

## CONDITIONING KATO POLYCLAY

Preparing Kato Polyclay for a project requires conditioning. When polymer clay has been idle for the period of time between production and its final destination in the hands of the consumer, all of the particles in formulation have been resting. An extreme example would be to compare it to liquid craft paint. In time, the paint develops a visibly obvious separation of ingredients. Shaking the bottle or jar for a minute will bring it back into suspension. Although the polymer clay is not a liquid, its resting ingredients need to be returned to a coalesced state. Basically, conditioning is “shaking up” the polymer clay. Conditioning reinvigorates it, makes it pliable, and improves its workability. Another comparison can be made with athletics. It is always advisable to stretch and warm up before participation. Conditioning can also warm up the clay and prepare it for use. A warm clay also adds to the ease of conditioning; however proceed with caution when using other means to warm your clay because you always face the risk of starting the curing process. A safe temperature to work with would be your body temperature. If your clay has been exposed to elevated temperature it will become slightly firmer, adding a small amount of Kato Clear Medium will help bring it back to a workable condition.

Kato Polyclay is a firm clay by design and conditioning might be a little more intensive than it would be for softer clays. We recommend two methods of conditioning. The first is a procedure developed by Donna Kato is a “Slice and Roll” method. It is a “culinary” approach as it requires the use of a rolling pin. The second conditioning method is one used by polymer clay artist Jana Roberts Benzoni and is described as the “Jana-Whack” method. It is more of an “industrial” procedure and requires the use of a mallet.

Here are the descriptions of the two methods. Tool information is listed following the methods.

### **METHOD 1 – SLICE AND ROLL**

**Tools** – Acrylic rod, work surface, slicing blade, pasta machine

**Step 1** – To condition a small block, slice into ½ inch slices.

**Step 2** – Flatten and compress each slice with an acrylic rod, thinning each slice until they are just slightly thicker than the thickest setting on the pasta machine – this is an important step, so don’t skip it!

**Step 3** – Roll these pieces through the thickest setting on the pasta machine. Reset the machine to reduce the thickness and roll through again. Repeat this reduction again and roll through.

**Step 4** – Fold and roll each slice through the machine until the clay is soft and pliable.

**Step 5** – Roll through, two at a time until you have one large sheet of clay.

## **METHOD 2 - THE "JANA-WHACK"**

**Tools** - You will need the same tools as Method 1 with the addition of a mallet

**Step 1** - Do not remove the clay from the wrapper. Working on a hard surface (preferably a cement floor), whack the clay bar on all four sides multiple times with the mallet until it is reduced to about half its original size. Do not whack the front and back because you want to maintain as much of a block shape as you can for slicing.

**Step 2** - Once you feel that the clay has softened up remove the wrapper and proceed to your work surface. Cut the compressed block into  $\frac{1}{8}$  -  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick slices. You can go directly to the pasta machine and roll the slices through or you can start at Step 2 of conditioning Method 1 to finish.

### **TOOLS**

1. For making uniformly thick or thin slices, the pasta machine is the best tool.
2. Sheets may also be made using a rolling pin or rod. Wooden rolling pins will work but the clay will build up in the wood, making it necessary to frequently clean them. The best rod is an acrylic rod ( like the Kato Pro Clay Roller). Clay does not readily build up on the acrylic surface and it's much easier to clean. The Kato Pro Clay Roller also comes with three pairs of gaskets that will enable you to roll sheets of three thicknesses.
3. A good work surface is a necessity. The oils in polymer clay may damage fine wood surfaces! Glass, acrylic, marble and formica are good materials to work on. Formica has a very fine texture on which the clay will not stick. You may find your clay sticking to very slick surfaces like glass and marble. In certain instances, you may want the clay to stick, so this isn't necessarily a negative trait. In very warm climates, the coolness of marble may help maintain a level of workability and keep your clay from becoming very soft and sticky.
4. You'll want a good long blade for cutting canes. The Nublade has become the standard among most polymer clay users. Its thickness makes it easier to cut through blocks of clay and large canes with minimal torque and twisting. Clean your blades frequently for best results. These blades are not for children's use! Single edge razor blades are great for cutting small diameter canes.
5. The Marxit measuring tool makes it possible to mark canes or sheets of clay in 6 different mm sizes. If you're cutting canes and wish for uniform thickness, this is the tool for you.
6. A mallet with a hard plastic surface works best. However you can achieve good results with a rubber mallet.

