Make An Awesome Drop Spindle

by Culturespy on May 12, 2010

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Intro: Make An Awesome Drop Spindle

Drop spindles are an ancient tool for spinning fiber into yarn or thread. They've been around for a very long time and have changed little since their first invention. The first spindles weighted with whorls appeared as far back as the Neolithic era. A whorl is simply a weight that helps the spindle spin "better" before you have enough yarn on it to give it a little heft.

These days you can buy a variety of types and styles in a range of prices and with a few notable exceptions they all work in essentially the same way.

I learned to spin on bottom whorl spindle but tend to use top whorl spindles now. If you know the difference you'll also likely know what you like. This design can be used either way or can be switched between the two styles if you find you need one or the other.

Spindles can be purchased in stores or online for anywhere from $15 or $20 on up to ...a lot. Especially if you want antique or custom "hand crafted" spindles. On the other end of the spectrum you can make them out of rubbish and free things for literally nothing but time.

This will show you how to make a decent looking functional spindle for a few bucks. About $2.50 in this case.

Step 1: What You Will Need

You will need:

A two ounce block of oven bake polymer clay. I got mine from an art supply store for $1.89. (I chose orange in honor of the spindle being created specifically for an Instructable.)

A chopstick. I used a large bamboo chopstick but you could use any you like. Wood, plastic, bamboo, pretty much anything will work.

A small screw hook. I just had one laying around but you can buy them for pennies or if you sort out how to attach it to the spindle you could make a hook out of a piece of wire.

You will also need:

A working oven to bake the polymer clay. Just follow the directions on the package.

Something to start the hole for the screw eye. A drill bit or an awl should do the trick. If your chopstick is soft enough you won't need anything but most are harder material.

If you're chopstick it too long you'll need a saw or pocket knife to cut it down. Mine was a few inches too long. I used a pocket knife to cut it down. The chopstick started out about 18" long and would have been OK that long but it felt awkward. It would have also made the spindle a little heavier than I wanted.

The whorl should slip fit tight enough to not need anything holding it in place but you might want to grab a rubber band or an "O" ring or something just in case. This is the fourth spindle like this I've made and none have needed anything so far.

Step 2: Optional: Cut The Chopstick To Length

I wanted a slightly more compact spindle than I typically use so I went with 11". That's the distance between the tip of my elbow and where my wrist meets my hand. It just felt like a good length, nothing more scientific than that.

As mentioned earlier, weight is the real critical factor in this. A heavy spindle won't make light thread, at least not easily. A light spindle can't make heavier threads and yarns very well. Mine are all kind of middle of the road and that's basically what you will get with this project if you do it like I did.

You could also make a single spindle and several whorls of differing weights and sizes. You could then just swap them out as needed.

Just cut it if you need to. If you aren't familiar with how to cut a "stick", maybe you ought to just ask someone...

Step 3: Making The Whorl

This isn't too tough. The only real trick is keeping it an even thickness and making sure your hole is dead center.

The polymer clay came in a rectangular 2oz block. I used 1.5oz for this whorl. Again, is just felt right. There are lots of different weights available on commercial spindles. The nice thing is for this one you can either make a heavier one if you feel like you need it or make a whole new spindle.

You can use a jar lid or even a round cookie cutter to keep the shape nice but as long as it's balanced it doesn't make much difference. Polymer clay is pretty stiff at room temperature so I didn't bother rolling it into a ball first and simply shaped it by hand keeping it even by eye. Since polymer clay is relatively tough stuff once it cures and your spindle won't be spinning with enough RPM to worry about wobbling unless it's very out of balance.

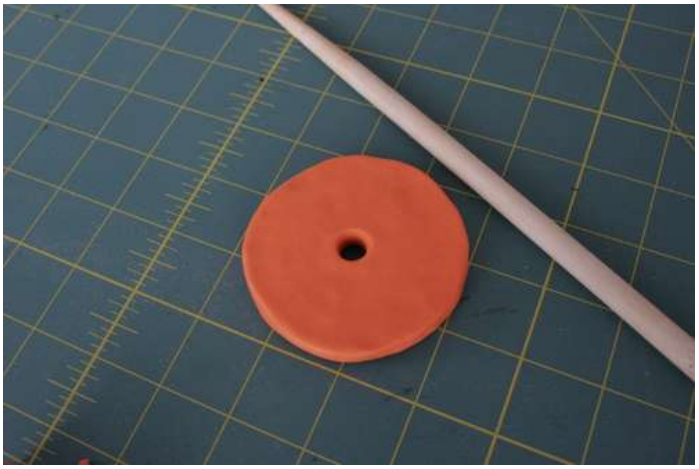
The clay I used cures in the oven at 275F/130C per 1/4" of thickness. So I tried to keep it right at 1/4". I have done cup shaped whorls and ones that thin toward the edges without trouble. Just keeping it simple this time.

Once you have the whorl shaped in a disc you simply eyeball the center point and gently work the spindle through the clay. It will cup slightly but that's OK. You need to be very careful not to make the hole bigger than absolutely necessary. Polymer clay shrinks slightly when you bake it and if you haven't made the hole too big you get a nice slip fit that's just right without needing anything to secure the whorl.

After you have made the hole gently flatten the whorl back out carefully avoiding deforming the hole. This will also "shrink" the hole ever so slightly.

Now bake the whorl however the package tells you to. Be careful to follow the directions. Most polymer clay will burn and get ugly or worse if baked too long or too hot.

(Most people who spin either own one or "many". I'm in the many camp. Though, I think I only have half a dozen at the moment.)



Step 4: Add The Screw Eye

While the whorl is baking add the screw eye to the blunt end of the spindle.

