

**NORTHCOTE POTTERY SUPPLIES  
TECHNICAL TIPS AND PRODUCT INFORMATION #26**

# PAPERCLAY

- Paperclay is composed of a normal pottery clay body mixed with a variable proportion of paper/cellulose material. Paperclays vary from brand to brand, and clay type to clay type.
- Paperclay bodies are generally only used for sculptural handbuilding and casting.
- Paperclay has 3 main benefits:
  - (a) the paper fibre provides additional structural reinforcement when building
  - (b) the finished fired work is much lighter (up to 25%) than normal pottery
  - (c) paperclay allows you to join wet paperclay additions onto dry paperclay forms, and perform mending of bone dry pieces which would otherwise be impossible
- PAPERCLAY IS NOT DESIGNED AS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED THROUGH USING LAZY OR IMPROPER HANDBUILDING TECHNIQUES.
- Paperclay must still be fired like all normal pottery clays (i.e. to the ideal temperature for the particular base clay body).
- Paperclay bodies are ideal for all handbuilding activities but are less desirable for carved work because the paper fibres can 'catch' on the carving tool and 'rip' up the surface of the pottery form.
- Paperclay slip can be made at home by adding cellulose fibre or paper pulp to commercial casting slip. This will take some experimentation to get the correct mixture. Do NOT add too much additional water to the casting slip to compensate for the dry pulp addition or you will not retain the casting slip qualities. The resulting podgy mess will be difficult to use. Always add some ammonia bleach or Dettol antiseptic to your paperclay casting slip to prevent the growth of bacteria etc and the disgusting smell and appearance of rancid slip.
- Paperclay releases a reasonable amount of smoke during the first firing between 0 – 300°C as the organic paper is burnt off. Beware that your smoke alarm does not go off. A drafted gas kiln is often better for firing paperclay than an electric kiln. Firing of moist clay exaggerates the amount of smoke given off.
- Paperclay can also cause areas of local reduction in under-vented electric kilns during the first firing so consider carefully which other pottery is fired with paperclay items in a 'mixed' kiln.
- Paperclay forms sometimes give less satisfactory glaze results because of the aerated structure of the fired clay body – very fluid glassy glazes often present a very bubbly finished appearance.

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