
Make a Peony with Air-Dry Clay with Cindy Willingham

Chapter 1 - Make a Peony with Air-Dry Clay

Overview

- Get ready to bloom as I teach you how to make a peony that will always be in season. Hi, I am Cindy Willingham, a painter, a potter, and many things in between. Based in Texas, I'm inspired by nature and the quiet spaces of life. My love of flowers comes from living in Maine, six months of winter, and you dream of florals. In this class, I'm gonna teach you many techniques to work with air dry clay, from slab building to molding with unexpected tools to create your very own peony. I'll show you how to paint and protect your air dry clay featuring a watercolor technique that will add character and depth to your peony. These hand building methods can be transferred from your air dry clay to your kiln fired ceramic projects. You'll be amazed to see how simple it is to create this gorgeous flower.

Materials

- To make a peony, we're going to need air dry clay. My favorite brand is from Trinity Ceramics, but Laguna also has a great air dry clay that's readily accessible. The Laguna brand is a little pricier. The Trinity Clay breaks down to about a dollar a pound, and you can do a lot with a pound of clay. We'll also be using this bamboo cutting board, which I love because it has a little lip on it that keeps it from sliding around the table. You could also use a slab mat, which is built for this work. It helps keep the clay from sticking to it. We're also gonna be using paint stir sticks. I have two tape together, and that's just the perfect width that I like to work with. We'll also be using a dowel to roll out our slab, but you could also use a rolling pin. We also have a bench scraper here to keep our work surface clean from the clay. We'll be using acrylic paints, and I have them in two shades, a light shade, and a darker shade for each part of the peony: the petals, the leaves, and the stamen. We have a bowl of water and a paper towel to catch any drips we may have. We also have our sealer, which is Maker's Magic, made by Scorch Marker. I really love that one. It gives it a nice sheen gloss, and it protects it well. We have corn starch in a sock to keep the clay from sticking to the molds. A couple of dishes, a retractable ballpoint pen, a scoring tool, and a couple of paint brushes. These are molds meant for making fondant. These are the petals. These are the leaves, and these are the cutters that come with them. This is a silicone pottery rib and plastic wrap.

Condition, cut, and mold clay

- We're going to be kneading and conditioning our clay. If you have fresh clay that's just been pugged, which means they've ran it through the mill to compress it and gotten rid of all of the air bubbles, no need for this step. You could use a wire cutter for this step, but I just love grabbing it with my hands. So to knead it, we're going to be pushing it out and then bringing it back into ourselves, supporting it with our hands on either side, getting rid of any air bubbles that might be in there. And you'll know you're doing it right when you have this little duck face here. And some potters call it the rams head. So just knead it until it comes all onto itself and just push those little wrinkles up. Eliminating any air bubbles. This is about a pound and a half of clay that I'm gonna roll out. I like to put the guides down, get my dowel and roll it out, flipping it over between each turn so it doesn't stick. And you can change directions to make it a little wider. And there we go. It's rolled out nice and evenly. This is referred to as a slab, and from this stage you can create mugs and many

other things. And this is what we're gonna cut our peony shapes out of. This is a set that I purchased at a craft store. It's for making fondant for cakes. And I saw it and I knew I could do something with it. With clay, it comes with these leaves in many different shapes, and we'll be cutting out three for this project. And for the petals, we're gonna be choosing two sizes and cutting out three petals of each. It's very important to keep your hands washed between stages because it gets us a texture on your hands, like salt dough, and that might transfer onto your clay. So let's just set these aside while we mold our leaves. I will keep this covered so it can be fresh for the next project. This is cornstarch in this sock, and you can brush it on if that's easier. I just love the technique of pouncing it on. That's what works for me. You sandwich it in between the mold and press down. Careful not to get too thin. The thinner it is, the more fragile it is. If you are making kiln fired clay. With this, you can go a little thinner because with firing, it will strengthen it. And if you want them a little longer, this is the time where you can play with them a little bit. And there we go. We have our leaves. Let's go ahead and shape our petals. Starting with the largest ones, gently down evenly. So evenly, press it down. And if you flip the mold over and press horizontally, your petals are going to be wider, so you can figure out what you want your peony to look like a little wider or longer petals. And don't worry about a little bit of sticking. This project is very forgiving, but that's why the cornstarch is so important. Final one. And there we are, and we're ready to assemble.

