

STAGES OF CLAY & CLAY PREPARATION

STAGES OF CLAY

1. Slip--watered down clay in a muddy form
2. Plastic--workable stage; molding stage; can recycle; can join to other pieces
3. Leather-hard--stiff and will hold its shape; join to other pieces; carve into; recycle
4. Greenware--bone dry; can be carved into; very fragile; can recycle
5. Bisqueware--fired once in kiln; can not be recycled; glazing stage
6. Earthenware (Glazeware)--second fire-low fire; can not be recycled

7. Stoneware (Glazeware)--second fire-high fire; can not be recycled; vitrified

CLAY PREPARATION

Clay Aging and Plasticity

Aging of clay is a very important step in improving workability and plasticity of clay bodies because it takes time for water to penetrate between the clay particles and produce a good and permanent bond. Bacterial growth also has a definite effect on improving plasticity of the clay. It is suggested that some old clay should be left in the container where new clay is added to accelerate bacterial growth in the clay. Bacterial gels (mold) will be noticed sometimes in a marbled pattern on clay. Such clay has a very good feel to it when wedging, which should be done to achieve maximum plasticity and uniformity.

Wedging

Wedging is used for eliminating lumps and air bubbles, drying the clay, and organizes the clay particles to lie in the same direction for strength. Wedging homogenizes or makes the clay consistent. To see if a ball of wedged clay is free of lumps or air bubbles and is homogenized, cut through it with a wire tool and look at the two halves.

Preparing to Wedge

Wedging should be done on as low a surface as is comfortable. You may need to add Grog to the clay while wedging. Grog helps strengthen the clay when sculpting. Your body should be higher than the table for good body leverage, so that you can use your body as well as your wrists and arms. Your body should be involved in the rolling action or you will get tired. The wedging surface should be firm and well anchored to make wedging easier.

Two Methods of Wedging

1. RAM'S HEAD

Pushing the clay down and out releases trapped air, eliminates lumps, and makes the clay homogeneous. The clay resembles a ram's head after each motion.

2. SPIRAL

Using a slight twist of the hands opens up all parts of the clay ball, allowing any air bubbles to escape. Spiral wedging also lines up the clay particles.