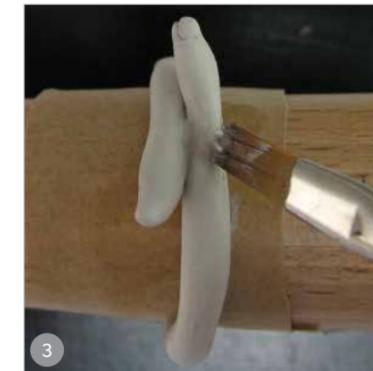


MUSHROOM MANIA

JULIA RAI

Mushrooms are really easy to make in metal in all shapes and sizes. Mushrooms grow on all kinds of organic material so these projects have a natural branch-like structure, which is textured with paste. If you have old metal clay – maybe some that has been reconstituted from dry scraps and not as smooth as you'd like – these projects are perfect to use it up. It's also a great use for lumpy or gritty paste, which makes a wonderful organic texture. As you will be covering the surface of the clay with paste, these projects are easy for beginners as it isn't a problem if the clay dries out while you are working.



PHOTOGRAPHS: LAUREL GUILFOY/E, JULIA RAI

MATERIALS & TOOLS

- 30–50g fine silver metal clay
- Silver clay paste, thick and lumpy
- Syringed silver clay
- 5cm x 0.8mm Sterling silver wire
- Sterling silver chain
- Earring scrolls
- Embeddable bail
- 2 embeddable eyelets
- Jumpings
- Greaseproof paper
- Clay shaper with a pointed end
- Cocktail sticks
- 1.5mm gouge carving tool
- Tweezers
- 1mm drill
- Craft knife
- Sanding sponge
- Paintbrush
- Firing tools
- Pickle (optional)
- Polishing tools
- Cutters and pliers
- Liver of Sulphur (optional)

HOW TO MAKE

1. Prepare the mandrel for the ring, accounting for shrinkage. I have used a US ring sizer, so the ring size used is three sizes larger than the final ring size needs to be. Slide the ring sizer onto the mandrel until it stops, then mark it with a pencil on both sides of the ring sizer. Wrap some greaseproof paper around the mandrel over the size marks and secure it with sticky tape at the edges.

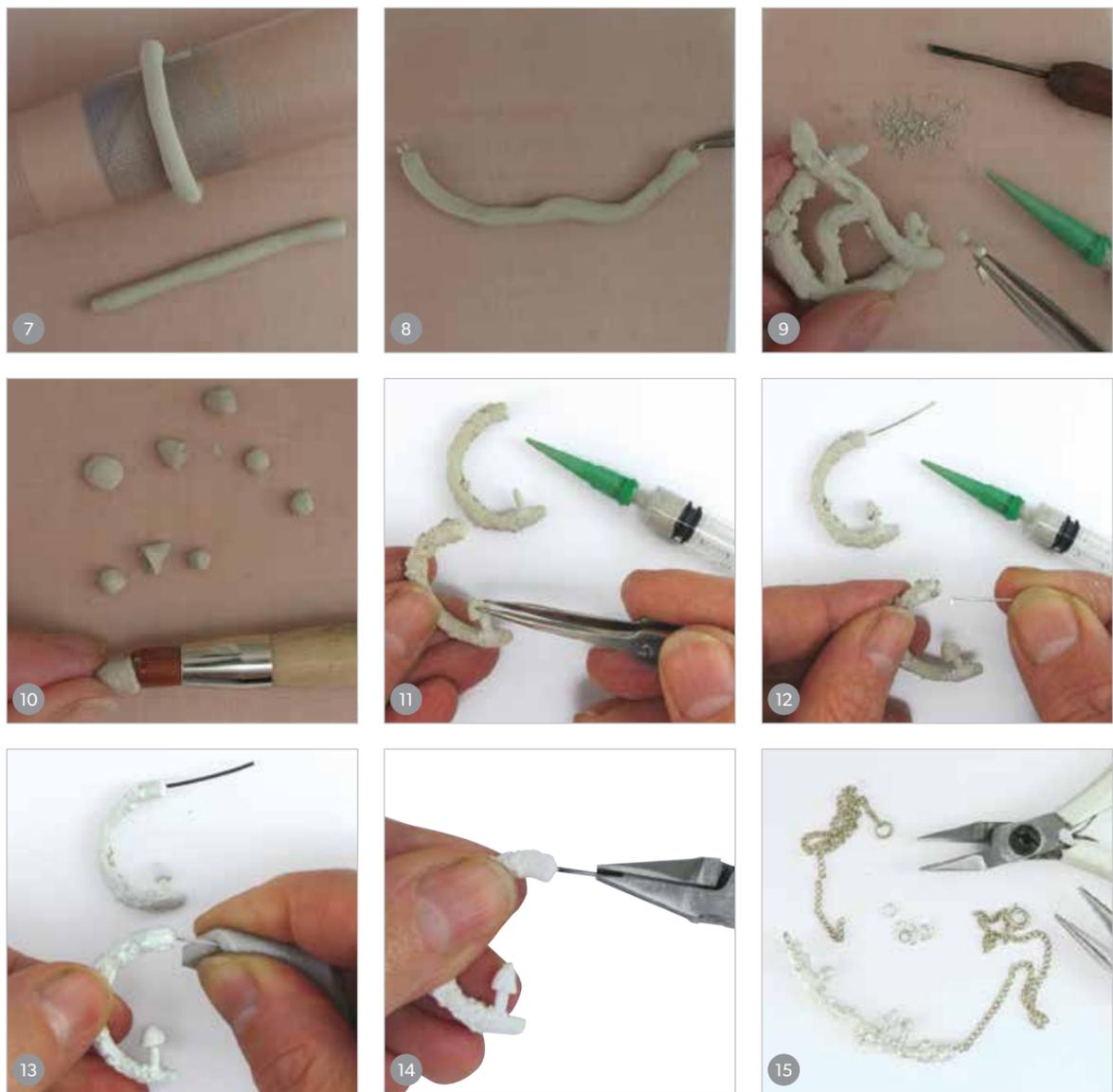
2. Roll out a long, thin snake of silver clay for the ring shank. Make this an uneven rather than a consistent thickness so it has a more organic form. The easiest way to do this is to use your fingers, but make sure you don't roll any areas too thin. Make it about 3–4cm longer than you need it to be and taper it slightly on both ends.

