

BLOOMING BOWLS OR BUG BOWLS



These bowls are simple to make. We put almost every step in this lesson so you can make one even if you have never worked with clay.

So bring your "I can do it!" attitude and let's make some bowls!

First things first...clay dos and don'ts;

Do

Use water sparingly

Wipe your hands off on a cloth frequently.

Be aware of where you are telling the the clay to go by noticing the angle between your fingertips and middle knuckles.

If the table is too high, put your work in your lap (on top of your cloth) or work standing up. Allow the dirty water sit so the clay settles, pour the clear water off and put the clay sludge in at trash bag or lined trash container.

Don't

Dump clay filled water down the drain (it will clog pipes).

Put lots of water on your work.

Do not throw clay (unless you have a potters wheel).

Don't handle your work carelessly, it will break.



Start by cutting a slab of clay off of the large "pug". Use a wire tool, a sturdy string or fishing line



Cut the slab into 4 smaller parts (six if you are working with very young children) Make two (or three) smaller.

800 4 LAGUNA
626-330-0631

Laguna Clay Company
14400 Lomitas Avenue
City of Industry, CA 91746

www.lagunaclay.com
info@lagunaclay.com



Make the larger pieces into balls. Use the palm of your hand. Clay is one place you are allowed to smack loudly!

Start forming your bowl by holding it in one hand as shown. Then use the thumb of your other hand to form the middle hole. Leave it a bit thick at the bottom.



Here you see the right hand doing the pinching and the left is just holding the piece. Starting at the bottom squeeze a little between thumb and fingers, turn the piece two finger widths and squeeze again. When you have moved all the way around the piece move up a thumbs length and do the process again. Note that the clay is going the way the finger is angled.

You can repeat the process until the bowl is thick enough to hold it's own weight and thin enough to "feel right" when you pick it up. This may take some practice. If your piece collapses, carefully crush it without trapping any air inside and make the clay into a ball, wrapping it to use for "decorative sprigs" later.





You now smooth the bowl if you want to. Then use a knife (fettling or butter knife) "to form the "foot". The "foot" of a bowl helps the bowl sit firmly on the table without rolling.

The wider the foot, the more stable the bowl. A excessively large foot makes a bowl heavy and can adversely affect the look of the bowl. Here you can clearly see a flat spot is cut at the bottom of the bowl. Trace a square on the flat area, then carefully cut away, starting at the flat spot with the slice narrowing at the curve of your bowl.



Adding clay pieces to a clay form with slip is called "sprigging". You will now make decorative elements which will attach to your bowl. Remember, if the sprigging is too heavy the bowl will tip to one side instead of being upright on the foot. One way to make things light is to make them hollow. If you close a form completely, poke a hole in it when you are finish, or the trapped air might break it.

Make your sprigging design, then lay it out without sticking it on. Once you have the "bugs" worked out, it will be time to attach everything.





Make little slices where you wish to attach a piece. This is called scoring. Then place a drop of water on the scored area, do the same with the sprig then press them firmly together. The scoring creates a great deal of surface area, the water creates a way for the clay particles to move easily. The pressure helps them line up and be strong with their new neighbors. The smaller the sprig, the less pressure is required.

Here is a little trick to make your limbs interesting. Apply a little pressure with dull side of the knife, then draw it along, allowing the rope of clay to roll. Do it both ways if you like for a pattern of diamonds or squares..



Then you set the piece aside to dry. Let it dry for two weeks. If the piece is wet when it is painted the paint will blister. If the piece feels cool to your cheek it needs more drying time



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Paint the whole piece with clear, white, black or red gesso. Let it dry for a day.

Paint your piece carefully, starting on the inside. Take care not to break your sprigs as you work around the piece. Wadded paper towels or foam can be used to lay the piece upside down without damage.



The bowl at the front has had a coat of clear gloss acrylic medium. The bowl at the back has been painted with acrylic craft paint only.