

The Make Space

Coil Potting

Creating a pot from clay coils is a fast and easy way of creating beautiful works of art from your kitchen table! With an easy-wipe surface, a few basic tools and a bag of clay you can build a vase that will last forever. So roll up your sleeves and have some fun with this activity from ceramicist Joshua Schoeman.



Tools and Materials

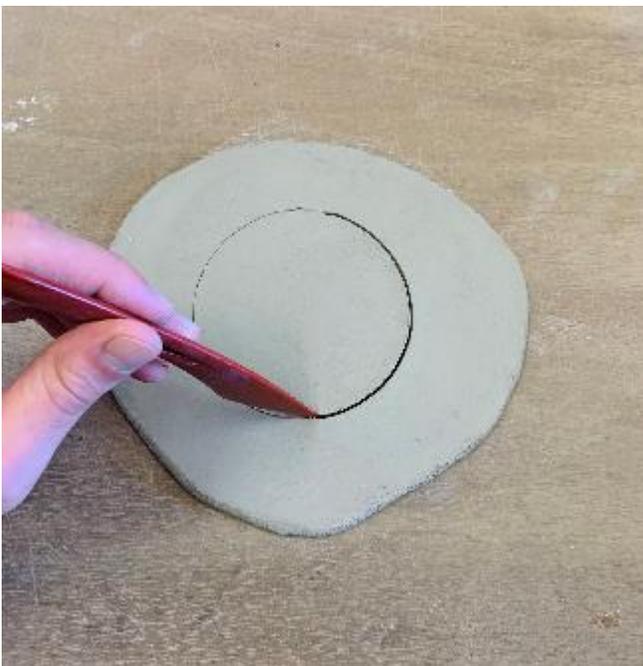
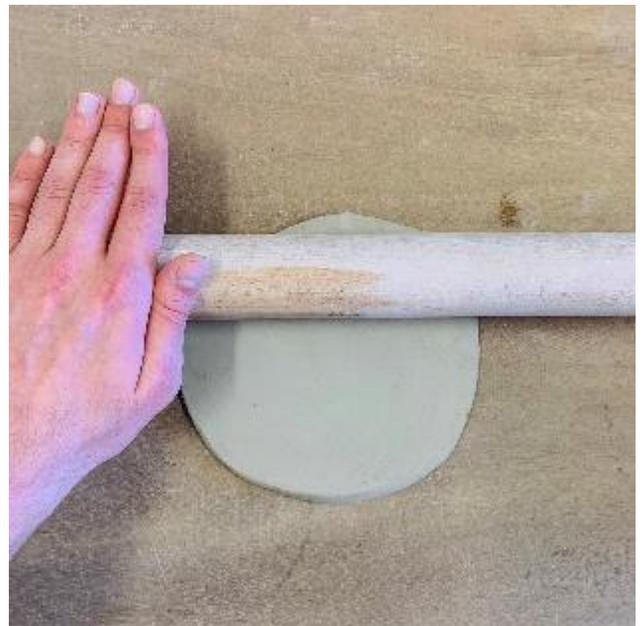
- Clay
- Wooden spoon
- Old plastic cards (Club Cards)
- Sponge
- Plastic knife
- Rolling pin
- Small paint brush
- Pot of water

Make the Pot Base



Flatten a ball of clay evenly with your hands, using the base of your thumb and palm.

Roll out the clay into a slab using a rolling pin, making sure the clay is an even thickness of around 1 centimetre.



Draw a circle onto the clay slab and then cut around the line with craft knife. Save the excess clay for the coiling process.

Making the Coils



Squeeze a ball of clay in your hand to make a sausage shape. Rotate the clay as you squeeze to remove large finger indentations in the clay.

Continue rotating and squeezing the clay, elongating and thinning the sausage of clay into a coil. Use both hands when the coil becomes too long.



