

Cutting Clay with Your Klic-N-Kut

by Judy Keating

January 31, 2010

There are many types of items that can be made from polymer clay that has been cut with the Klic-N-Kut cutter. Those include buttons, scrapbook and card embellishments, jewelry items, key chain or cell phone dangles, etc., plus other items limited only by your imagination.

The supplies I used to cut polymer clay are:

Klic-N-Kut Maxx 15" cutter

Maxx/Groove Cutting mat

Krylon Easy Tack Adhesive Spray

Sliver 2 KNK Blade

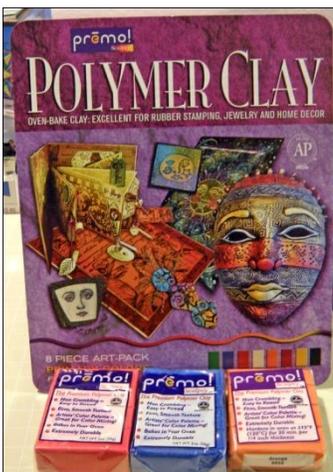
Blue Painter's Tape

Baker's Parchment Paper (I used the Wilton brand)

Hand cranked Pasta Machine (do not use for food preparation)

Sculpey prēmo! Clay

O Ring Spacers

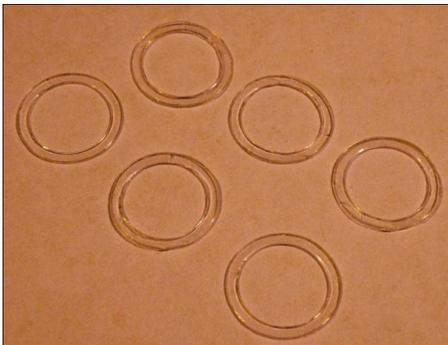


I chose to use the prēmo! brand of polymer clay made by Sculpey because it is easy to work with and retains a degree of flexibility after baking.



I used the Sliver 2 blade for cutting the clay because it has the longest usable blade length. The maximum thickness of the clay that you can cut cleanly with the KNK is determined by the usable blade length. Because of the thickness of the clay, the blade will most likely be extended to its maximum length.

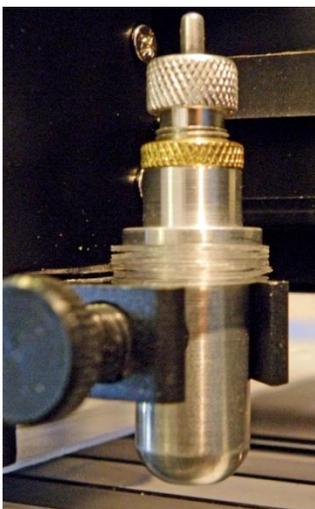
When cutting the clay it is important to make sure that the blade holder does not press into the surface of the clay. The blade holder will need to be positioned higher in the clamp than normal. You can pull the blade holder up in the clamp before tightening the holding screw or you can use O Ring Spacers. The use of the O Ring Spacers helps insure that the blade holder will be positioned at the same height each time it is inserted.



I used these O Ring Spacers - all 6 of them - to raise the blade holder to the height needed to keep it above the surface of the clay during the cutting process. These O Ring Spacers are cut from a thin acrylic. They could have been cut from card stock or even thin chipboard.



This shows the O Ring Spacers in position for use.



