



Clay Ocarinas

Family Friday Project



Costa Rica
500–800 CE



China, 1800's



Italy, 1870

Clay vessel flutes have been made around the world for over 7000 years. The Chinese had an egg shaped flute called a *xun*. In early America they were nicknamed “sweet potatoes.” In the 1850's Italian maker Giuseppe Donati named his design *ocarina*, meaning “little goose.” Using the air-dry clay in this kit, you can make your own.



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Let's get started . . .

Tools & Tips

Tape sturdy paper or fabric to your work surface to keep the clay from sticking.

Keep any clay you aren't actively working with sealed in the bag to keep it from drying out. Your finished piece will take a few days to dry completely. It won't be waterproof unless you seal it with a varnish or acrylic sealer.

An old gift card or similar sheet of plastic works well to scrape and smooth areas, although the side of the popsicle stick will work, too.

For a strong bond between two pieces of clay, always score, or rough up, the surfaces to be joined, wet them, and thoroughly blend them together. A fork or the opened end of a paperclip works well for scoring.

When cleaning up, wash your hands, tools, and surface using a bucket of water, then rinse the bucket outside. Clay will clog your drains quickly!

Steps

ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/pottery-making-techniques/handbuilding-techniques/how-to-make-a-ceramic-ocarina/



Shape a piece of fresh clay into a smooth ball the size of a clementine. Cut the ball in half through its middle.



Pinch the two halves into bowl shapes by cradling the clay in one hand and shaping it with the thumb and index finger of the other. Turn the clay in your hand frequently and keep the thickness of the wall as even as possible. If the clay begins to dry and crack, use a sponge and water to remoisten it.

When you have finished the first half, open the other half in the same fashion. Compare the diameters of the two pieces as you go.



When the two halves match up perfectly, fuse them together into one hollow shape. Use a fork to rough up the rim of each half and paint on an even coat of water. Allow the clay to soften a bit before joining the halves.



Press the halves together. A slight twisting motion will strengthen the bond. Meld the seam with your fingers followed by the flat end of your popsicle stick or old gift card, as shown. Use the fingers of both hands to remove surface imperfections. Use a damp sponge to keep the clay moist and free of cracks.



Create a flattened bottom by pressing the hollow form onto the table surface. Set aside the body of the ocarina to create the mouthpiece.



The mouthpiece shown here is approximately 1 inch wide, 1 1/2 inches long and 3/4 of an inch thick. Notice that the mouthpiece shape has squared sides with a slight taper from back to front. The mouthpiece is thick enough to allow for the later insertion of the beveled popsicle stick to create the windway. The shape of the mouthpiece can be smoothed after it has been attached to the body. Lay the mouthpiece next to the body to determine the best place for attachment.



Thoroughly score the end of the mouthpiece and the area where the mouthpiece will be attached. Brush on a liberal coating of water. Allow the clay in this area to soften. Set the mouthpiece and body on the table and press them together. The mouthpiece must be aligned with the flat side of the body.



After the mouthpiece is attached, pick up the body and smooth away the seam. Complete this step thoroughly to minimize the risk of cracking later.



Carefully insert the popsicle stick into the mouthpiece to create the windway. Care must be taken to ensure that the stick passes through the mouthpiece parallel to the top and bottom surfaces and squarely with the sides. Slow even pressure is best.

If you want to shape or add decoration to your ocarina, do this now. In the picture on the cover, I added another hollow form for a head and pressed in lines to make wings.



With the stick used to create the windway still in place, use another beveled-edge stick to cut the window on the underside of the ocarina. The window should be located so that the side closest to the mouthpiece is just inside the interior of the wall of the body. If the hole is cut too close to the mouthpiece, the window will be blocked by the wall. Make a squared opening and remove the small piece of clay. Cut all the way down to the stick underneath. Make clean, squared cuts on all four sides.



Next, with the beveled edge of the stick facing down, make a square cut at a 45° angle, moving toward the mouthpiece, as shown in the picture. Press the stick in until it reaches the other stick. Follow through, removing the small piece of clay. Your objective is to create a sharp beveled edge on the side of the aperture farthest from the mouthpiece. This sharp edge splits the air from the windway and creates the sound. Carefully withdraw the stick from the windway. Bring the ocarina to your lips and give it a test blow. If it whistles, you can move on to the next step. If there is no whistle, reinsert the stick in the airway and check the sharpness of the bevel.



Withdraw the windway stick, being careful to keep the stick flat. Do not raise or lower it, as this will misalign the bevel. Use a drill bit or the dowel to create the finger holes on the top of the ocarina. It is most common to create 4-6 holes, but you may do as you like. Depending on the precision of your mouthpiece assembly, at some point as you add more holes, your ocarina may stop sounding. If this happens, either adjust your windway and bevel until it works again, or fill in your last finger hole and declare success! If you want to tune your ocarina to a specific scale, cut and tune one hole at a time. Enlarging a hole raises its pitch, so start small and enlarge each hole until you achieve the pitch you want.

Extra Clay?

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