

beginner
metal clay
wirework

Spired tendrils



Corkscrew wire around smooth metal-clay cylinders for these attractive earrings

by Carol A. Babineau

Along with the times, fashions are a changin'. The straight, dramatic drop is in, and this project invites you to rise to the occasion. Simple yet elegant, these earrings are perfect for those without heaps of free time. The design calls for spiraling wire around sintered metal-clay cylinders, and adding flashy crystal drops using basic wireworking techniques. You can even make several pairs at one time without watching the hands run around the clock. Versatile earrings for any occasion, dress them up or dress them down and they'll fit right in. And the appealing style makes them a catchy gift option as well!



[1] Roll out a snake. Place 10–18 grams of metal clay onto a lightly oiled heavy plastic sheet or other non-stick surface. Place a 3×5-inch (7.6×12.7cm) piece of hard plastic or Plexiglas® over the clay, and move the slab in a brisk, back-and-forth motion over the clay to elongate it evenly into a snake approximately 3 inches (7.6cm) long.

[2–3] Flatten the ends. Using a tissue blade or craft knife, trim the snake into two 1½-inch (3.8cm) segments. Flatten one end of each segment using a finger or thumb. Use a thin needle file to make a small hole in the center of the flattened areas, and let the clay dry to a leather-hard state.

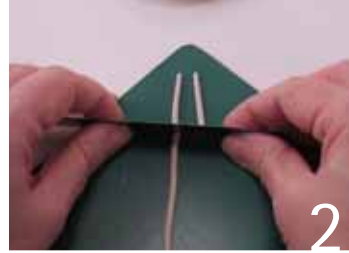
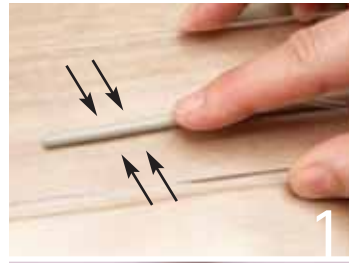
[4] Sand and refine the earrings. Sand the pieces smooth, leaving the top portions flattened and the bottom portions rounded.

[5] Drill the holes. Insert a #65 drill bit into a pin vise, and very carefully enlarge the holes that you made earlier. File the holes using a thin needle file.

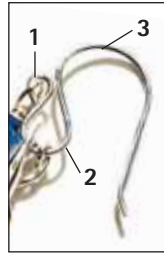
Fire the pieces. Place both earrings onto a kiln shelf, supported by a pile of alumina hydrate. Fire them according to the clay manufacturer's instructions. (*Editor's Note:* If you don't own a kiln, try firing them with a torch, hot pot, or gas stove. For more information on these methods, take a look at the article, "No Kiln? No Problem!" in the March 2005 *Art Jewelry* magazine.)

Polish the earrings. Polish the earrings by first burnishing them with a stainless-steel brush to remove the white residue from firing. Then give them a sparkling shine by placing them in a tumbler with stainless-steel shot and burnishing compound for at least 30 minutes.

[6–7] Add spiraled wire. Wind 3 inches (7.6cm) of wire around a knitting needle or bamboo skewer 6–7 times, depending on the length of your earrings. Remove the wire spring from the form. Using roundnose pliers, form a small loop at the top end of the spring (see Basic Techniques on the homepage for wireworking basics). Slide the spring onto the metal-clay earring. Gently stretch the spring out until it is the length of your earring (trim the wire if necessary). Form a second tiny loop at the bottom of the spring. Repeat for the second earring.



[8–9] Form ear wires. Cut a 3-inch (7.6cm) piece of 22-gauge wire, and form a small loop at one end using the tip of the roundnose pliers (loop #1 in the diagram). Use a thicker portion of the roundnose pliers to form a second, larger loop in the opposite direction (loop #2). Use a small ring mandrel to form the third and largest loop in the opposite direction from the second (loop #3).



Sand and smooth the end of the wire. Slide the ear wire through the hole in your metal-clay earring, as well as through the top loop of the spring. Repeat for the second earring.



[10] Create dangles. Use 24-gauge headpins to create crystal dangles (two per earring). Use wrapped-loop connectors (see the sidebar titled "Wrapped-loop connectors") to connect one dangle to the smallest loop of the ear wire, and another to the bottom loop of the spiraled wire.

materials

- Metal clay, 10–18 grams
- Sterling-silver wire: 12 inches (30.5cm), 22-gauge
- 4 crystals, 3mm
- 4 headpins, 24-gauge

tools & supplies

- Heavy plastic surface
- Olive oil
- Hard plastic or Plexiglas® slab, 3×5-inch (7.6×12.7cm) rectangle
- Tissue blade or craft knife
- Needle tool
- Drill, #65 bit
- Needle files
- Sandpaper, 400- to 600-grit
- Kiln with kiln shelf and alumina hydrate
- Soft stainless-steel burnishing brush
- Tumbler with stainless-steel shot and burnishing compound
- Knitting needle or bamboo skewer, diameter larger than the fired metal-clay pieces
- Wire cutters
- Roundnose pliers
- Chainnose pliers
- Ring mandrel

resources

- PMC3® metal clay
- Swarovski® crystals, 3mm

Wrapped-loop connectors

Slide a 3mm crystal onto a 24-gauge headpin. Make a 90-degree bend in the headpin 3–4mm above the crystal using chainnose pliers. Using roundnose pliers, grasp the wire next to the bend on the top side. Bring the wire over the top jaw of the pliers, forming the first half of a loop. Now place the bottom jaw of the pliers in the loop. Curve the wire down and around the bottom of the pliers, completing the loop. Slide this loop into the smallest loop of the ear wire. Use chainnose pliers to horizontally clamp the top of the loop. Simultaneously use pliers or your fingers to wrap the wire tail of the headpin around the stem 2–3 times, until the wraps meet the crystal. Repeat this process to connect a dangle to the bottom loop of the spring. Repeat for the second earring. For step-by-step photos of the wrapped-loop connector, visit Basic Techniques on the *Art Jewelry* homepage.

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