

Paper Mache & Cotton Pearl Beads

Paper Mache products, also known as Cotton Pearl, were first produced in the early 1900s in Erzgebirge im Harz, an area of northern Germany with a long history of traditional craftsmanship.

According to first known history, they were made to recreate the center stamen and pistil of a flower, which was probably carved out of wood from the trees in the local mountains.



After World War II, many Germans resettled into Bavaria, where they started production of costume jewelry and costume jewelry parts. Not much capital was available or required, but many workers were skilled. Beads were produced and painted by hand in many colors and designs.

Paper Mache Beads today are made of the base material called Cellulose, the same as used for paper towels and tissues. It arrives raw from the paper mill on a huge roll.



The paper is fitted into an mold with multiple cavities with some glue, which contains a special needle. The needle rotates in the soft paper and forms into a round bead, drop, or another shape.



When the bead fills the mold cavity to the correct size, the needle stops rotating and it falls out of the cavity when the mold is opened.



Now you have the very soft raw beads with the needles inside.



The needle is used to put the beads on special trays to hold them upright without touching. Different trays are required for every different size of beads.



The trays of beads are dipped in special chemicals to harden them, and then dyed in special baths. Between every dip needed to harden the beads is a wait of 3-5 hours.



To get the beads to the color shade wanted requires multiple dips in the dye baths, with a dry time of 3-5 hours each coat. The average amount of dips is about 5-9 times, in order to get the proper finish.



The bead coating is finished around 12 hours after the last bath, when it is 100% dry. Only now do you see the final color product and surface quality.



Next step is to cut off the needle and start drilling the hole using a sharp needle. A normal drill bit would catch the inside of the bead, and unwind the paper.

Now the beads are ready for sale! Since every step of the production is made by hand, labor costs are much higher than for machine made products. Other production influences are heat and humidity, and the short shelf life of the chemicals used, since a dye bath must be discarded after 5 days.