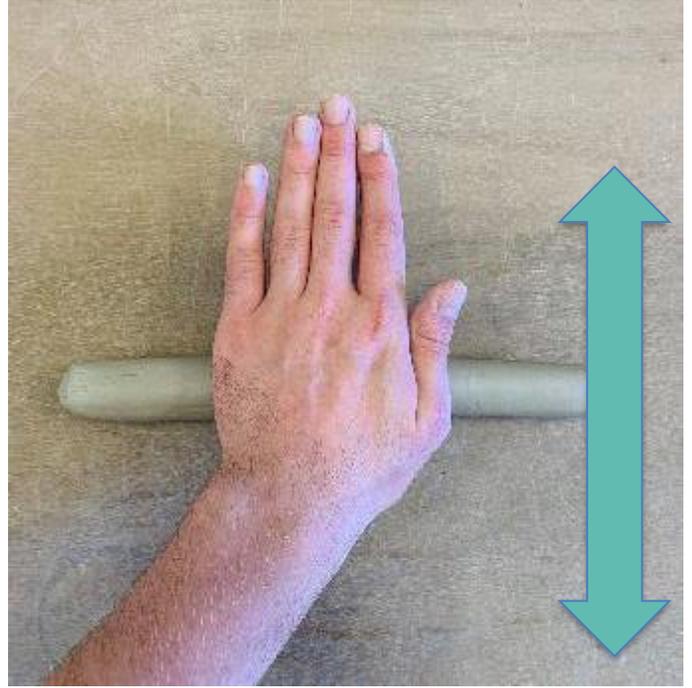
Potter's Tip

If the clay starts to dry out, dip two fingers in water and rub hands together. This will moisten the clay without making it slimy.

Rolling the Coils



Place your fingertips onto coil and roll your hand forward, pushing gently downwards as you roll. When the coil reaches the base of your palm, roll backwards until the coil reaches your fingertips, and repeat.



To elongate evenly, place both hands in the middle of the coil and when rolling, move hands towards the ends of the coil. This should be a diagonal motion.



Flattening Coil



The coil you roll should be an even thickness, and free of any indentations. Smooth over any blemishes in the clay with a damp finger to remove them. Using your thumb, press down on the coil firmly to flatten it, and repeat moving from end to end.



Cross - Hatching and Wetting



This is the process Potters use to make sure clay slabs and coils stick together.

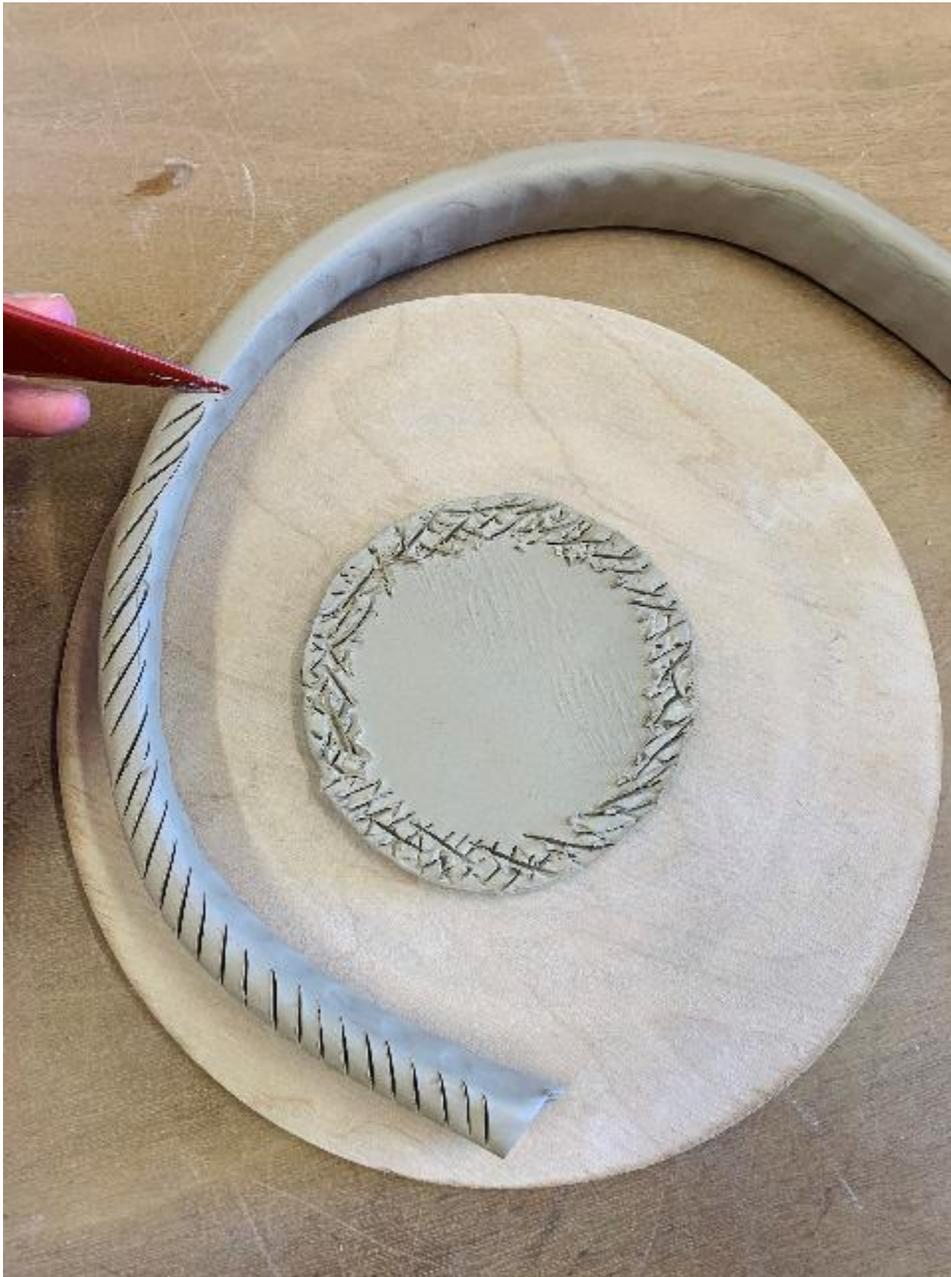
Start by cutting short, deep lines diagonally around the edge of the clay base, facing the same direction. This is called hatching.

