

How to Make Paper Clay in Your Home Studio

Lisa Merida-Paytes • October 18, 2017 • [Read Comments \(9\)](#)

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In this post, we'll show you how to make paper clay. Making paper clay is a great way to gain strength in your work, while also reducing its heft. If you've never worked with [paper clay](#), you'll be thrilled with the doors it can open up in your work. Paper clay improves joining capabilities and decreases warping and shrinkage, all the while reducing the heft of the work. This makes it ideal for building complex or delicate ceramic sculpture.

Ceramic artist Lisa Merida-Paytes has found paper clay to be a great tool with which to build her ceramic sculptures. Not only does it make the work have more strength, but paper clay also makes it lighter weight. In today's post, an excerpt from the [Pottery Making Illustrated](#) archives, Lisa extols the virtues of this wonderful material and gives instructions on how to make paper clay. So read up, and then put your work on a paper clay diet! –Jennifer Poellot Harnetty, editor.

How to Make Paper Clay – Materials



Commercial spray insulation, also known as cellulose fiber, can be purchased from your local hardware store. How would you like your ceramic work to be lighter? Or stronger? Or both? Paper clay may be the answer since it has all the advantages of durability while avoiding the heaviness often associated with regular clay. Made using any type of clay body – earthenware, stoneware, raku or porcelain – paper clay enhances green

strength, decreases warping, improves joining capabilities in wet-to-wet and dry-to-dry situations, and you can even attach wet paper clay to bisqued paper clay piece to repair small breaks.

Making your own paper clay is simple. You'll need prepared clay slip (commercial or homemade), a drill with a mixer attachment, buckets, bleach, a plastic rib, a respirator, several plaster bats, and paper fibers. Any paper fiber such as newspaper, cotton linter, or photocopier paper can be used to create paper clay, but these types of paper will often develop mold growth if left overnight. I discourage using toilet paper because it contains starch and promotes rot within the clay in as little as a few hours. To eliminate mold, you'll need to add a tablespoon of bleach and remix. I recommend making paper clay with spray insulation, also known as cellulose fiber and commonly used in insulating attics and homes. I suggest the cellulose for three reasons: strength, time and money. The most important of these being the prefiring strength supplied by the inclusion of the fibrous material. Also, cellulose fiber cuts out the very time consuming step of breaking down traditional paper materials into pulp.

How to Make Paper Clay – Mixing



Clay slip with cellulose fiber mixed in. The finished product will be more textural, with fine strands of pulp. To make 10-15 pounds of paper clay, pour two gallons of recycled clay slip or commercial slip into a 5 gallon bucket. Sprinkle three handfuls of cellulose fiber into the slip and mix with the drill mixer. Crumble the fiber as you add it to the bucket to help prevent dry pockets of material forming in the slip. Mix the slip and fiber for approximately 15 minutes. While mixing, the slip may require more water, but add only small amounts at a time. Once the materials are thoroughly combined, run your hand through the slip to make sure there aren't any large, dry clumps of fiber remaining. If you find pockets, break them up and continue to mix for several more minutes until the slip comes to a yogurt consistency with tiny threads of texture.

CAUTION

Wear gloves, a respirator and goggles to protect from inhaling dust particles from the clay or fiber. Be sure to read and follow all product warnings on the cellulose fiber.

How to Make Paper Clay – Using

Paper clay slip can be cast directly into molds. To prepare the paper clay for handbuilding, pour the slip onto dry plaster bats and spread it around with a rubber rib until it's a half inch thick. Wait 10 – 15 minutes for the plaster to absorb the excess moisture and the slip forms a hardened film. Flip the clay over to dry the other side for another 15 -20 minutes. At this point, the clay should be workable as a slab or ready to be wedged for handbuilding.