

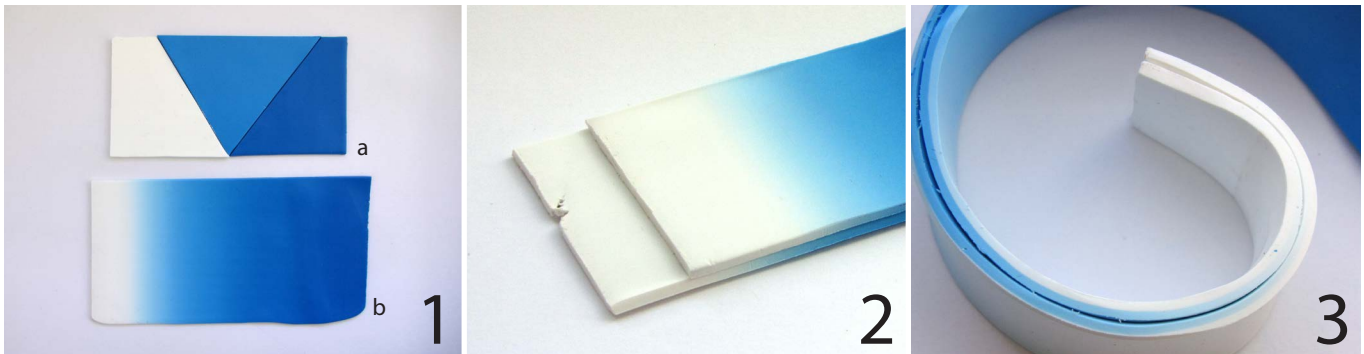
# Basic Polymer Caning— with a *Twist!*

*Adapt an entry-level striped-cane technique  
to create a complex graduated look.*

by Claire Wallis

## **This cane was a result of a happy accident!**

When a Skinner blend twisted as I fed it into a pasta machine, I didn't think it would be noticeable, so I stacked it in a cane anyway. I was 100% wrong about it not being noticeable — and that's a good thing! When I cut the cane, the graduated effect was immediately apparent. After spending some time tweaking my technique to enhance the graduated stripes, it became my new favorite cane.



**Condition the clay.** Roll 2 oz. (57 g) of one color of polymer clay into a ball, flatten it, and then roll it into a snake. (You can use any brand of clay, but firmer clay is more suitable for caning. I'm using Fimo Soft in Pacific Blue and White.) Fold the snake in half, twist it, and roll it into a ball again. Repeat until the clay is soft and pliable.

**NOTE:** You can also use a pasta machine (dedicated to nonfood use) to condition clay. Cut the block of clay into approximately ¼-in. (6.5 mm)-thick slices. Stack them together into a sheet, overlapping the long edges. Press the edges together. Run the clay through the pasta machine set to its extra-thick or thick setting, fold the clay in half, and run it through the machine again, folded-side first. Use a needle tool to puncture any air pockets, and continue to fold and roll the clay until it's soft.

Repeat to condition 2 oz. (57 g) of the second color of clay.

**NOTE:** You probably won't use the entire 2 oz. (57 g) of each color, but it's good to give yourself some wiggle room by preparing more clay than you'll need.

**Mix the third color.** Following the same method for conditioning the clay, thoroughly mix half of the white clay with half of the blue to create a mid-range blue.

**Create a Skinner blend.** Roll each color of clay through the pasta machine set to an extra-thick or thick setting. Start with the lightest color to avoid contaminating it with darker clay.

Use a tissue blade or a craft knife to cut triangular shapes out of each color, as shown, and assemble them [1a]. The assembled slab should be the width of the rollers of your pasta machine.

**NOTE:** Notice that the ends of the triangles aren't perfect. You want a little excess on each end so that the colors stay pure as you perform the next steps.

Gently press the edges together to join the three colors of clay, and then run the slab through the pasta machine once or twice to fuse the seams.

Fold the slab in half lengthwise, and bring the long edges together white-to-white and blue-to-blue.

**NOTE:** Always fold the slab in the same direction. Matching the color on the bottom and the top edges is key to making a Skinner blend.

