

ARTventures ... at home!

Native American-inspired Clay Bowls

Sculpt an air-dry clay bowl utilizing Native American pueblo pottery techniques and designs.



Zuni people, *Bowl*, early 20th century, earthenware.
Gift of Mrs. Charles Morgan Wood. 1931.33.1



Maria Montoya Martinez (American, 1887—1980), *Jar*, 20th century,
earthenware. Gift of Mrs. Charles Morgan Wood. 1931.33.6

Materials needed:

- air dry clay
- bowl for water
- paper towels
- toothpicks
- wax paper
- sponge
- paper bowl
- baby powder
- plastic fork, knife, spoon



Optional:

- clay carving tools
- clay rib tool
- sandpaper
- acrylic paint (black, white, orange)
- paintbrushes (medium, small)



Form bowl base:

1. Form clay into a baseball-sized sphere and smooth lightly with a damp sponge.
2. Place clay sphere on a sheet of wax paper and flatten with hands until clay is about the thickness of a finger.
3. Holding the flattened slab in one hand, make a fist with other hand and gently press fist into it. Rotate clay slab while repeatedly pressing fist into clay to form a shallow bowl shape.
4. Place clay into a paper bowl for support.



Note: lightly cover the inside of paper bowl with baby powder or a damp cloth before adding clay so clay avoids sticking. If clay does stick, use scissors to cut bowl away later.

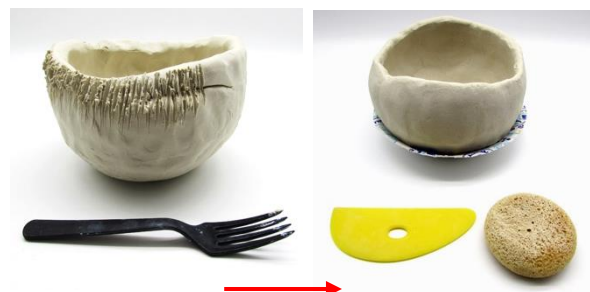


Form bowl body and neck:

5. Form a new clay sphere and then roll it into a long coil. Coil should be similar thickness to the clay bowl or slightly thicker.
6. Attach coil to top of shallow bowl base. Using fingertips, smooth to connect the joint where the coil and the top of the bowl meet. Smooth inside and outside of bowl. Form more coils and continue stacking and connecting on top of the bowl until desired height is achieved.



Helpful hint: use a fork to scratch connecting surfaces of both parts. Then, join together and smooth with a lightly damp sponge, rib tool or spoon.



Note: each additional clay coil attached to the bowl should be in equal width to the coils below it. This ensures clay bowl body increases in height but not width. If width increases too much, your bowl could collapse or flatten.

7. Create and attach a smaller coil to top of bowl's body. Smooth both clay parts together with fingers for firm connection. Continue adding smaller, concentric rings of coils until desired neck shape is achieved.

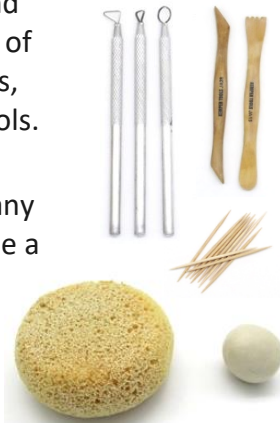
Note: the opening of bowl should still allow enough room for a hand or a few fingers to still fit inside. Place hand inside of bowl to support it while adding and connecting coils.

8. Smooth over all connections both inside and outside with lightly damp sponge and rib tool or spoon. Squeeze all water out of sponge before smoothing to avoid getting clay too wet. Continue to shape and mold bowl walls where desired.

Polish and decorate bowl:

9. Allow clay to lightly harden until surface feels leather hard (not sticky or wet). Draw geometric designs and patterns into surface of bowl using toothpicks, fork, knife, or clay tools.

Note: to smooth any clay cracks or erase a texture, smooth over areas with lightly damp sponge.



Helpful hint: many designs of Native American pueblo pottery include symbols representing the sun, clouds, water, and rain—elements of great importance for the cycle of life, the seasons, and farming in the desert. Stylized rainbows and/or a combination of the sun and rain are also often seen in pottery. Designs can also tell us what that bowl was used for (ex: a container for water or seeds). Other popular elements include birds, feathers, and flowers. Utilize any or all these symbols to decorate the clay bowl.



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10. Optional: allow 24 hours for clay to harden. With a paintbrush, paint designs and geometric patterns in white, orange, and black acrylic paints. Designs can be drawn in pencil first.

Helpful hint: thin your paint slightly with water first so it best adheres to clay. Add more paint layers to build color. Start with white areas first, then add orange and finish with black. Allow paint to dry between layers.



Helpful hint: prior to painting, lightly sand the fully dried clay with medium or high grit sandpaper for an extra smooth painting surface. Sandpaper can also erase unwanted painted areas.

Note: white, orange, and black are the most common colors used in Native American pueblo pottery painting, but not all three colors are always used. Use any one or a combination of these three colors as desired.



Resources

[Learn the pottery techniques of Maria Martinez](#)

[Watch Maria Martinez at work \(Part 1—forming the bowl\)](#)

[Watch Maria Martinez and son at work \(Part 2—bowl decoration and firing\)](#)

[Learn about Acoma pueblo pottery with artist Robert Patricio](#)

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Questions about or ideas for ARTventures at Home? Email: edu@daytonart.org