3. Wrap the snake of clay around the mandrel and cross it over at the top. Put a squeeze of syringed silver clay between the two ends where they cross and smooth it with a paintbrush. Make sure the ends are sticking up. If they droop, hold them and blast them with a hairdryer to set them in place. Leave the ring to dry on the mandrel.

4. Make the mushroom caps. Take a piece of silver clay an appropriate size for the ring. Roll it into a ball, then form it into a cone shape. Using an oiled clay shaper with a pointy end, push a dip in the bottom and form the cap; uneven or quirky is fine. Make another one and leave them both to dry.

5. If you have lumpy paste, you should use this. If not, make some with dry bits of clay or dust and mix until smooth. Cut up some dry clay into small pieces and add them to the smooth paste. Mix this up, keeping the lumps. Paint the paste onto one side of the ring and let it dry, then add it to the other side so the whole ring is covered.

6. Trim the ring ends if necessary, then dampen with water. Squirt some syringed silver clay into the dry mushroom caps and add them to the ring. Clean up any excess silver clay with a damp paintbrush and put the ring aside to dry. Dampen the mushroom caps with water, wait a moment, then scrape lines down the surface using a cocktail stick to create a texture. ►



Earrings (opposite page)

7. Make the earrings by taking two equal quantities of silver clay and rolling them into snakes around 4.5cm long. Dry these over a curved form such as a paste pot with Teflon wrapped around it. Once they are dry, texture all over with the lumpy paste, one side at a time and dry.

Necklace (p60)

8. Make another uneven snake of silver clay around 7cm long and form it into an organic, branch-like shape for the necklace. While it is still soft, embed an eyelet into each end and

allow it to dry. Texture both sides, one at a time with lumpy paste and leave it to dry.

Pendant (p60)

9. Make a number of uneven snakes of silver clay and join them together using a little syringed silver clay to form an interesting pendant design. Dry and then texture as before. Once dry, make appropriate sized dips in the back of the pendant for the ends of the bail using a small carving tool. Squirt the syringed silver clay into the dips to embed it. Blend any excess into the texture, making sure the bail ends are fully covered.

10. Make a number of mushroom parts by creating a long, thin snake and cutting it into short pieces for the stalks. Form different shaped mushroom caps: some cones with a dip in the bottom, some half-spheres with a hole in the bottom. Allow the stalks and caps to dry.

11. Add the mushroom stalks to the earrings, pendant and necklace first, sticking them on firmly with the syringed silver clay. Allow them to dry. Squirt syringed silver clay into the dips in the mushroom caps and stick them onto the stalks. Allow to dry. Dampen the surface of each mushroom cap and scrape a cocktail stick down it to create a texture as before.

12. Cut the Sterling wire in half and bend a small 'L' into the end of each piece. Drill a small hole into the end of the earrings and open it out using a craft knife, just enough for the 'L' end of the wire to fit in. Fill the hole with syringed silver clay and push the 'L' end into the silver clay. Smooth the silver clay over the end and dry. Clean any paste from the wire before firing.

13. Gently sand the textures on all the pieces to smooth out any sharp or pointed areas. Fire the earrings in a kiln at 700°C for 30 minutes to ensure the Sterling wire doesn't get brittle. Fire the other pieces at 900°C for two hours. Pickle the earrings or use a sanding pad to remove the oxidation from the earwires.

14. Cut the earwires to the desired length and sand the ends so they are smooth and comfortable. During firing the wire becomes annealed making it soft so strengthen it by gripping the wire with pliers and twisting it a quarter turn several times along the length. Polish all the pieces using a brass or steel brush, tumble polisher or rotary tool.

15. Hang the necklace on chain using jumprings between the chain and the embeddable eyelets. Oxidise the pieces using Liver of Sulphur if you like the effect, following the manufacturer's instructions. Polish the high spots to highlight the texture. Add earring scrolls to the earring wires and a chain to the pendant.

RESOURCES

Art Clay Silver, embeddable bail and eyelets: metalclay.co.uk
Wire, earring scrolls, chain and jumprings: cooksongold.com
Dockyard carving tools: csacj.co.uk

CONTACT

juliarai.co.uk
csacj.co.uk
info@csacj.co.uk