

making Jewellery

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CHRISTMAS TREE FOCAL BEAD



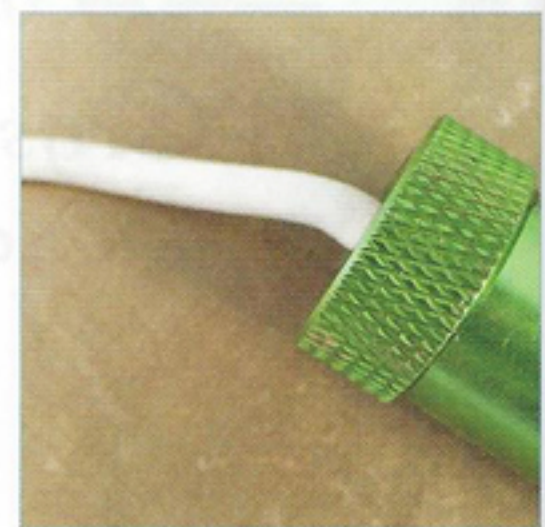
Learn how to make this beautiful three-dimensional Christmas tree focal bead, which can be adapted to make an heirloom tree decoration. By Julia Rai

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.

This three-dimensional design is sure to be a talking point at Christmas parties! The tree halves are built around a central tube, which allows for wire to be passed through from top to bottom to form the hanger. Added embellishment is possible at the top and bottom. Fire up your imagination and create something stunning!

MATERIALS

- Silver metal clay
- Silver clay paste
- Silver clay syringe
- Glass or ceramic paint
- Silver eye and headpins
- Silver chain or silk thong
- Beads or crystals
- Christmas tree cutter
- Cocktail sticks
- Ball burr or large drill bit
- Makin's Clay Extruder with tube attachment
- Tissue blade
- Clothes peg
- Good quality paintbrushes
- Soft, clean brass brush
- Agate or steel burnisher
- Pliers
- Liver of Sulphur (optional)



STEP 1

Choose a very fine tube attachment for the Makin's Clay Extruder with a die to form a tube approx. 5-10mm in diameter. Oil the barrel, die and tube attachment. Form a smooth ball of metal clay and put it into the barrel of the extruder. Assemble the tube attachment. Extrude a length of tube and cut it off using a sharp blade. Make sure it is absolutely straight, then dry.



STEP 6

To add a tree-like texture, hold the bead in the clothes peg and paint one tree half with thick paste. Drag a cocktail stick through the paste to form lines fanning out from the tube to the tree edge. Do this on all the tree halves facing upwards and allow these to dry. Turn the bead over and hold it using the clothes peg. Repeat for the other sides.

RESOURCES

Silver clay:
www.bluebelldesignstudio.co.uk
Glass or ceramic paint:
www.artifolk.co.uk
Chain, silk thong, wire:
www.cooksongold.com
Makin's Clay Extruder and Clay Core Tube Adapters:
www.ejrbeads.co.uk

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STEP 2

Roll out the metal clay to four-cards thick on an oiled piece of Teflon. Cut out the Christmas tree shape using the oiled cutter. Using an oiled tissue blade, cut the tree exactly in half from top to bottom. Make sure the cut edges are straight and dry the halves slowly. Repeat so you have four tree halves in total.



STEP 3

When everything is dry, carefully file the top and bottom of the tube and make sure the holes are not blocked. Poke a needle tool inside to do this. Refine the edges of each tree half and file the long edge absolutely flat if necessary. Hold the tube in a clothes peg and using plenty of thick paste, stick the first tree half to the tube at a right angle. Dry.



STEP 4

Reinforce the join with syringe if necessary and dry it again. There is no need to clean up the paste or syringe at this point as the whole piece will be textured later. Turn the bead round and use the clothes peg to carefully hold the tree half that is already stuck on. Stick another tree half to the other side of the tube using thick paste and leave to dry.



STEP 5

Reinforce the join with syringe as before if necessary. Lie the tree down flat and stick a third tree half to the tube using thick paste. You will now have three tree halves stuck to the bead. Leave to dry and then reinforce the join if necessary. Add the final tree half by holding the bead using the clothes peg. Dry and reinforce the join so the whole bead is assembled. Dry.



STEP 7

Smooth the edges and file the top and bottom of the tube so it is level with the top and bottom of the bead. Using a ball burr or large drill and make shallow dips in the tree halves. These will be filled with colour after firing to look like baubles. Kiln fire on a bed of vermiculite or supported by a fibre blanket at 900°C for two hours.



STEP 8

Polish using a tumble polisher or brass brush. Use a burnisher to shine up the edges of the trees. Dip in Liver of Sulphur if you like an antiqued look, and then polish the high spots of the texture to create a contrast and show up the branches. Using ceramic or glass paint, apply colour to the dips with a small paintbrush, dry and finish following the manufacturer's instructions.



STEP 9

Thread a crystal or bead onto the end of a long headpin and thread it all the way through the tube. Add a star bead and then make a loop on the top end of the headpin. Hang the pendant on a chain or thong. An alternative is to use an eye pin and add an additional dangle on the bottom of the bead if you like movement.

Extra Projects Make a tree decoration and earrings

TREE DECORATION

For the tree decoration, use beads and ribbon to match your tree colours. Make this bead using air-drying clay or polymer clay for a cheaper alternative.

EARRINGS

Make a matching pair of flat earrings using the Christmas tree cutter shapes cut in half and the same texturing technique.

Designer tips

- Since this design lends itself to a broad range of shapes, you can experiment with different cutters to achieve a wide variety of three-dimensional focal beads.
- A clothes peg makes a great handle for working on complex shapes. It holds the piece level for you to add elements and allows you to texture parts and put them to dry without disturbing the texture.
- The central tube allows for incorporating beads or crystals into the final piece. You could use a rolled rod of silver clay as the central stem and just embed a fine silver ring to hang it if you don't have an extruder.