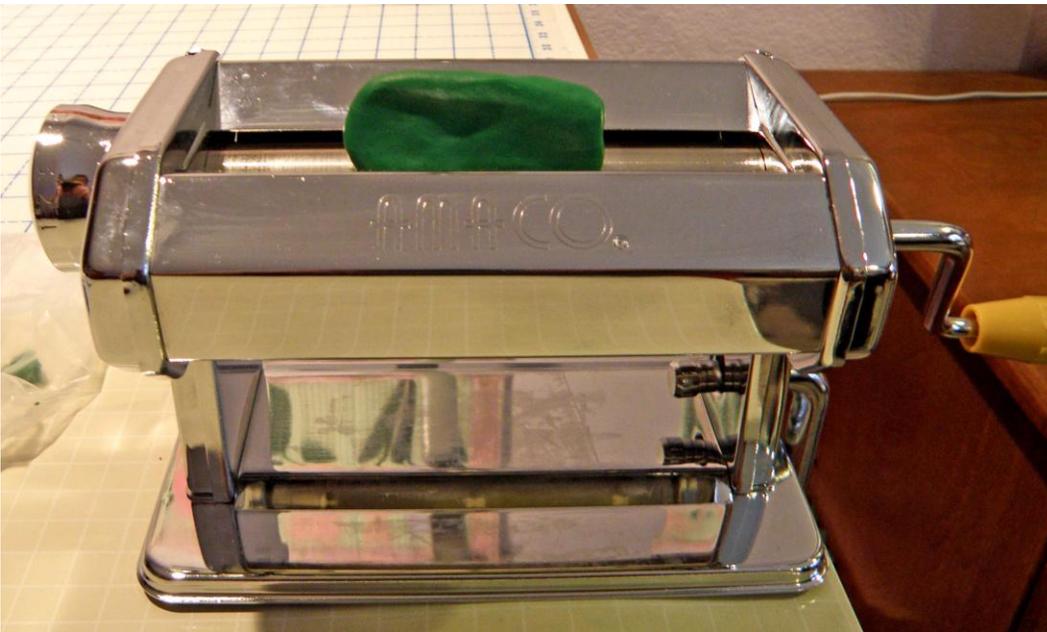
You can see that the O Ring Spacers have positioned the blade holder higher in the clamp than without them.



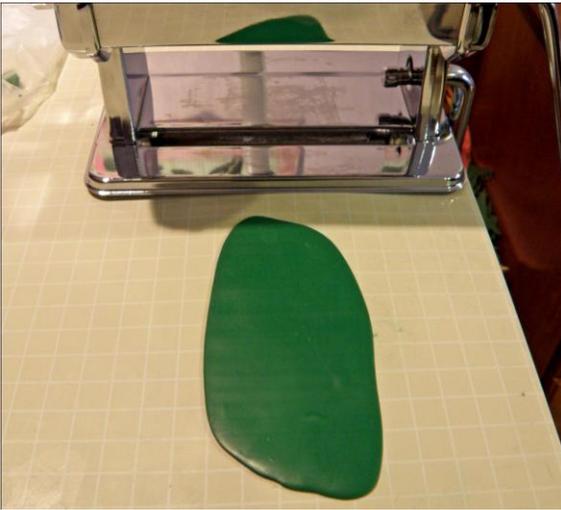
To prepare the mat for cutting the clay, I laid a piece of the parchment paper onto the sticky surface. Since the parchment is coated with silicon, it won't stick securely to the mat and it is necessary to tape the paper down with the blue painter's tape.

Prepare the clay according to the instructions included with the clay. Although the instructions suggest that you can use the pasta maker to condition the clay, I encountered some unexpected results when I tried that method. The problem occurred because I ran the clay through the pasta machine multiple times, folding the ribbon of clay back on itself once or twice before running through the machine again. By doing this I managed to trap air in between the layers of clay and ended up with bubbles in my clay. I conditioned the clay by working it with my hands until it was softened and then ran it through the pasta machine without folding it.

