

Home Clay Studio Basics

Working with clay at home has two unique challenges as compared to other projects:

- 1) **Clay dust is a breathing hazard.** All work and cleanup should be done before the clay is dry and dusty if at all possible. Cleaning up dry clay should be done with water (a damp sponge is good) to prevent the dust from becoming airborne.
- 2) **Clay should not be washed down the drain.** Though not as big a problem as plaster or concrete, clay can clog your drain pipes. At the WBCA studio we have a clay trap that still requires cleaning every month. Any clay you might wash down the drain should either be reused or thrown out (not washed down the drain). The clay can be left to settle to the bottom of your bucket so the water can be poured off down the drain or reused. Clay solids at the bottom can be dried out and reused if clean, or thrown in the trash if contaminated with non clay debris. You can also dump it outside if you have a spot (this applies to clay ONLY, not to anything with pigments, like glazes).

Here is what you will need:

1. **Work area** - preferably a dedicated sturdy table that can tolerate being cleaned with a wet sponge. If you use it for other projects you will need a storage location for your clay work. It may be helpful to cover and tape down some good heavy plastic (plastic trash bags can work). To minimize dust, it should be easy to wipe it down with a damp sponge.
2. **Water container (or two)** - small one for working out of and a larger one for cleanup is useful. It can be anything that will hold water, from a clay mug to 5 gallon plastic bucket.
3. **Sponge** - again, a small one for working and a larger one for cleanup is useful. You do not have to use a clay sponge - it can be a kitchen sponge or a large tile setter's sponge and it can be cut to size. You can even use an old rag.
4. **Plastic cover** - for your work while it is in progress. It can be dry cleaner bags or trash bags. It is best if it is not too stiff.

5. **Newspaper or cloth** - as a release surface. This is to keep your work from sticking to the table so you can move it around.
6. **Board** - to keep your work on. This may not be necessary, but is useful if you need to move things around. It can be anything firm that is the correct size for your project. Plywood, drywall, stiff foam insulation, and cookie sheets can all work.
7. **Spray bottle**-not an essential tool but a convenient way to add water to your work. These can be purchased from a variety of stores and range in size from ½ cup capacity to over a gallon (pressurized garden sprayers).
8. **Tools** - these can be anything you find in your home, kitchen, or garage. Pieces of cardboard, wood, wire, string, cans, bottles, rulers, brushes, scrapers, pieces of scrap metal, or plastic buckets. Tools (or toys) made for other purposes are often good for clay too!

One of the tools we use often is a **cut-off wire**. You can make one from things you have around. You will want two handles (ends), which can be anything solid like scrap wood, sticks, or clothespins. You will also need some kind of string or wire. Braided wire is more flexible than solid wire, but if you have thin solid wire you can twist 2 or 3 strands together. Picture hanging wire, monofilament, kite string, or dental floss can also work. The thicker material is harder to pull through the clay, but thin material often wears out quickly. The ones you buy are usually a braided metal. Drilling holes or making notches in the handles can help hold the wire material.

9. **Clay** - don't forget you need clay too! The clay we use at WBCA is made by Minnesota Clay Co. We use **MB** (a smooth white stoneware), **Spit Rock** (a sandy grey clay that fires off white) and **Iron Range** (a red semi-smooth high fire clay). These clays are all rated to fire to cone 10. WBCA will not fire your work if you are using clay other than the exact three listed above unless you get approval from the studio manager. There are many places to get clay from across the country, but they can melt at different temperatures. It is vital that we control what goes into our kilns and clay reclaim. WBCA is NOT offering firing

services at this time, we will keep you posted if that changes.

Local clay manufacturers/retailers:

Minnesota Clay Co., <https://www.mnclay.com/>

Continental Clay Co., <https://www.continentalclay.com/index.php>

Blick Art Supplies, <https://www.dickblick.com/categories/ceramics-sculpture/>