



LESSON 24 LEVEL C CLAY

A LEAF-SHAPE CONTAINER

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN: using the draped slab technique to make a container

WHAT YOU WILL NEED: terra cotta, white or stoneware clay or self hardening clay; rolling pin or bottle; cloth-backed vinyl for a work surface; one or more large leaves such as sugar maple, sycamore, giant ivy, fatshedera; a fist-size round stone or a small round bottom bowl; paper clip; waxed paper or plastic wrap

TIPS: Read the clean up directions before beginning. Choose a large, fresh leaf with an interesting shape and prominent veins for this project. If the slab is too small, add more clay under the tips of the leaf. Blend the added piece well into the piece to avoid breaking later. Clay shrinks as it dries. After the leaf has become leather-hard on the stone or bowl form, remove it. Otherwise, it may shrink more and crack.



Student Example

A NOTE TO PARENTS: These lessons work best with terra cotta clay, but other clays will work also. Terra cotta or similar low-fire clay can be obtained at most ceramic supply stores and many hobby shops. Ceramic clay keeps indefinitely if stored in an airtight container (a plastic bag will do). It can be softened, even if thoroughly dry, by soaking it in water. “Self-hardening” clay or clay you can bake in your own oven is more expensive, but will also work in this lesson. We do not recommend plasticene because of its oily texture.

GETTING STARTED: Artists often use nature’s forms as inspiration for their work. Large, shapely leaves can become patterns for attractive ceramic containers. The impressed, cut-out leaf shape of moist clay is draped over a rock or bowl to give it a graceful form. Glaze will emphasize the vein pattern.

1. On the non-stick side of the vinyl cloth covering your work surface, flatten



and roll out a grapefruit size ball of clay. Make a 12 mm. (1/2") thick slab a little bigger than the leaf you have chosen. (You may roll it between two pieces of 12 mm. flat edge wood.) If the rolling pin goes over both piece of wood, the clay will be of even thickness.) Add patches of clay where necessary, attaching them well with a bit of water.



Student Example

2. Place the leaf on the slab with the veins next to the clay.. Make sure no tips are hanging over the edge.
3. Pressing firmly, roll the rolling pin over the leaf so that the veins are pushed into the surface of the clay. Don't let the clay get thinner than 10 mm. (3/8").
4. Unbend the paper clip so one end of the wire can be used as a cutter. Holding the wire vertically, cut around the edges of the leaf. Pull away the extra clay.
5. Moisten your fingers. Smooth all the edges with your fingertips
6. Lay some plastic wrap over the round stone (or the upside-down bowl). Gently drape the clay over the form with the vein side facing the stone. Check to see that all the edges are smooth. Scratch your name or initials into the bottom of the clay leaf.
7. Put your work in a cool place to dry slowly. Cover it with some damp paper towels or a damp cloth for the first 24 hours.
8. The next day, when it is leather-hard, carefully remove it from the form.
9. Allow it to dry away from air drafts for a least one week if you are going to glaze and fire it.
10. Terra cotta clay, after firing, is attractive even without a glaze finish. White and stoneware ceramics should be finished with a glaze that "fits". (Check with the supplier when you purchase the glaze.) Do not glaze clay that is not kiln fired. Decorate those pieces according to instructions on the self hardening clay container.
To glaze your fired container: Shake or stir the ceramic glaze until it is creamy, with no lumps. Paint it onto the top surface and the edges. When it

dries enough to turn it over, glaze the sides, but leave the bottom surface unglazed or it will stick to the bottom of the kiln. When it is thoroughly dry, you may fire your container again to bake the glaze.

CLEAN UP: Take any leftover clay and make it into a ball. Use the ball to pick up all the scraps of clay you can see. Then take a DRY paper towel or cloth and sweep the dry powder left into a small pile and into your hand. Take it outside and put it in the dirt. Brush your hands together to get the last bits off. Now wash your hands with soap and water. Brush off the mat you used for a work surface out of doors.

Always store your leftover clay in an airtight plastic bag with a little water to keep it moist and workable. If it begins to dry, make it into balls the size of an orange. Poke your thumb into each one so it will hold a bit of water. Place the balls upright in the plastic bag, close it tightly and they will absorb the water overnight. (Even old, dry pieces can be saved by breaking them up in a container and adding clean water. It may take several days depending on the size of the piece of clay.)

TALK ABOUT IT: Did you like working with clay? Would you like to work with it again? What would you do differently? What other form could you use to make a bowl? Some people prefer the look of unglazed pottery better than glazed. Which do you prefer?

MORE IDEAS: If you have neither stone nor bowl, remove the smoothed clay leaf to where it will dry, vein-side up. Pop up the tips and edges with little round balls of clay until the leaf shape is leather-hard. Remove the clay balls and proceed from Step 9, above. Or, drape your clay over an upside down acorn squash. Press the clay gently into the grooves of the squash. With a straightened paper clip, trim the clay evenly around the “waistline” of the squash. Let your squash bowl dry for several hours in a cool place. Then carefully take it off the squash. Gently flatten the base so your bowl will stand up. Glaze just the inside of the bowl if you want it to hold liquid.

CONNECTIONS: Many ancient cultures are known only through objects the people made of clay, since fired clay (ceramics) is as lasting as stone. Archaeologists can date even broken pieces in a number of ways. They use the geologic layer in which a piece was found; Carbon 14 analysis of plant and animal remains near it; sophisticated chemical analysis; and several other ways. Investigate some ancient clay pieces at your local museum or on the Internet.