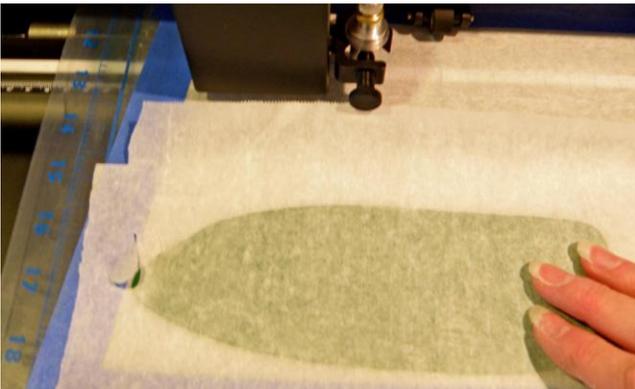
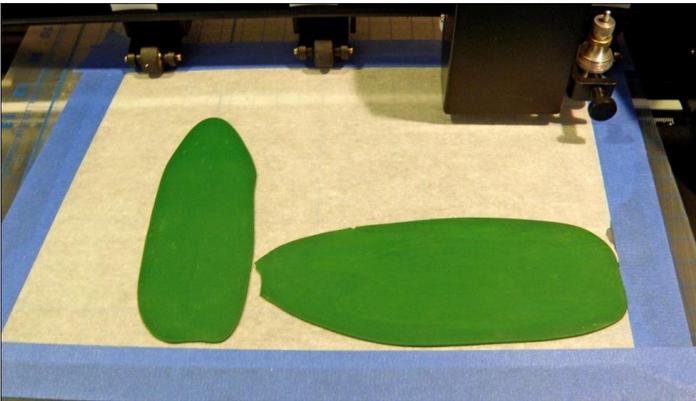
When you run the clay through the machine it will end up longer but not much wider than the original piece that is fed into the rollers. Thus I suggest that you form your clay into a rectangular piece that is approximately as wide as you want the flattened piece to be.



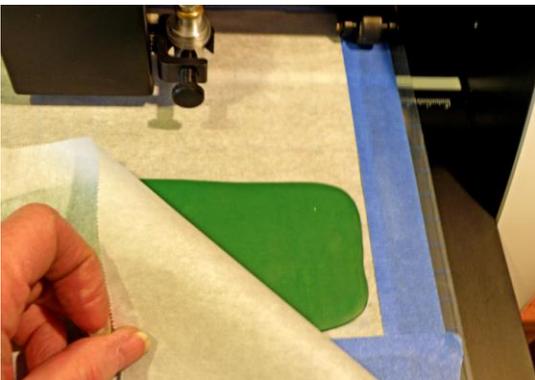
This rectangular piece of clay resulted in the flattened piece shown below. The dial on the pasta machine is set between 5 and 6. For some reason, my machine's dial clicks into place when the indicator is between numbers. You might try settings between 4 and 6 on your machine. For large pieces make successive passes starting at the highest number on the dial and decreasing the number for each pass until you reach the final setting. A second pass at the final setting is sometimes helpful.



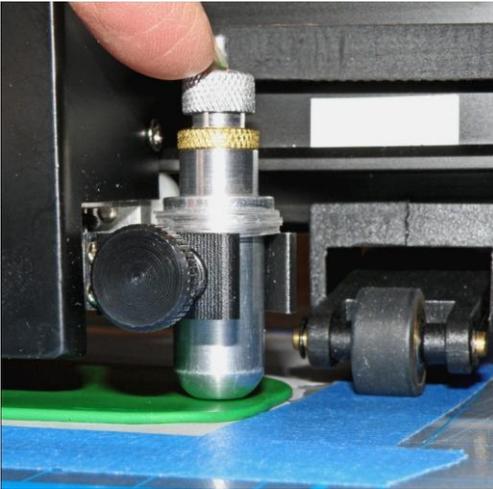
Now the clay is ready to be put on the mat. If you put the clay onto the mat while the clay is still a bit warm from handling, it will stick to the parchment paper better than if you let it sit and cool before placing it on the mat.



To help insure that the clay sticks to the parchment paper on the mat, place another piece of parchment on top of the clay and gently rub the top of the clay. Do not rub hard enough to alter the shape of the clay.