Assemble flower

- My hands are all clean. And now let's clean up our board. I love using this bench scraper. It just gets all the little bits to assemble the flower. We're going to be using this sauce bowl and we're going to be covering it in Saran wrap. To keep the flower from sticking, we're gonna take our leaves and we're gonna position them in three even spaces. So that looks about right. So now we're going to be scoring the bottom one. Scoring is gonna help the clay attach itself. I'm gonna be scoring the bottom side of the leaf that's gonna be touching. That one can add a little moisture to that and just gently tapping. Sometimes I like to use the rounded end of a paint brush just to help it grab onto itself. Now we're gonna be scoring that leaf and the underside of the last leaf. Add a little moisture to that evenly space them, and let's use our paintbrush again. And this just helps the clay attach itself becoming one. All right, now let's attach the petals. We're gonna start with the larger petals. We're gonna score the center of the leaves, and we're gonna score, sometimes you have to clean this off too. We're gonna score the underside of this petal and we're going to add a little moisture to help it join. And we're gonna be placing it in between the spacing of the leaves. Just gently tap it. You can also use this pottery rib to bring the seam in. To complete that join, let's go with the next petal that we're gonna be placing in between these two leaves. Same process, scoring as we go. Scoring where they're going to join. Just gently tapping it, forcing that clay to come together. Let's do the final large petal scoring again, scoring the underside of the petal where it will join, gently tapping it. First layer done, and we will shape it more after we're finished. Let's do the same process for the smaller petals scoring both sides. And I like to go both vertically and horizontally. Gently tap, tap, tap, and, and we are placing these petals in between the larger petals. Clean off your scoring tool if needed. We're at the home stretch. Let's tap that center. And there we have our leaves and our petals finished, and we're gonna be adding the stamen. Next we're gonna be using about a teaspoon of clay. For the stamen, just roll it into a ball. Score one side of it, score the center of your petals, add a little moisture, wiggle it together, smooth out any cracks you might have. And wiggling is kind of like tapping. It'll help the join. And to decorate this statement, we're going to be using one of my favorite tools, this retractable ballpoint pen. I love the circles that it makes in this.

I'm not sure I how I discovered it just from playing around. You wanna start in the center gently pushing in. Do you see how nice that texture is? I love it. It's like a little bullseye and just keep going across. I love finding unexpected tools around the house. I think that's perfect. Shaping your petals is what gives your peony personality. We're gonna use a little plastic wrap and we can crumple it up. And this is how we're gonna support our petals as it dries. So you just kind of tuck it in there and it'll be easy to remove before we start painting. This plastic wrap provides the perfect support for these petals. You just tuck it right in and it helps shape the petals, as well as the little sauce bowl. It's very shallow and cupped, so it just provides the perfect circular shape. This is also the time to bend out the leaves. If that's the way you'd like 'em. I'm gonna let this flower dry overnight, but you can follow your manufacturer's instructions. This technique can also be used with kiln fired clay. The difference with air dry clay is that you need to rinse out your brushes and sponges and other tools because air dry clay cannot be reconstituted with water.

Paint first layer

- Our peony is fully dried and you can tell that by, it's not as cool to the touch wet clay can be very chilly. And also the color has changed. Most of it has turned white, but every clay is different and it won't be consistent throughout and it's fairly solid. I can't scratch anything to it. I can't move any of the pieces. Next, we're gonna be sealing it to protect it and to help the paint adhere better. We're gonna be sealing this with the Maker's Magic gloss sealer. I love it. It protects your project, makes it stronger and gives it a glossy finish. So you just brush it on like you're painting it and you wanna get in between all of the layers, getting those grooves, the veins of the petals. If it's a warm day outside. I love to use a spray acrylic sealer too, 'cause you don't have to mess with getting in all the layers. And sometimes this gloss just makes all the details pop. And if you're sensitive to smells, you can make sure your windows are open, be a well ventilated area. It's important to seal this. It just, to me, it strengthens. It's got so many layers and air dry clay can be a little more fragile, so it's adding strength to it. But also since there are all the grooves in the petals, it's gonna help the paint adhere better and you really can't get too much on. And we're gonna let this coat dry to the touch so we can flip it over and paint the underside. The sealant has dried on the top and the bottom, and you can stop here. It's actually really stunning, just on its own. You could also spray paint it, add a little gold. Who doesn't love a little dazzle? But we're gonna add acrylic paint to add color. I'm gonna be using a matte acrylic, but you can use any craft paint, any acrylic paint. You could even use an acrylic based gouache for this. We're gonna be starting with the lighter color. Just go in, squiggling your brush, getting into all of those veins. Nice coverage on the leaves. If you've rolled out your leaves too thin and they break off. The best thing about air dry clay is it doesn't have to be food safe. So you can just glue that baby right back on and keep working. And don't worry about perfecting it. Other coats of paint are going to hide your mistakes. Just get into all those crevices - And - You can flip it over to paint the underside of the leaves gently supporting the petals in your hand. If your paint's getting a little too thick, don't be afraid to add a little water. All right, our first coat of leaves are done and we can just set it to dry on our work surface. These leaves have fully dried, and we're going to put our first coat of the statement on with the lighter yellow, not too much paint. You can do a light coat. I love to see the clay peeking out. Sometimes just gives it a little variation in color. We'll let that dry and we're gonna do the first coat on the petals. I prefer to paint in this order because the paint of the petals will cover up any mistakes. Now that our stamen is dry, we're gonna start to paint the petals. We're doing a pink version of this peony, and I like to start with the lighter shade. Just pick it up, cradle it in your hands, and this is the step when you have to

