

How To; - Roll Clay Sheets

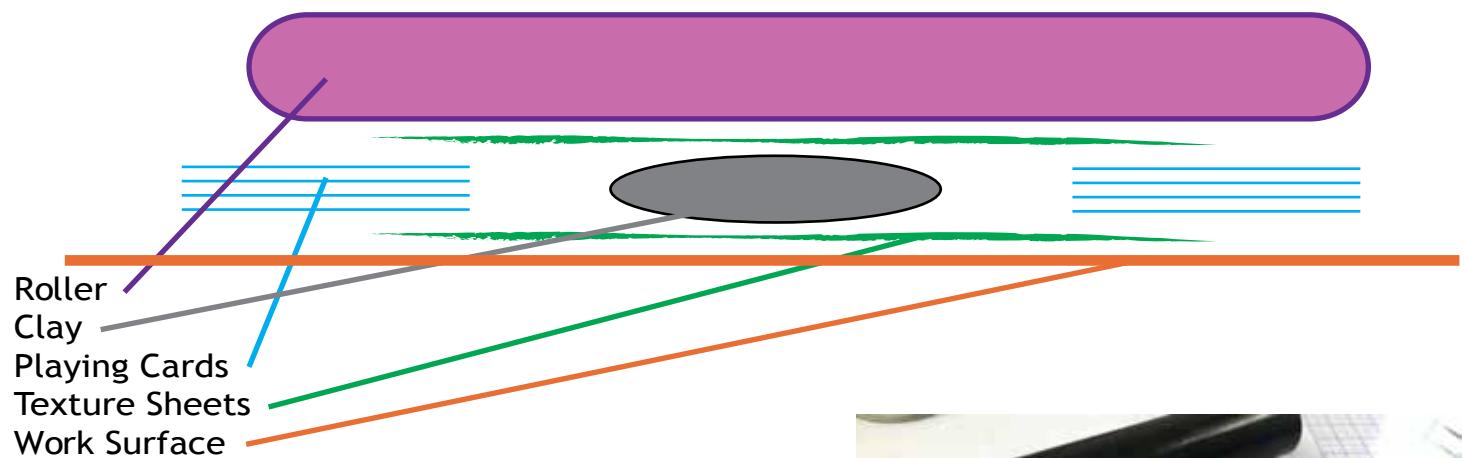
Rolling out your clay into flat sheets is one of the most commonly used processes for working with this clay. Once you have a flat sheet of clay, you can cut this into shapes easily with a knife, needle tool or metal cutters to create shapes which are then dried out, refined and fired.

Sheets of clay can be dried flat and used as they are, or shaped around formers of different types to create 3D items (for example in making rings, beads, or bails), as well as refined and joined together to make more complex forms.

Due to the shrinkage and sintering of the clay when fired, it is particularly good at taking surface textures or patterns, one way to make the most of this property; use texture sheets of some type when rolling out your clay. If the back of a piece will be on show, then try adding pattern to this too.



Tip - For a standard sheet of clay, a 1mm thickness (4 playing cards thick) works well. Thinner sheets can be used if you plan to layer them up, but the metal will be too weak if used on their own. Thicker sheets can be used to give a chunkier effect, but will use up more clay.



Rolling Out Clay

Plan out what you want to create - use paper templates or modelling clay if you need to work out shapes and do a test run first to work out your design.

Once you have a plan, lightly grease your work surface, any texture sheets and your rolling pin.



To roll out an even sheet of clay, and to control the thickness, you need to use something solid and level between your rolling pin and the work surface. In many metal clay kits, plastic slats are provided - often colour coded at different thicknesses, alternatively, use stacks of cheap plastic coated playing cards. **To translate between using slats & cards - 2 playing cards = roughly 0.5mm**

To roll out a patterned sheet of clay - start by briefly forming your clay into a block. Place it on a lightly greased work mat, sitting between your two stacks of cards and roll out to 2 cards thicker than your goal thickness (eg. if aiming eventually for 4 cards thickness - pre-roll now using 6 card stacks. Ensure both ends of your roller are supported on the card stacks as you roll.

Ease the sheet of clay free from the work surface and lay it onto your selected pattern or texture sheet - you can use anything to roll onto your clay - a wide range of texture mats and sheets are available to buy, but you can also use leaves, fabric, paper, or you can make custom patterned sheets. Ensure any texture surface it is greased, but not so heavily that areas of the pattern are blocked. For added pattern opportunities, use textures on both sides of your clay, by using one sheet under the clay and another on top. Make sure your card stacks (or plastic



Tip - Any marks in/on the surface of the clay will be exaggerated after firing - even fine / subtle patterns can be very effective.

If you are not happy with your pattern, you can start over at any point.

slats) are sitting on the bottom sheet and inside the sandwich of your stack, supporting the top sheet. Take two cards off each stack before rolling.

Pre-rolling allows more control over the texturing - giving a cleaner, clearer pattern, and also controls the depth of pattern if you are using particularly deep texture sheets.

Cutting and Forming

Once you are happy with the sheet size and pattern, you can cut and shape it how you like.

Cut with; -

- a scalpel or needle tool - freehand or use a stencil / template,
- straight edges or smooth curves with a tissue blade,
- selected shapes using a cookie cutter.

A long thin strip can be used to create a ring, flat pieces can be charms or pendants, sheets can be gently manipulated into 3D forms while still damp - shape them around or drape them over forms so that they dry in a particular form.



Tip - When moving and manipulating the clay - use a damp finger or paintbrush to moisten the edges of the piece (and surface if needed) - if the clay is starting to dry out it will crack as you move it.

Use a damp finger to smooth out most minor cracks if needed. If you have any cracks that can't be closed with a wet finger, add some clay paste carefully with a paintbrush.



Next steps; - Drying, Sanding, Joining, Firing, Polishing