



Throwing Demo

The Basics: your first pot

Throwing Clay is a different recipe than hand building clay. Make sure you have the right clay.

If clay is too hard to wedge slice a large chunk into slices that are about ½ inch thick. Dip the slices in water, place in a plastic bag and seal. The next day it should be ready for wedging.

Wedge clay to remove air pockets and align clay particles. Knead/roll on wedging table dusted with clay powder. Push clay and roll without folding. Rotate ball 90 degrees and continue wedging. Slice clay into 2-lb. chunks.

If clay is too soft, you can leave it out in the open air to dry a little, but this takes time. If you're in a hurry, you can wedge soft clay with dry ball clay.



Attach a splash pan around the wheel head. Put a bat on the wheel head. Cover lap/thigh area with towel (this is the splash zone!). Turn the wheel on.



CENTERING: During this first part of the throwing process, you will need to use your muscles to bring the ball of clay on center. Remember to *brace yourself* – keep your elbows firmly on your thighs.

CENTERING “the gorilla”

The wheel should be going around very fast during centering. The direction is counterclockwise. But don't start your wheel yet.



Pick up a 2-lb. chunk of wedged clay and smack it into a ball.



Smack ball of clay down onto center of bat.



Pack it down into a modified cone shape.



This is what your ball looks like now:



Start your wheel now. Brace your elbows on your inner thighs. Squeeze water from your sponge over the clay – do this whenever the clay needs more lubrication.

Remember to brace!

The wheel is going around fast. Your elbows are braced. Pull the clay up from the bottom of your hands. You are pressing in on the clay, bracing with your body. The clay is moving upward because that is all you will let it do.



Focus your energy on the lower portion of your palm, down through your little finger (on both hands). The rest of your hands will follow and support these parts. Allow your fingers to curve slightly – they are stronger when curved.



As your hands squeeze the clay starting from the wheelhead, allow the clay to move upward in space. When you have a tallish cone, it's time to start pushing downward. First, round off the top of the clay.



To move downward with the clay, both hands must supply force. Remember to brace your elbows! The right hand supplies downward pressure (like a continuous karate chop). The left hand moves out horizontally (from 6 o'clock to 12 o'clock on the wheelhead). You've got that clay locked in a moving vice grip.



Keep pushing down while centering. But don't push too far down yet unless your clay is centered now.



Repeat this up-and-down process as needed to get your clay on center. Don't push the clay too low unless you are done with coning – otherwise you can't push it back up again without making a cup shape that holds water.

This process is called “coning.”

When your clay is centered, push it down into a low shape.



One last chance to get the clay on center: this is another hand position you will find useful when the clay is in a low shape. You can use a variant of this hand position to put the clay back on center after sinking the hole, so remember this.



Sink the hole: Rest your right hand on the clay (remember to brace). Allow your right thumb to find the center and make a small hole.



Sink the hole to the bottom: if you use both hands together, it's easier on you. Notice how the left hand is used to push down on the right thumb. Stop before you get to the bottom – leave the bottom a little thicker than you think it needs to be.



Open out the bottom: change the angle of your right thumb so that the hole widens out. Stop when the inside bottom is as wide as it should be in the finished pot (think ahead to the finished pot). When you're throwing, the *inside* is most important. The outside can be trimmed later.



Pack the bottom: using your left hand, flatten and compress the bottom. This step will go far to keep the bottom of your pot cracking in the bisque firing. Remember, the left hand owns the inside of the pot, while the right hand owns the outside.



Everyone's first 3 fingers are different lengths. But they will be the same length if you curve them and press them together. They will also be stronger that way. Use the 3 curved fingers of the left hand to pack the bottom of the pot.



Raising the walls and finishing: this is the second phase of throwing the pot. Slow your wheel down – going too fast will cause your pot to destroy itself.

RAISING THE WALLS AND FINISHING “finesse”

Now is the time to raise the walls. If you want, your first pull can be like pinching. Starting from the bottom and using your right hand, pull the clay up toward the top. You'll have to practice how much to squeeze. If you squeeze too hard, you'll make a thin spot, and this will cause your pot to fall.



Pulling the walls up is done in several stages. After you initial pinch pull, the pot will be too tall to get your hand down to the bottom. You'll have to make the equivalent of the pinch between your two hands. Pick a specific point on each hand to pull against – usually the fingertips or a knuckle. Brace!



When pulling, the right hand starts before the left hand, gathering a ridge of clay just above the wheelhead. Then the left hand catches up, and both hands pull up together. Make more pulls until your clay is well pulled up. Leave your form in a very basic shape until you finish pulling.



When you get to the top of your pot, ease off on the pressure. Release your hands gently so as not to push the pot off center at the top.



While raising the walls, uncenteredness often gets pulled to the top of the pot. If your pot has an uneven rim at this point, it is fine to cut it off with a pin tool. Be sure to start cutting below the area where the trouble starts. Brace both elbows and gradually move the pin tool in toward the wall of the pot.



Pack the rim: make a nice, softly rounded rim by taking a strip of paper towel, dipping it in water, and holding it over the rim of your pot. Note: the pros usually use a piece of chamois rather than a paper towel, but the paper towel works fine.



Once you have the walls completely pulled up, you can shape your pot to your heart's content. You will probably want to slow the wheel down even more for this step.



Stop to take a look at your pot. Is this what you want? Should you stop now or keep shaping?



Be sure to take as much clay as you can off the bottom of the pot near the wheelhead. This saves you trimming work later. You can use a sponge and/or a wooden knife or rib.



Don't leave any excess water in the bottom of your pot. Soak it up with a sponge (keep the wheel moving as you do this).



Your pot is done for now. Use the cutting wire to cut the pot off the bat.



Remove the bat from the wheelhead. You will probably have to use a slim blade of some kind to break the suction of the slip. Put the pot aside, but don't let it dry out completely. When it is leather hard, it will need to be trimmed.



NEXT STEP: TRIMMING