start getting a little bit neater, because like I said, painting of the petals covers up your messes. I love painting these peonies in many different shades. I've done whites, I've done a yellow, blues. Don't forget it, about the edges of those petals. And you can go however you feel comfortable manipulating the flower so you can get your brush in there, let this dry, and then paint the underside of the petals.

Watercolor paint technique

- The peony has dried with the first coat in all three parts. And we're going to be adding a watercolor technique to just add a little more depth and variation in our colors. We're using a very subtle, darker shade of the first coat of green that we used. It'll look subtle, but it'll just add depth, variation, shadows in the veins. We're gonna put just a little bit of paint into our vessel and then add water to the paint, loosening it up a bit gently pick up your flower. And we're just gonna loosely put this around the leaf. Add a little more water. If the color is too saturated, we want that light color to shine through also. But I just love how the darker paint rests in the texture of the leaf. You can do as many coats as needed until you get the depth that you're happy with. Just make sure you dry in between coats. But just like painting with watercolor, it'll dry lighter and you're just kind of tapping the color in, letting the paint fall down the leaf. And if it's too light or watery, you can always add more paint. Let this dry and do the same technique to the underside of the leaf and repeat as necessary. Now we're going to move on to the petals. We're going to be using this watercolor effect on the petals, and I just have so much fun doing this. So let's take our darker pink. Just put a little bit in your clean vessel, adding water to loosen it up. I like to be a little loose 'cause I like to get drippy with this step. Let's pick it up. I love just letting the paint drip from the top of the petals, finding their way into the veins, and you can help it along as needed. But I love it lighter at the top of the petal and darker near the stamen. And that's what happens when you just let it drip down. And you will have to do a couple of coats till you get the desired effect that you're looking for. But the paint just finds its way into the grooves. Add a little more paint if you want it more saturated. Isn't that so satisfying to watch gravity? And I've tried this technique with watercolor inks and the color is just so deep and heavy, so you just have to play around and let it fully dry between coats before adding some more color. If you're not patient enough to wait until it dries, you're basically just wiping off what you put on. Continue painting more layers until you get the desired saturation that you're looking for. Being careful to dry in between coats and then continue to the underside using the same technique. I've done about three coats on the petals and I'm very happy with where it is. It just looks like a vibrant watercolor painting to me. So next we're going to be sealing it with our Maker's Magic. And I love this step because the sealant just brings out the depth, adds the gloss, and just brings the whole project to life. So you can go over the stamen and the petals all at the same time. The leaves, wherever can reach just to make sure to dry before doing the underside, 'cause you don't want your fingers getting in the way or taking off any sealant. And you can also use that spray varnish as well, Getting some of those leaves. Oh, the leaves are just getting glossy and gorgeous. So you're gonna let this dry before doing the underside. And I have a finished one right here that's been sealed from top to bottom here I have some other variations of things you can play around with. Color saturation. This one has one leaf, and it's just a little bit smaller so you can play around with size and style. This one is white with just a greige overwash. That's my favorite. I'm a little bit of a minimalist. These techniques also apply to kiln fired clay. And of course you'd be painting them with glaze instead. And as you get more comfortable, you can insert them to your other ceramic projects. Put them in the middle of a bowl, put them on a mug. So many ideas. They look great on a

stack of books in your home or on your bedside table. Or you can give them to your friends.