Run the folded slab through the pasta machine, folded-edge first. Repeat to fold and roll until the colors make a smooth gradation the width of the rollers [1b].

**TIP:** If you want to make a narrow Skinner blend, work with one side of the clay against the side of the machine, and flip the slab with each pass through the rollers so that the lighter side is first on the left, and then on the right. This will help keep the edges of the clay from spreading too much.

**Cut and offset the strips.** Use the tissue blade to trim the long edges of the slab so that they're parallel. Cut the slab in half

## materials

- Polymer clay: 2 colors, 2 oz. (57 g) each

### toolbox

- Polymer clay

lengthwise. The strips should be approximately 3 in. (76 mm) wide.

Stack the two sheets on top of each other, offsetting the ends [2]. Run the stack through the pasta machine white-end first to create a thick ribbon. Hold onto the strip and feed it in to the machine slowly to prevent it from going in at an angle, which will distort the strip.

**Reassemble the strips.** Trim the edges, if necessary, and cut the strip in half lengthwise again. The strips should be approximately 1½ in. (38 mm) wide. Each strip has one side where the white extends only a short distance, and one side with a much larger proportion of white (due to your offsetting the stack). Stack the strips on top of each other (think "right sides



## reducing a square cane

I love to use this cane on bangles or anything with a curved or rounded surface, as curves really exaggerate the stripes. To reduce the cane from its original size, smooth and pull the cane against your work surface rather than pushing and squeezing it with your fingers, as you would a round cane. Pinching the cane can make the sides concave and create wonky lines, especially in a precise geometric cane like this one. Work slowly, and allow the cane to rest and cool if it starts to become distorted.

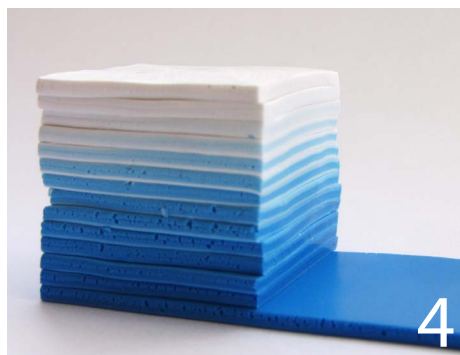
### design options

The rings above are made from a thick slice of each cane, cut to shape, cured, and sanded. You can create different looks by using low-contrast colors (above left), and high-contrast colors such as deep blue or black, white, and neon (above right).

together”) with the sides showing the most white on the outside of the stack [3].

Run the stack through the pasta machine again on a thick setting. Then, put it through again on a medium-thin setting to create a long, thin strip. Trim all four edges, if needed.

**NOTE:** For fewer stripes in the cane, run the stack through the pasta machine on a thicker setting. For more stripes, use a thinner setting. Don’t make the clay too thin or it will be hard to handle as you build the cane.



Process photos by Claire Wallis.

**Assemble the cane.** Place the strip on your work surface with the white end pointing left. Use the tissue blade to cut off a section of the white end. Working left to right, place the cut piece on top of the strip, and use the edge of it as a guide to cut the next layer. Repeat to cut and stack the entire strip [4].

**NOTE:** I prefer to stack and cut rather than create an accordion fold (folding the strip back and forth) as I find this method reduces waste and minimizes distortions caused by bubbles of trapped air.

Trim the ends, and reduce the cane (see “Reducing a Square Cane,” above) to your desired size [5].

**NOTE:** I like to reduce this cane to a size slightly larger than required for my piece so that I can stretch the cane slices over whatever I’m covering. Stretching in the direction of the lines of the cane will straighten them. Just remember to smooth the clay in the same direction as the lines to avoid distorting them.

#### ASK THE ARTIST: CLAIRE WALLIS



#### What was the first piece of jewelry you made?

“I made my first polymer clay necklace from a Butterfly Wing Bead tutorial by Desiree McCrorey. For a long time, it was favorite piece to wear; even now I don’t think I could part with it. The rugby-ball-shaped beads have an alternating

spiral pattern of black-and-white circles and a strip of solid color that moves from yellow, to orange, to red, to black. I strung them with black rondelles and gold glass spacers. At the time, I didn’t have a pasta machine, so I had to mix the graduated colors by hand.”

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