

How To Make Clay Pots For Survival

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There are almost as many uses for clay pots as there are ways to make them. They're decorative, functional, and multi-purpose.

You can make them in any size that you need, and clay pots are used for everything from making sauerkraut to planting herbs, but many other prepper projects can be based on using clay pots.

Learning how to make clay pots for survival can be a fun, rewarding experience that even the kids will enjoy.

Materials to Make Clay for Pots

You probably won't be able to run to your local craft shop and pick up clay if SHTF, so it's a good idea to know what clay is made of and how to blend it so that it makes a product that will cure properly. Since clay is sourced from the earth, you're stuck with what you have right underneath your feet.

Fortunately, you can make clay using many different types of soil, but there are most definitely parts of the country that offer much higher quality clay than others. For example, Georgia clay and clay found in the American Southwest are probably two of the most famous clays, but there's a good chance that you're standing on soil, or live near some, that can be used for making clay pots.

There are two basic types of clay that you can use to make clay pots: earthenware and stoneware. They have some significant differences, so let's touch on that for a minute.

Earthenware

Earthenware clay was probably the clay first used by our ancestors. It has a lot of impurities such as limestone that make it less durable. This type of clay can be made from just about any type of dirt as long as you process it correctly.

The problem with earthenware is that it reaches optimum hardness at lower temperatures, and that makes it less durable and more likely to crack and chip.

Earthenware is fine for many projects but not for [fermenting foods](#), eating or drinking out of, or making items that need extreme durability such as tiles.

Stoneware

This type of clay is relatively pure and thus has a higher firing temperature. Firing is the process used to remove water from the clay at the molecular level, which brings it to optimum hardness. The good side is that you can remove many of the impurities from your clay; not all of them, but many of them. The process is fairly simple and involves letting the soil sit in water so that the sediment settles.

Of course, there are many variations of earthenware and stoneware. They range from clays that are soft and suitable for plants to clays that are durable enough to hold up to hard farm work. Stoneware is best because it's strong and much more versatile.

Now that you have a general idea of what types of clay you have to work with, let's talk about some methods to make clay pots for survival.

Pinch Pots

This method sounds simple and it is, once you get the hang of it. Before that, though, you're going to make some pretty lopsided pieces, so start small until you get the hang of it.

Start with a ball of clay about half the size of a tennis ball; that's a workable size for a beginner. Roll it to get it nice and round, then poke a hole halfway through or so with your finger. Put your thumbs in the hole, supporting the outside of the ball with your fingers and palms.

Gently, in little pushes, open up the hole around the sides and bottom, spinning the ball in your hands as you go. The goal with this method is to evenly build the walls and bottom of your pot. As the hole starts to open up, use your fingers on the outside and your thumbs on the inside (or vice versa) to pinch your pot into the shape that you desire.

Once you have it in the general shape and thickness that you want, go around with your fingers and feel for spots that are too thick or thin and level them out. If a spot gets too thin, you can smooth in a bit of extra clay.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReRCcDGMQnQ>

Video first seen on [suetube466](#).

Once you're happy with your pot, thump it gently onto the table to create a flat spot that will be the bottom. Make sure you have the pot as centered as possible when you do this.

If your pot starts to dry out, mist it with a bit of water and rub it in with your fingers. Don't use much or you'll have a puddle of mud instead of a pot!

Once you have your pot shaped and a bottom formed, smooth it out using your fingers or a small piece of smooth wood or metal. If you have any cracks, mist a bit of water on and smooth it with your finger. Smooth out the lip of your pot, too. You can use a bit of slip (clay thinned with water) to smooth out the sides of your clay pot.

Now your pinch pot is ready to fire!

Using the Coil Method to Make a Clay Pot

This method is pretty cool and beginner-friendly, too. You're going to roll out coils of clay about the size of your pinky. Make them a foot long or so in the beginning. That way it's manageable and your clay won't dry out too quickly.

Start the bottom of your pot by laying the coils flat and spiral them around each other so that they're touching. Now use your fingers or a small wooden tool to smooth the coils together.

Once you get the bottom formed, add a coil on top of the outer coil of your base. Smooth the bottom of the coil into the bottom on both the inside and outside. Continue doing this as you build the height of your pot.

Shape your pot by gradually adding longer or shorter coils as you build – if you want a pot that's completely vertical, use the same size coils all the way up. If you want it larger around in the center, use longer coils as you build up, then shorten the coils as you get toward the top.

Once you've got your clay pot built, go through with your fingers and feel for thick or thin spots like you did with the pinch pot, smoothing them out with your fingers or with the wooden tool. You can use a bit of slip to smooth the sides.

Smooth out the lip with your fingers and your pot is ready to fire.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgYJvbQgb40>

Video first seen on [ArtistEducation](#).

Use the Slab Method to Make a Clay Pot

This method is sort of like making a pie! Roll out your clay so that it's an even thickness of about 1/2-1 inch. Start simple. Cut out a square for the bottom, then cut 4 slabs that are an inch wider than the base. Make them as long as you want your pot to be high. Start low in the beginning until you get the hang of it.

There are a few different ways to merge the pieces but both require two steps. First, you need to score the connecting edges. Use a knife to make some shallow cuts (crisscrosses are good) on each part that will be connected. Second, you'll use slip as the glue.

Once you have the sides cut, they may be too wet to build the box without collapsing. If this is the case, put them in a plastic bag with some newspaper for 24 hours or so until they're firm enough to hold up without collapsing.

Method 1

Decide whether you want to attach the sides so that they sit on the base or around the outside of the base. I prefer to set the sides on top of the base, but that's just me. Now that the sides are dry enough to work with, measure the sides to the exact width that you need them to be and trim appropriately.

Score all edges that will be touching. Start by smearing a small amount of thick (glue consistency) slip on the edges of one side of the bottom and the bottom of one of the sides. (Sounds confusing, but think of it this way – you're attaching the first side to the base).

Now put the edges together and hold them together for a minute, smearing the slip on the inside sort of like you would grout. Now you're going to add the second side. It's the same exact process as attaching the first side, except you merge the sides to each other as well as to the bottom. Smear the slip into the corners and off of the sides so that it's smooth.

Allow your new box to sit for a couple of days so that the slip dries a bit. Your new box is now ready to fire!

Method 2

The only difference between this method and the last is that you're going to trim the edges of the sides and bottoms at an angle similar to the way that you'd cut a doorframe so that the angles line up. It gives it a bit of a cleaner look and also makes it hold up a bit better.

Oh, if you want to make a lid, you can do that, too. Just cut a top that's the same size as the bottom, then trim a lip around the outside so that it sets inside the sides. Let the box dry with the lid on it so that it dries equally and will fit when it's fired.

Now you know three main ways to make a clay pot for survival! If you have any suggestions or ideas, please share them in the comments section below.



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