

**NORTHCOTE POTTERY SUPPLIES
TECHNICAL TIPS AND PRODUCT INFORMATION #3**

CLAY PREPARATION & RECYCLING

ALL COMMERCIAL CLAY IS NOW SUPPLIED DE-AIRED AND IN SEALED PLASTIC BAGS. This means that kneading/wedging for the purpose of de-airing is not necessary BUT there are other reasons for kneading and de-airing. Kneading before throwing can ensure that the clay particles are all moving in a circular direction and this assists centering and "loosens" the clay up.

MOIST BAGGED CLAY HAS AN INDEFINITE SHELF LIFE DEPENDING ON HOW IT IS STORED. Out of direct sunlight and heat is best. Keeping it away from poking fingers and not carrying clay bags by the heat seal also help ensure no moisture is lost from unsealed bags.

ALL COMMERCIAL CLAY IS EXTRUDED FROM A LARGE PUGMILL/EXTRUDER. This means that it has a "stress" from the anger blades down the middle of the block (A) which is most apparent in slabs cut directly from the block (B). These will probably open up when drying. It is therefore advisable to knead clay, then make it into a slab.

WHEN RE-USING CLAY it is best kept in a well-sealed soft plastic bag (not a hard plastic shopping bag) i.e. plastic garbage bag. Squeeze the air out of the bag. Tie it in a knot. A small amount of moisture can be sprayed into the bag from a squirter bottle to compensate for the moisture taken out of the clay by handling.

IF CLAY BECOMES TOO FIRM for easy manipulation, slice it into 1cm thick slabs (like bread slices) and dip each one into water before placing them in a stack in a plastic bag. Sit for 1 – 2 days, then knead into shape. This is the fastest and easiest way to recycle.

BE CAREFUL WHAT SURFACE YOU KNEAD ON. While plaster slabs and cement sheets are fantastic to dry moist work on, they will often take too much moisture out of clay that's being kneaded. An unsealed timber table is a good surface to work onto. **NEVER USE GLASS OR LAMINEX SURFACES FOR POTTERY MAKING.**

RECYCLING DRY CLAY IS BEST AVOIDED BY NOT CREATING DRY CLAY WASTE. Stop the drying process while the clay is still firm but not dry and you'll spend less time and effort doing this dreary job.

TO FULLY RECYCLE CLAY YOU WILL NEED (1) Plastic buckets (2) Plaster batts (3) Pugmill or lots of willing kneaders (4) Plastic bags (5) Space indoors to set all this up.

TOTALLY DRY CLAY IS THE EASIEST TO RECYCLE. Fill a bucket with the clay and cover with water. There will be a hissing/fizzing sound as the dry clay takes up the water. Once all the water is absorbed you should have a thick slip mix. Empty this on plaster beds or a plaster-kneading bench and sit till firm enough to handle for kneading/pugging.

IMPORTANT! PLASTER IS THE ENEMY OF FIRING. It is most important that small pieces of plaster do not make their way into recycled clay because they will explode/spit out in the kiln once heated causing disastrous effects on pottery. The most likely way this happens is when clay is scraped off plaster beds ready for kneading/pugging.

RECYCLED MIXTURES OF DIFFERENT CLAYS should only be fired at EARTHENWARE temperature (1100°C) unless you are entirely sure that every component of the recycled mix is a stoneware temperature body (i.e. stoneware or porcelain).

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