

CHRISTMAS BAUBLE EARRINGS

Create sparkling silver cages to trap colourful beads for festive bauble-inspired earrings.

By Julia Rai

Julia is co-director of the Cornwall School of Art, Craft and Jewellery where she teaches a variety of classes. She holds the prestigious Metal Clay Masters Registry credential at level four.

As a child Julia loved to make paper lanterns to hang at Christmas and that was the inspiration for these earrings. It's a challenging project as the elements are very fragile until they are assembled and fired but it's worth it. The cages hold small beads threaded on an eye pin and the possible colour combinations are endless.

MATERIALS

- 10g silver metal clay
- Silver metal clay paste
- Small amount of syringe
- Small beads
- Silver colour eyepins
- Earring findings
- Playing cards
- Tissue blade
- Plastic coated pencil
- Small blob of polymer clay
- Teflon sheet
- Good quality paintbrushes
- Emery board or sandpaper
- Hand drill
- Fibre blanket
- Tumble polisher
- Jeweller's wax pick
- Pliers

RESOURCES

Silver clay, syringe and paste:

www.creativeglassshop.co.uk

Eyepins and earring findings:

www.cooksongold.com

Beads from suppliers throughout this magazine

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**STEP 1**

On a Teflon sheet, roll out the silver clay five cards thick and texture using a shallow texture plate or leave smooth for a mirror finish. Trim the left and right edges so they are straight. You should have a panel about 2.5cm wide. Using an oiled tissue blade cut the panel into slices 2mm wide. Always cut more than you need as they break easily when they are dry.

**STEP 6**

Once this third slice is completely dry, stick the final slice in place using the third slice as a handle. Clean up any excess paste. Put this down carefully on a Teflon sheet resting it on the dry sides. It may help to dry it a little using a hairdryer while you are holding it, to set the slice in place before putting it down. Allow the piece to dry completely.

Designer tips

- For safety, use a document spine-binding bar, cut to the length of your tissue blade to use as a handle. Turn the blade inside the bar when not in use to protect your fingers.
- Make your own wax pick by adding a blob of paraffin wax to the end of a cocktail stick. Store in a zip-lock bag.
- The syringe is the perfect tool for a project like this, as it gives you precision placement of clay to fill holes and gaps.

**STEP 2**

Oil a plastic-coated pencil and place on a piece of Teflon shorter than the pencil. Secure the pencil using polymer clay on the ends to stop it from rolling around. Gently drape the cut slices over the pencil so the centre of the slice is the highest point. Lightly press down the ends so they are flat on the Teflon. Make sure they're straight and allow them to dry.

**STEP 3**

Roll out the remaining clay eight cards (2mm) thick and cut this into strips 2mm wide. It's important that these strips are completely square and dry flat, so air dry them slowly. Cut small lengths that will fit the flat ends of the slices. Paste a small strip to one end of a slice and dry. Paste another small strip to the other end of the same slice and dry.

**STEP 4**

Paste a second slice to the other side of the strip and allow this to dry completely. Once it is dry, fill any gaps with paste or syringe and dry again. Sand both sides of the piece flat down on sandpaper or an emery board. You are aiming to get a flat smooth edge on both sides. Sand the piece slowly and carefully as it's very fragile at this stage.

**STEP 5**

Take two more slices and carefully sand both sides flat down on an emery board or sand paper. These are really fragile and it is very easy to break them, which is why you make more than needed! Put the assembled piece flat down on a Teflon sheet and stick one of the sanded slices into place using thick paste. Clean off any excess paste with a damp paintbrush.

**STEP 7**

Check the inside of both ends for gaps and fill using a syringe if necessary. When it is dry, file both ends completely flat using an emery board. Use a hand drill or pin vice to drill a 1mm hole in each end, straight down into the centre. Be very careful when holding the piece to drill as it's still very fragile. Repeat this process to make the other earring.

**STEP 8**

Fire the earrings on a bed of fibre blanket in the kiln at 900°C for two hours. Tumble polish to get a high shine, brass brush or hand polish depending on your personal preference. Thread an eye pin up through the hole in one end of the earring and use a jeweller's wax pick to hold small beads inside the cage while you thread the eye pin through each one.

**STEP 9**

When you have enough beads inside the cage, thread the eye pin through the top hole. Open the eye pin using flat nose pliers and thread a top drilled dangle bead onto it. Form a loop in the top end of the eye pin using round nose pliers and cut off the excess wire. Add an earring finding to the loop at the top and repeat for the other earring.

**Extra Projects**
Make charms and a necklace**CHARMS**

You can also make small charms using exactly the same process as you would to make a necklace. These are perfect to embellish a hair pin for a special night out.

NECKLACE

Make a larger version of the earrings as a focal bead for a festive necklace. Match the beads inside the cage with those in the necklace.

