

# Polymer clay – Tips, Materials and Baking

## What is polymer clay?

Polymer clay is a synthetic modelling material that is made from a PVC (polyvinyl chloride) base. It shapes well, and doesn't dry out like other clays, so it stays pliable until it is baked. Once baked at a low temperature it hardens.

## Useful tools and materials

To work with polymer clay at home you'll need a few pieces of the following equipment:

**A work surface** that is clean and smooth, such as a tray or an old plate, or a plastic placemat. *Never work directly on a table or a counter, because some of the colours in polymer clay may stain the surface.*

**Rolling tools** – a cylindrical object with a smooth surface for rolling. It could be a round smooth sided pencil or pen, a glue stick or a glass jar.

**Cutting tools** – This will depend on what you are comfortable having your child use. A small kitchen knife with a straight even blade is great, or a craft knife. A plastic card works pretty well too (keep in mind that certain colours of clay may stain the card).

**Shaping tools** – These could include household items such as toothpicks, bamboo skewers, the end of a teaspoon or other cutlery, the round end of a paintbrush, or disposable wooden chopsticks.

**Extra** - Some baby wipes or some damp paper towel are useful as well, for wiping hands, as some of the darker colours can stick to fingers and mix into lighter colours while working.

**\*\* Be sure to wash items thoroughly after use, especially if they will be used for food\*\***



## Working with polymer clay

Polymer clay can sometimes be a little stiff when just taken out of the packet. It may need some kneading and squishing around before it becomes easier to work with. Make sure your hands are clean before you work with the clay, as it's very easy for the clay to pick up dirt and dust which could mar the appearance of your sculpture. Also, it's a good idea to wipe your hand between shaping different colours so the colours don't mix.

## Baking polymer clay

Polymer clay won't harden until it is baked or cured in a low temperature oven. Place clay models on a baking tray lined with baking paper. Preheat the oven to the temperature specified on the packet. Make sure you do not exceed the temperature, as the clay can turn brown, and cause a very unpleasant smell. It's better to err for baking longer at a slightly lower temperature I have found.

Always set a timer so you don't end up overbaking your clay.

I've taken these bake times and temperatures from the manufacturer's websites.

If you are using **Sculpey III**, then bake at 130C for 15 minutes for each 6mm thickness of your sculpture.

For **Sculpey Souffle**, bake at 130C for 30 min for each 6mm thickness.

If you are using **Fimo Kids** clay, then bake at 110C for 30 minutes, regardless of size.

## How to tell if your clay is done baking

Your clay is done when a fingernail pressed into the surface leaves an indent but doesn't break the surface. Depending on the thickness of the piece, the clay may be flexible – that's fine, it's still done. It's plastic based, so it doesn't have the rigid quality of traditional fired clay. The clay will continue to harden as it cools down.

## Storing polymer clay

Polymer clay doesn't dry out like other clays, so it doesn't necessarily need to be kept in an airtight container. It should be stored away from dust, heat and light. Hard plastic boxes aren't the best as the clay can react with certain plastics over time and may bond with the container. Resealable plastic sandwich bags are great.

## Safety precautions

While polymer clay is classified as non-toxic, it is still advisable to take a few precautions when working with this material. Most important is not to use tools that have touched polymer clay for food preparation without thoroughly washing them first, and never bake polymer clay and food together. Be careful to watch small children around polymer clay to ensure it isn't ingested, and wash hands well after using. When baking, always line your baking tray with baking paper, and wash tray thoroughly afterwards. Never microwave polymer clay.