

human libraries

kitchen table collective



sugar bowls and spoons

aliyah hussain

Fancy a brew? How do you take your tea or coffee? One spoon or two? For this activity we take a versatile handbuilding technique called pinching and make sugar bowls and spoons so we can pretend we are having a brew together. Or maybe we are making small tea cups, or mini plant pots, or trinket bowls, it's totally up to you.

Method

1- First let's start with the pinch pot. In your hands roll a ball of clay. The size of the ball will determine the size of the pot. So for your first go it's best to work with a medium sized ball that fits comfortably in the palm of your hand. Don't overwork the ball but make sure it's smooth, compact and evenly shaped.

Place the ball in the palm of one of your hands and cup it lightly. With the other hand push your thumb into the centre of the ball about half way through.

***unfold this sheet to see the examples**

2- Once your thumb is inside the ball of clay bring your other fingers on that hand to meet your thumb and pinch together. You will feel the clay move, stretch and shift.

Don't press too hard, you don't want to break through the walls of the pot. Continue this motion in a circular fashion around the hole, keeping your other hand cupped and supporting the ball of clay.

The supporting hand will determine the shape of the pot as well as the pinching hand. Where it sits on your palm is the base of the pot and the shape of your hand will be the shape of the pot. A flatter palm will mean a wider pot and a tightly cupped hand will make your pot narrower and taller.

3 - When you are pinching try to feel the thickness of the clay between your fingers and keep it even throughout.

Some people like to pinch with their eyes closed so that they can really feel the hands doing the work and follow the feeling instead of judging it by eye.

Rotate the pot as you work around the hole making it bigger and the walls taller. You can experiment with pulling the clay too; upwards to make it taller and outwards to make it wider.

4 - When it gets awkward to keep the pot placed in your palm you can transfer it to the wooden board. The base of the pot will have become rounded in your palm so set it down and push down the base from the inside so that it becomes flat and sturdy.

Now you can manipulate the shape. Think about the direction you are pinching in with your hands, are your pinching outwards and making your pot wider? Or are you pinching upwards to make it tall?

Now it's on the board you can pinch with both hands, alternating between thumbs on the inside and fingers on the outside or fingers on the inside and thumbs outside. Both methods produce different results. I find it easiest to rotate the pot/board as I go. This mimics the potter's wheel which spins to create an evenly shaped vessel.

5 - Once you've got a nice shape take another look at your pot.

Spin it around and see how it sits, are any sections in need of pinching out? Is it wobbly on one side or starting to flare out at the edges. (All beautiful by the way!)

You can manipulate your pot into a more even shape by reverse pinching too. If there are sections that feel too thin or are flaring out away from your desired shape, take your thumbs inside the pot and use your pinching method to push the clay back together.

This is a nice way to create interesting shapes too, such as a narrow neck on a fat round pot. Experiment with the process a few times to get the feel of what is possible.

6 - The surface of your pot will be full of little dimples from your fingers pinching it into shape, you can make more of this decoration by going round again but digging in with the back of your nail to create more decoration.

Or if you prefer a smooth pot, use your fingers or the sponge to smooth out the surface. Hot hands working into cold clay will create surface cracks in some areas, most of them will not affect the integrity of the pot but if you like you can smooth them over with a lightly damp sponge.

Don't forget to smooth the inside of the pot, and check for cracks near the base. You want the base to be a minimum of 0.5cm thick so that it's sturdy enough to hold the pot upright.

Smooth down the rim of your pot, ragged edges can become sharp after firing so make sure they are round and smooth.

7 - You can add decoration to your pot by using the sgraffito method (engraving or cutting into the surface with a tool) or by adding on clay decoration using the score and slip method. (Either flat collage shapes or twisty coils)

Or you can leave the surface plain and paint your decoration using the under-glazes when it's drier.

Remember, when applying the under-glazes work in layers if you are building up solid colours, don't add water to the glaze if you can help it and avoid painting the base of the pot. Please leave a 0.5cm gap all around the base of the pot, so that no glaze runs and sticks it to the kiln.

8 - Spoons. Roll out a small slab of clay, using the guide sticks. Using the knife tool cut out a long thin rectangle of clay. (Roughly a teaspoon length and approx 2-3cm wide.)

On one end of the rectangle pinch your thumb and first finger together, this is the spoon side. Use the pinching method to tease out the round bowl shape of your spoon. Smooth out the edges of the spoon, to avoid any sharp edges.

You can also pinch/shape the handle of your spoon too, or just smooth the edges. It should lie flat (see the examples on the back of this handout) When decorating with underglazes make sure you don't glaze the back of the spoon.

You can also experiment with cutting out different shapes and using the pinching technique to create other things, for example, a cut out circle can be pinched into a trinket plate with a decorative lip.