Using a brush and water, wet the edge that has been hatched thoroughly. The clay should become sticky to the touch.



After clay edge is wet, cut short, deep lines over the hatch, this time cutting in the opposite direction. This creates a cross-hatch, making a textured surface for the clay coils to stick to.

Cross - Hatching The Coil



Before attaching the coil to the base of the pot, cross-hatch the bottom of the coil in the same way, as shown. Make sure you don't hatch the flattened sides of the coil – these will become the pot walls!

Attaching Coils to Pot Base



Place coil directly on top of the base, using your fingers to align the coil to make sure both cross-hatched surfaces are facing each other. This will allow the different clay pieces to bond together like Velcro.

Wrap the coil all the way around the base and pinch down firmly, pushing the coil into the base. You should hear a squelching sound!

If the coil is too long to fit around the base, place the coil as close to the end as you can and cut downwards over the join using a craft knife. This will leave you with just enough coil to complete the first level of the pot.



Making a Good Join

Use thumb and fingers to squeeze both ends of the coil together, adding a dab of water if needed, making sure both ends will not separate if pulled gently apart.

Potter's Tip

Wiggle fingers together when joining clay. This action compresses the clay and makes the bond stronger.



Use your thumb to smooth over clay surface, hiding the join from sight.

Building Up the Walls



Continue building up the pot walls using more clay coils.

Repeat the processes of cross-hatching and wetting and squeezing down the coils every time to make sure the clay is strong and properly joined.

Use your thumbs and fingers to smooth out the joins between the coils, both inside and out.

You should be leaving large thumb indentations. These will be removed when the pot is smoothed.



How to Use a 'Kidney'



'Kidney' is a word Potters use for any object that can be used to smooth or shape a pot. A common household object to use as a kidney is an old plastic club card. By placing your thumb over the middle of one side and your four fingers evenly spaced along the other side, you can use your hand to bend the card into a few different curve shapes. Have a go!



Smoothing the Pot



Use a kidney to smooth over any indentations in the clay that have been made by bonding the coils together. Bend the kidney to the curvy profile of your pot, apply pressure to the pot surface and drag the kidney along the outside of the pot. The kidney will help flatten bumps and fill in dents in the surface. If necessary, support the inside of the pot with your free hand to stop the kidney distorting the shape of the pot.

Shaping the pot



To get a refined base, flip the pot and start paddling (repeated gentle tapping) the base with a wooden spoon, rotating as you go.

This action pushes the pot inwards and gives it a 'lift'.

Be careful not to hit the pot too hard and distort it!

Use your fingers to shape the pot as you build it by pinching the coil inwards if you want the walls to move towards the inside of the pot, or pinching outwards if you want the bulge of the pot to grow.



Potter's Tip

Clay likes to expand outwards, so it takes more effort to get a pot wall to curve inwards.

Adding the Neck



Build coils up, making sure to pinch inwards with your thumb and fingers. The thinner the pot, the shorter the coils need to be.



Use wooden spoon to paddle the shoulder of the pot, achieving sharper curves.



Rub the top rim with a damp sponge to smooth it. Any areas of the pot that look rough can also be smoothed with a damp sponge.

The Final Stage: Decorate!



Now you have your very own coil pot, you can decorate it! The pot above has some ear-like handles and a necklace of clay balls. Just remember to cross-hatch and wet clay before joining. Once finished, leave to harden in a sunny part of the house.

**Share your creations with us on social media #wattsmakespace
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A huge thank you to Joshua Schoeman for collaborating with us on this activity | @Schoemanceramics