Just make a small pilot hole and screw it in.

Step 5: Assemble The Spindle

You'll need to let the whorl cool a little once it comes out of the oven. Obviously it's going to be very hot so be careful.

You can wait until the whorl is room temperature or while it is still slightly warm and pliable slip it together. This has one advantage in that as it cools the rest of the way it will shrink a bit more and stay in place better but it's probably fine either way.

All you need to do is gently push the spindle through the hole in the whorl until it's a few inches from the blunt end with the hook. It helps to rotate the spindle a little while you thread on the whorl.

Note:
If you assemble the spindle while the whorl is "hot" it can crack the polymer clay and you'll need to make a new one. Warm = OK / Hot = NO

(This is also when you will want to add a swank Instructables Robot to the spindle.)

Step 6: Now Go Make Some Yarn

With your drop spindle assembled you are ready to go out, get some fiber and learn to spin!

Here's a nice Instructable on spinning.
www.instructables.com/id/spinning-yarn/

Related Instructables

spinning yarn by alicious

Knit Plastic Bag Handbag by pluralmolecule

Drop Spindle Constrution by juleej

Knit with love! A history of Passion! (Photos) by MissPurl

Wool/Yarn Spindles and Feed by ekobor

Wash wool or other fibers for spinning. by Culturespy

Comments

12 comments **Add Comment**

fibersofgrace says: Sep 9, 2010. 11:47 AM **REPLY**

GREAT!!! thank you for this instructable!! I have wanted to do clay... however whenever i do polymer It is not hard after baking but sort of slightly bendable.. which brand do you like best for hardness?

I am desperately looking for chopsticks, the nice black enamel kind
Or wood, Does anyone know an inexpensive source? I am in vermont.
smiles, grace who collects spindles like potato chips... I make most of them though..

piranha says: Sep 28, 2010. 2:31 PM **REPLY**

all regular brands of polymer clay (sculpey, premo, fimo, kato) should be hard and not bend anymore after baking, if the piece is as thick as this whorl. if yours does, it's either a special clay you grabbed by accident (sculpey also makes bendable and eraser clays), or you didn't bake it long enough and/or at the right temperature. ovens are alas not as reliable as we assume, especially older ones. your oven might not actually reach the temperature that's on the dial, or it might fluctuate -- you'll need to check it with an oven thermometer.

you can re-bake polymer clay, so not all is lost if your first attempt resulted in a piece that's too bendy. just put it back in the oven after you figured out what temperature it actually bakes at and give it another 15 minutes.

for utilitarian stuff like this, i use super sculpey, which comes in 1 lb packs of a translucent pink-beige colour and is much cheaper per oz than the coloured stuff. that's not worth it though if you're just planning to make one whorl; i use it for sculpting, and inside of larger beads. it bakes very hard. otherwise i'd just use whatever is cheapest at your local craft store, it makes no difference for crafting a whorl.

kcls says: May 31, 2010. 5:03 PM **REPLY**

Nice job, and great pictures! How might one go about spinning a drop spindle?

fibersofgrace says: Sep 9, 2010. 11:49 AM **REPLY**

I have a video on you tube as to the fiber preparation. I also have a video on using a spinning wheel.
While at myhttp:// www.youtube.com/halalsilks
site, I have a channel called FIBER JOYS and this has hundreds of videos that show spinning on a drop spindle and more.
I also have another channel called KNIT HELP, CROCHET IS TIMELESS and other ones to help others with fiber arts.
enjoy!
Grace
who is equally addicted to spinning

Culturespy says: May 31, 2010. 9:26 PM **REPLY**

Here you go! Even if you can't find wool, you can spin lots of other things. This is a great Instructable showing how to spin. Hoping to post one of my own soon but this will be a hard act to follow.

www.instructables.com/id/spinning-yarn/

kcls says: Jun 1, 2010. 4:31 AM **REPLY**

Thanks, but I wanted to know how to spin the drop spindle itself. You do spin it, right? Like a top?

Culturespy says: Jun 1, 2010. 9:35 AM **REPLY**

Some types do, they're usually called "supported spindles" but this one no, not without just going ahead and spinning wool. It's spins suspended from the yarn you are spinning.

This type is either just spun by twisting it with your fingers or rolling the shaft along your leg. It's fairly straight forward as far as the spindle goes. It's handling the fiber that gets tricky.

You could probably make one that would spin like a top if you used a much short shaft but this one probably wouldn't spin like that.

kcls says: Jun 1, 2010. 9:45 AM **REPLY**

Oh... now I see! I'm so dumb! I thought it was one of those things where you wrap some string around the top and pull and it spins around really fast like a top. *Now* I see that you use it to spin yarn. Sorry! The whole instructable makes a whole lot more sense now! :D

Culturespy says: Jun 1, 2010. 12:50 PM **REPLY**

You know, that does give me an idea for another project... maybe I'll make a top that can double as a spinning tool to teach little hands to spin yarn.

I was recently schooled by a little guy, not quite four years old, who was able to point out how to correct a spinning problem I was having. A rare skill that truly transcends age groups.

kcls says: Jun 1, 2010. 1:21 PM **REPLY**

Ha! I'm glad I inspired you for another project. Good luck!

AngryRedhead says: May 12, 2010. 8:48 PM **REPLY**

If you want to make a uniform thickness, tape 2 spacers (e.g., identically stacked rulers) slightly apart on the surface and use a rolling pin over the spacers and on top of the medium. Then you can use a biscuit cutter for the circle. I think that might be one of the useful lessons I took away from high school pottery.

Nice Instructable!

Culturespy says: May 12, 2010. 9:35 PM **REPLY**

Hey thanks! That's great tip. I'll be sure to try that soon.