

# POLYMER WEEK

advent calendar



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## SPECKLED EARRINGS

by Noelia Contreras

One of Noelia Contreras' biggest passions is inventing smart and interesting ways to connect polymer clay pieces together. In this tutorial, she presents a simple technique using small nails to join baked clay components, resulting in a lovely pair of Speckled Earrings.

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### TOOLS & SUPPLIES

#### POLYMER CLAY

- white, translucent, purple

#### MATERIALS

- glass inclusions in a shade similar to your chosen clay color
- acrylic paint – white and one matching your clay color
- small round-headed nails
- earring findings
- sheets of paper
- wet sandpaper – 600, 800, 1500 grit
- bowl with water for sanding
- cornstarch
- double-sided tape
- baking tile

#### TOOLS

- pasta machine
- roller
- rigid blade
- scalpel
- work surface
- spatula
- set of ball styluses (various sizes)
- cutter set
- wire cutters (for trimming nails)
- hammer
- anvil or bench block
- nail brush
- jewellery pliers
- drill with bits matching the nail diameter
- nail brush or texture sponge



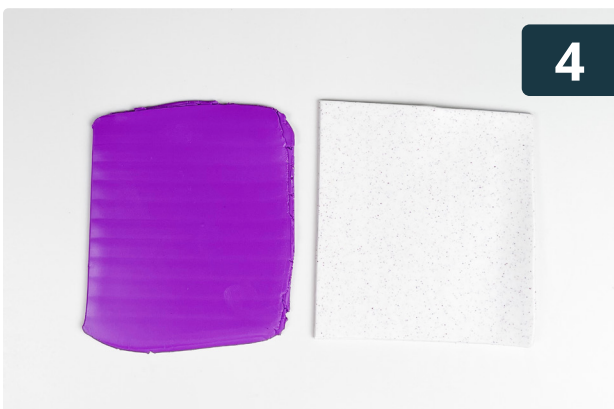
Condition white, translucent and one colored clay, in this case purple, which will match nicely with the purple glass inclusions.



Mix the white and translucent clays in equal parts 1:1. Using a spatula, add the glass inclusions.



Fold the sheet and run it through the pasta machine until you achieve an even speckled look. If you want it denser, add more inclusions. Don't worry, the inclusions will not scratch the rollers of your machine. Cut the sheet in half.



For the gradient, use two sheets of clay, one speckled sheet and one pure purple sheet.

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Continue with the skinner blend and fold each square into a triangle, shifting the tips so the ends don't mix.



Run the piece through the pasta machine, always in the same direction, until you achieve a gradient you like.



Now you have a prepared speckled sheet and a gradient sheet. Prepare the cutters you will use.



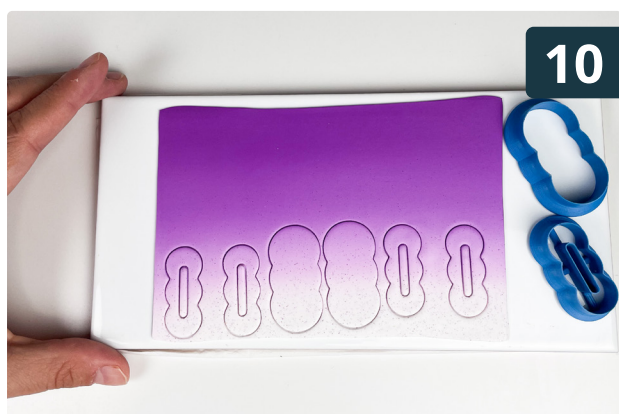
Roll both sheets through the pasta machine to a medium thin thickness. Place them between two sheets of paper and burnish them with a roller to remove any machine marks.





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Place the sheets on a baking safe surface such as tile or glass, making sure there are no air bubbles. If the clay is too soft or sticky, dust lightly with cornstarch to prevent it from sticking to the cutter.



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Using elongated cutters, cut two large and two small shapes of each size from both sheets. Be careful not to lift the clay. Extra pieces shown in picture.



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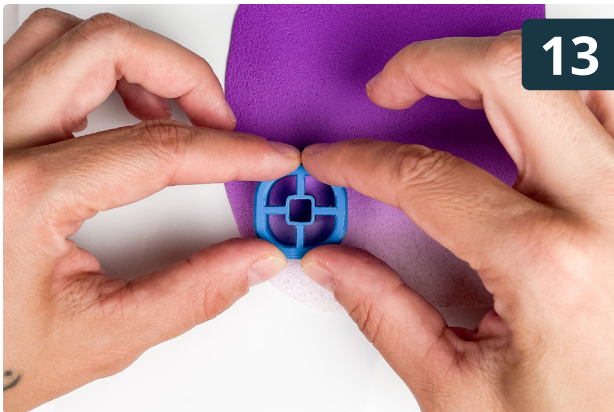
Remove the excess clay. If any clay remains inside the cut, use a scalpel or needle tool to remove it from the tile.



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Reuse the leftovers from the gradient sheet by running them back through the pasta machine. You can add more clay from the initial mixes if needed. Adhere the sheet well onto a tile and instead of cornstarch, texture it with a nail brush, needle tool or texture sponge, adjusting the pressure depending on how soft the clay is.

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From the textured sheet, cut at least two square pieces for each pair of earrings with the cutter. It is a good idea to cut extras in case of accidents. Bake all the pieces for 40 to 50 minutes, following the manufacturer's recommended temperature.



Once baked, remove any burrs with a scalpel, being careful not to cut too much.



To smooth the back sides and edges, sand with wet and dry sandpaper in 600, 800 and 1500 grit. Since the pieces are very thin, make a loop with double sided tape, stick the piece on top and use it as a handle to avoid sanding your fingertips.



Wash the pieces with soap and water to remove residue, then drill the holes that will match the nail diameter.

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On the square pieces, make two holes, one on each on opposing corners. On the elongated pieces, center the smaller shape over the larger one and drill a hole through the top of the small piece, going through both layers. Prepare white and dark purple acrylic paints and ball styluses of different sizes.



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Take the two long shapes without texture and start dotting them with white paint using the largest stylus. Then switch to smaller styluses for finer dots, leaving some space for the darker color.



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Repeat the process with the dark purple acrylic paint. Add more or fewer dots depending on how dense you want the design. Let the pieces dry.



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To join the pieces, use a rivet. Gather round headed nails, pliers, a hammer and an anvil or similar surface.



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To assemble each earring, insert the nail through the small elongated piece, then the square and finally the large elongated piece. You can swap the order if you prefer.



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Trim the excess nail with pliers, leaving about 1 mm sticking out.



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Place the pieces face down on the anvil and gently hammer the nail until it flattens and covers the hole, securing the pieces together. You can protect the clay with sheets of paper to avoid marks.



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Attach the earring hooks using pliers.





Your speckled dangle earrings are now ready to wear.



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## FINAL PROJECT





## NOELIA CONTRERAS

Noelia Contreras is a computer programmer and a Spanish polymer clay artist who fell in love with the medium around 2006. Her style is incredibly vibrant and precise, filled with inspiring patterns and clever construction ideas. Much of her creative time is devoted to exploring and testing new polymer clay assemblies. Together with her husband Alex, she runs an online polymer clay store where they design their own tools, silkscreens, and other products.

@noeliacontrerasm  
d-onatools.es