

PILLOW BEADS

BY CARISSA NICHOLS



Pillow Beads

or

How To Drive Yourself Crazy in One Afternoon

Before we start let me just say this: Are you **sure** you want to make these kinds of beads?!? Once you start, it's hard to stop, and then you spend all your time thinking of new shapes and new ways to make these hollow beauties. (And why did I even bother to ask? If you are reading this, you are **already** infected with the poly virus and are beyond help!)

There are many different ways to make hollow beads, but the easiest process that I know of came from Carl Hornsberger, one of the grandfathers of polymer clay. Carl likes to putter around inventing tools to make polymer easier to use. Some of you may even have his football bead roller in your tool supplies.

Carl calls his creations "Fortune Cookies" because of their twisted shape. I made mine a little differently and people told me they looked like "Galumpkis," or dumplings. (Sorry if I spelled that one wrong, Mom!)

These beads take practice, pure and simple. Even if you get a nice hollow shape, the edges can often crack open again. So don't give up if your first few tries don't work out.

WHAT YOU NEED

This technique can be used with textured clay, but for now, try using just some **plain undoctored clay**.

Try using a well-conditioned Fimo color, as we are coming into summer and Scuply/Premo brands can very quickly become soft and sticky from the heat of your hand. "Hot" clay will not keep its shape, nor will it stick together very well. Also avoid the metallics or Fimo Soft until you are more comfortable with the technique, as you can run into the same problem.

A 3 or 4-inch round cookie cutter will be used to make circles in the clay. Cut out several to practice on. Later on, you will find that practice will allow you to make smaller beads and ones with different shapes.

Throw the circles in the fridge for about 10 minutes, so they are nice and chilled.

Cornstarch will help keep the inside part of the clay from sticking to itself.

Make sure your hands are squeaky clean. If you have been handling the clay and your hands feel sticky, then you will find it difficult to seal the edges of your hollow bead.

WHAT TO DO

The key to quickly making the beads is to **handle the clay as little as possible**. This will be hard the first few times, but once your hands get the idea, it will begin to feel more natural.

Select a circle and gently **rub just a dab of cornstarch** in the center of the circle. This is now the "inside" of your bead. **Do not** rub cornstarch all the way to the edges of the circle. If you do, your circle will not seal to itself at the edges, and the bead will collapse during baking.

Fold the circle loosely in half and pick it up by an outside edge.

Tamp the edges of the clay together smoothly and gently. Work your way from one end to another, stopping when you have about 1/8th of an inch of edge left open. Smooth and work the tamped edges, so the clay merges together and you have NO line visible. If the clay overheats, just stop and put it back into the fridge for a few moments.

Now for the tricky part! Blow into the 1/8th of an inch hole **very gently**. If you blow too hard, the sealed edge will blow open. However, if you don't get enough air into the bead, then it will flatten out during curing. (With some of the shapes you make, this can be an interesting look.)

Before removing your mouth from the clay, use your lips to pinch the hole closed.

Now I know that there are some concerns out there about clay toxicity and all that, so I cover my lips with a thin layer of Vaseline lip therapy, wipe it off when I am done and gently wash my lips with soap and water. I know other people who stick a little coffee stirrer in the hole and blow with that instead of using their mouths. Doing this would also allow you to use your fingers to close the hole. Do what is best for you.

Once you are done, you have a half-moon shaped hollow bead. This shape is an easy one to learn on as you only have one edge to worry about sealing. Once the bead is cooked, I wrap it with wire and use it as a pendant.

BAKING

It's best to **bake your bead starting in a cold oven**. Also **support the bead in a bowl or plate of cornstarch** during baking to prevent the sides from flattening.

I normally bake about 25 minutes at 260F. Then I **shut the oven off and let the beads cool off in the oven**. Sudden temperature shifts can crack the bead at the seal.

If the seal does crack, you can run a thin snake of clay in the same color or a contrasting color along the edge of the seal, smooth it down and rebake. Alternatively, you can place a larger snake on the edge to make a shaped "lip," which you can decorate.

Shapes of Beads

You can get different shapes of beads by folding over long ovals, long rectangles, and diamonds. Once you get used to this technique, you can try shapes that are formed from two sheets placed on top of each other, and seal the edges all the way around. Give it a try and send us some pictures!!

Until next time, Carpe Polyum!

Carissa