clay box

Instructions:

- 1) Cut a couple of sheets of waxed paper that are approximately 6" X 6" each. Precision isn't important, though. Set aside.
- 2) Covering the Altoid box bottom:



Cover the bottom of the tin

Roll a polymer clay sheet to #4 pasta machine setting thickness. Flip the Altoid tin so it is bottom side up. Place the clay sheet on one edge of the tin's bottom.

As you place the clay sheet on the tin, gently stroke the sheet onto the clean metal surface, advancing from one edge to the other. By gradually covering the surface like this, you reduce the chance of trapping air under the clay.

Roll across the sheet using your Lucite roller. This seems to really help the clay stick to the metal surface and also reveal any trapped air pockets.

If the clay sheet tends to stick to the roller, place a sheet of waxed paper on the clay sheet and roll over the waxed paper.

Remove the waxed paper.

Check for air pockets (gently raised domes in the clay). If there are any air pockets, it's too late to pry the sheet off because it seems to stick to the clean metal surface pretty well. Use the thinnest needle you can find to poke a hole in the pocket and push to force out the air.

Re-roll to smooth the surface. Gently press the hole with one of your fingers to close it up.



Trim excess clay from the bottom



The finished bottom

Re-cover the clay sheet with the waxed paper. Flip the box so it is right side up. Place the box on your work surface.

Trim away the excess clay using your NuBlade. By setting the clay covered surface on the wax paper, you prevent your piece from sticking to the work surface.

- 3) Covering the Altoid box top:

Roll a polymer clay sheet to #4 pasta machine setting thickness. Place the clay sheet on one edge of the box top.

As you place the clay sheet on the box, gently stroke the sheet onto the clean metal surface, advancing from one edge to the other.

Finish using the same covering technique you used to cover the bottom of the box.

Cut away the excess clay by flipping the box upside down and trimming. If you've left the box bottom covered by wax paper, temporarily remove it so you can easily trim the top sheet.



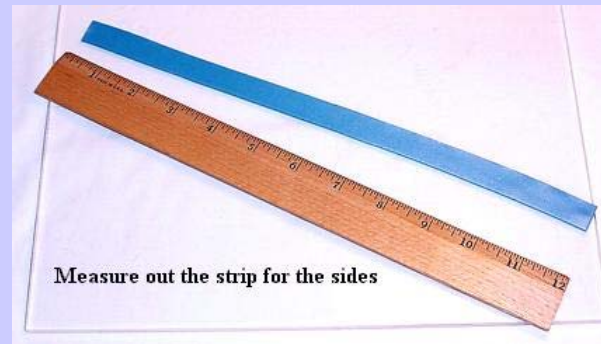
The finished top



Basic tin

4) Covering the lower sides of the Altoid box:

Using the #4 thickness on the pasta machine, make a strip that is at least 10/16ths inch wide and at least 11 1/2 inches long. Don't fret if the strip is wider or longer - you can trim away the excess after applying the strip to the box sides.



Measure out the strip for the sides



Wrap the sides in clay

Start at the back of the box. Place the strip right up against the rim of the lid. With a gentle yet steady tension, begin wrapping the strip around the lower sides of the box, pressing the clay against the side as you go.

When you have completely encircled the box, trim the excess length and press the cut edges together. Smoothly blend the edges together.

Place the box upside down. Press the strip against the bottom sheet until it sticks. With your blade laying on the bottom sheet trim away any excess clay so that the strip is flush with the box bottom.



Trim excess clay from the sides

5) Covering the Altoid sides of the upper half:

Using the #4 thickness on the pasta machine, make a strip that is at least 5/16ths inch wide and at least 11 1/2 inches long. Don't fret if the strip is wider or longer - you can trim away the excess after applying the strip to the box sides.



Check to see where the hinges are

Place and trim the clay for the top sides the same way you did for the bottom sides.

6) Adding rope trim:

Roll out two clay ropes that are each about 2/16ths inch to 3/16ths inch thick and at least 11 1/2 - 12 inches long. When rolling, use your palms -- never fingers -- to create nice evenly thick ropes.

Place waxed paper on the box top, then flip so the box is upside down.

Cut one end of a rope on the diagonal. Align the rope so that it rests on the cut edge of the side strip, covering the cut edge.

When you have completely encircled the edge, cut the end of the rope on the diagonal and slightly twist so it matches the slant of the other end. Press the ends together and smoothly blend to remove the seams. Gently and firmly press the rope into the edge without distorting the rope's shape.



Add rope to the bottom



Add rope to the top

Flip the box right side up, placing it on another sheet of waxed paper. Remove the waxed paper that was on the top of the box.

Add rope trim to the top of the box just as you added trim to the bottom.



Cut circles

7) Adding ball feet:

Use the 7/8ths inch hole punch on a #1 thick clay sheet to cut out five (5) circles. Roll each cutout into a ball.



Add the feet

Place four (4) of the balls on the corners of the bottom of your box, just inside the trim. Place the box on its feet and gently, gently press evenly to assure the feet stick to the bottom and trim corners. Be careful not to distort the trim too much. It's OK for the balls to be just a little flat.

8) Decorating:

Take the 5th ball and place it directly in the center of the front edge of the box, just inside the trim. Press gently to assure the ball sticks.

Use the 3/16ths inch hole punch to punch out eight (8) circles out of a clay sheet that is #4 thick. Combine four (4) of the circles into one ball. Combine the other 4 circles into another ball.

Repeat this process three times, punching out six (6) circles to make two balls, then four (4) circles to make two balls, and finally two (2) circles to make two balls. You should have a total of eight (8) balls of gradually decreasing sizes.

Arrange the balls on both sides of the center ball. Make sure they rest along the trim sides as well as the bottom.



Decorate the tin

Obviously, you can decorate as you like, and you can get far more detailed, adding different shapes, different trim, etc. Be creative and experiment.



9) Hinge work:

Use the Xacto knife with the #19 blade to horizontally score the clay area just above the hinges. The #19 blade is only slightly wider than the exact width of the hinge, so it's perfect for cutting out the hinge opening. Simply press the blade into the clay.

Use the Xacto knife with a #11 blade to score along either side. Use the #19 blade again to cut upwards along the hinge itself.

If the clay is firm enough, you can easily remove two little slots which will allow the hinges to work as soon as the box cools from its baking. If the clay is very soft and distorts easily, scoring the slots will suffice. Wait until after baking and cooling to finish removing the clay from the slots so the hinges can work.

"What are the tweezers for?" you may wonder. If your workspace and home are like mine, you've got no better way to deftly remove those sneaky little cats hairs that seem intent on attaching to the raw clay. ;-)



10) Baking:

Carefully handle your box while you smooth away any fingerprints you can find. Bake your Altoid box at 275 degrees F for 45 minutes. Cool.

If you didn't do it prior to baking, use the Xacto blades to remove any clay that would interfere with the hinges. Test to make sure you can open and close the box.

11) Sanding and Varnishing:

You can remove finger prints and most minor irregularities post-bake by sanding with wet/dry 400, 600 and 1000 grits and a little water.

If you decide you want to then varnish with Future or Flecto Varathane, make sure the box is completely dry and free of any irregularities. The shininess seems to accentuate any surface flaws.





The final project

Congratulations on a fine job. You be done!

[Desiree](#)

Editor's Note: Desiree's website, [Desired Creations](#), is like a candy store. You will find delicious and delightful projects and tutorials. She is well-known as the pasta machine Queen who bravely showed us all how to dismantle and reassemble our machines many years ago. Desiree is a talented and generous artist whose body of work lives in the annals of polymer clay. I hope you enjoy your visit.