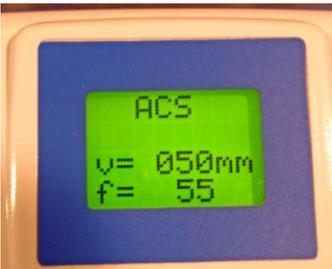


Remove the top piece of parchment by folding a corner back and 'rolling' the paper off the clay. If you pull the paper straight up, you can lift the clay off of the mat.

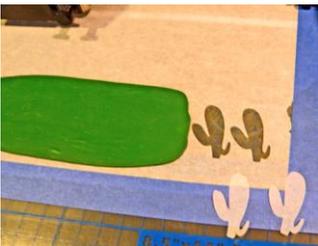


Test the height of the blade holder by pushing it down as far as it will go and then check to make sure that there is no impression from the blade holder in the clay. There should be a very small space between the bottom of the blade holder and the clay. The blade itself will mark the clay because it is extended below the bottom of the blade holder.

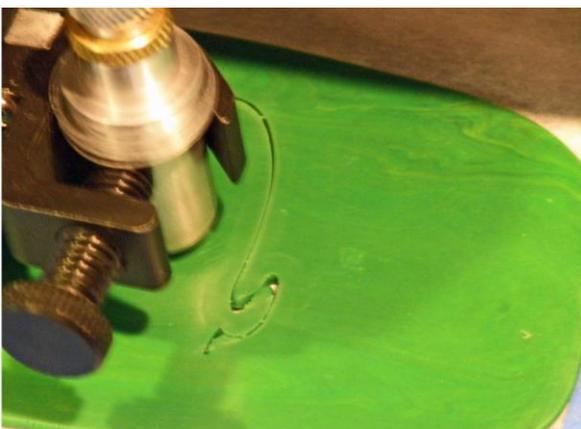
Once you are satisfied that the settings are as they should be, it will help to get cleaner cuts if you will allow the clay to rest on the mat and cool down a bit. Rather like cookie dough – cookies cut from cooler dough hold their shape better and are easier to handle.



Very little force is needed to cut the clay even when it has cooled. Cutting at a slow speed worked best for me. These settings are on a Maxx. Other cutters will use different settings.



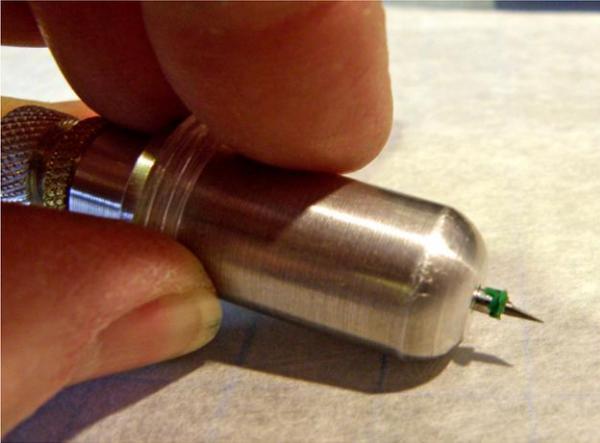
A little adjustment on the blade length is called for here. If the blade also cuts the parchment as in the picture, then the blade length is too long.



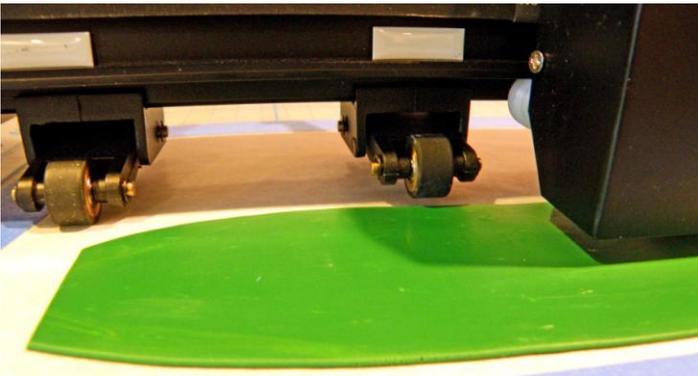
This shows a cut in progress. As you can see, the motion of the blade will move the clay because the clay is still soft even after it has been sitting for a while. Again, think cookie dough. I did try refrigerating the clay for about 10 minutes but by the time I got it on the mat it had warmed up. Just like cutting paper, the smaller the object and the tighter the curves and angles, the more stress the blade puts on the clay. Large objects with long lines and gentle curves appear to cut more cleanly.



