

Metal Clay Leaves by Sherrie Perkins



To “make” metal clay leaves is one of the best ways to begin using metal clay. The reasons, I think, are first you don’t have to do anything other than choose a real leaf, geranium leaves are fabulous. You don’t have to worry about designing...and you get to learn a process, as well as how the material handles and end up with something that you can use to make jewelry. Most instructors teach this method early on in metal clay classes, because of these reasons.

First select a leaf somewhere in the 1-2 inch range...make your first leaves smallish, because the process takes time. You can do several leaves at a time.

I would suggest that you set yourself up so you can walk away from this project and do other things because sitting and waiting is not a lot of fun!

You will need in addition to your selected leaves:-

...metal clay paste – (get a small package and make your paste by spraying water into your container I use about 5 sprays, stir it up and add 5 more, stir etc until I get something similar to pancake batter. I use PMC 3 clay, because it is the strongest and it can be fired at a lower shorter temperature, but I do fire mine at 1650 for two hours....overkill I know, but better safe than sorry).. I usually prepare this prior to doing my project, day before and then let it rest...checking it before I start the project and if it is too thick, I give it 5 sprays and stir. You can buy paste if you prefer, I live out in the country and so making my paste is more convenient.

...a sable brush (I get mine at the beauty supply store) I store my clay paste in a tightly closed small jar, if it get a bit dry, I spray it with water and stir.

...I use either a glass (I buy a cheap frameless frame, which is just glass and clips and you can put graph paper inside for sizing) or a plastic cutting mat (from Walmart) (glass is easier to clean and an 8 x 12 inch is perfect)

...if you have a mug warmer that is perfect for drying your metal clay (you can let your clay air dry, but does increase your drying time)

...a tweezers is helpful for lifting your delicate leaves around

You are ready to begin making your “masterpiece”

Coat the **back side** of your leaf with metal clay paste which should be a hair thicker than pancake batter and very smooth. Put a smooth even coat on....don't glob! Set aside on your warming surface and do your next one. Do not rush your drying. If I was doing this I would do 4-6 leaves, paint each one and put on warming surface when you have finished your leaves, check the first one and see if it is dry, how heavily you applied the paste is going to determine how quickly your leaves dry.

Personally I would go away for a half hour and return, taking the leaves off one at a time, paint, return to drying surface....continue this until you have between 15-20 applications...you will have to walk away and return...by the end of the day you should have some leaves that have about 1/16th of an inch of silver paste on them, which would be about 18-20 gauge sheet, but yours will have texture (remember you won't be able to see your leaves....the texture is hidden by the leaf itself).

Take your leaves and leave them on your work surface over night and then you are ready to fire....you might touch them to make sure then are bone dry...they won't be cool to the touch and there should not be any dampness felt. Put them into the kiln, leaf and all, the leaf will burn away.

I have been firing at full ramping to 1650 degrees for 2 hours. Remove from kiln and quench in water. Clean with a wire brush and design your new piece of jewelry.

If you feel I am being obsessive about my instructions I let me tell you a story....I had never seen metal clay and was enticed to take a class....the teacher had nothing for us to do other than paint leaves and watch them dry. So hyperactive that I am I painted, put on warming device, painted....you get the picture, in two hours I had enough....I had about 5 coats on my leaves....I said done, lets cook these suckers...we did and they came out absolutely wonderfully, however they were like aluminum foil...what to do??? Well I mounted them on \$10.00 worth of wire and had to solder them on....to stabilize them...I do have a wonderful pendant, but it cost me a lot of material, a lot of time and frustration...so do it right the first time and you will absolutely amazed at the results you will get.