A successful cut! The cut pieces will usually cling to the waste when the clay is removed from the parchment. The blade has moved the clay as it was cut. I gently tore the waste into bits much like weeding vinyl and lifted the cut pieces out. Think of it as of a cross between vinyl and cookie dough. The waste could also be cut into sections with a knife for removal.



I cut one piece at a time (in this case, one cactus) so I could remove my blade holder and clean the accumulated clay from the blade. A clean blade makes a clean cut.



When placing the clay on the mat it is important to position it so that the pinch wheels do not roll over the clay. In this picture, the pinch wheel on the right is still in the raised position and the clay has been trimmed to avoid the one on the left. Moving the pinch wheels away from the clay is also a solution if your machine allows you to do that.



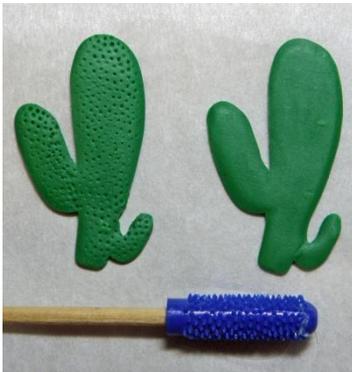
As a reminder to myself to not engage the center pinch wheel, I wrapped the lever with blue painter's tape.



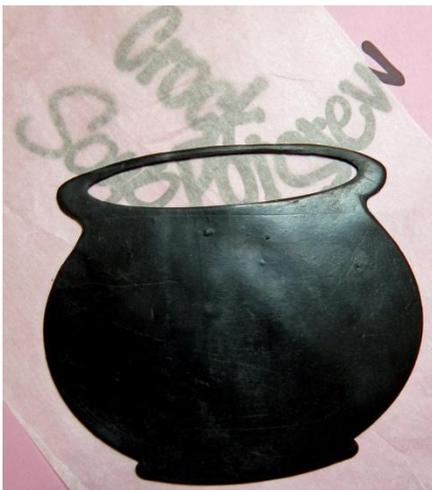
The edges of the clay will have a slight ridge on them from the cutting process. The cactus on the left has just been removed from the waste and the edge is very obvious. The edge on the cactus on the right has been smoothed as in the picture below.



A second piece of parchment paper has been placed on top of the clay piece and the edge smoothed/rounded by gently rubbing a finger (or a finger nail for more effect) around the piece.



I wanted to texture the surface of my cactus pieces to make them more interesting or realistic. I used a small plastic tool that has tiny spikes to roll over the surface of the clay using a gentle pressure. The finished cactus pieces were to be key chain dangles and needed a hole for a jump ring. I opted to bake them first and then drill the hole rather than to make a hole before baking. Then hole was much neater that way. The baked clay can be easily drilled or sanded or cut. It also can be painted and stamped.



I had made some fairly large pieces from clay (5" x 5.6") with a part that was very narrow. In handling the piece after cutting, the narrow part got wiggled around a bit and I wanted to be sure that it was placed correctly prior to baking. Using the print function in my KNK Studio software I printed out a copy of my design, placed a piece of parchment on top of the printout, put the clay piece on top of the parchment, and moved the narrow piece into its proper place. The clay then stayed on the parchment for the baking.

Bake the clay according to the instructions that came with the clay. Some instructions suggest using a toaster oven dedicated to craft usage only.



The finished pieces.