

## The Right Consistency

The most important thing to learn about Hearty Clay is how to tell when it is the right consistency for the results you want. There is a happy medium between too wet and too dry. Experience will teach you to know when it feels right. The clay requires conditioning by working it in your hands before pressing or rolling. Generally it is too soft and wet when it is fresh from the package. (Occasionally you may get a package that is too dry. ) If the clay has a cold sticky feel it should be kneaded and worked until it is no longer sticky but it soft and velvety to the touch. When it on the side of being too dry it will begin to feel more firm and will be difficult to form into a smooth ball. At this point moisture can be added by kneading a bit of water into the clay. It should be kneaded very thoroughly when adding water. If it is not kneaded thoroughly after adding water it will tend to be sticky. If the package has been opened and the clay has been exposed to the air it will become hard. At some degree of hardness it will not be possible to reclaim by adding water and will have to be discarded.

## Forming a Smooth Ball

Many things that we do with the clay begin with a smooth ball. We form a ball to remove all the wrinkles before pressing into a mold, for example. Practice to develop the knack of making a smooth ball. After working the clay vigorously and turning it inside out, rolls it vigorously, with a bit of pressure, between the palms of your hands. Examine to see if it is free of cracks and creases. Repeat if necessary.



NOTE: Recently I have made a discovery that I want all shoemakers to know about. You will find that Hearty Clay is somewhat flexible when dry but also has a brittle quality. Thin pieces crack or break easily. I have discovered that adding a small amount of glycerine and knead it into the clay before making the shoes will cause the clay to be much more soft and pliable when it is dry. At this writing I haven't determined the ideal amount to be added. I use a dime sized blob for ¼ package of clay. Then it must be kneaded thoroughly.

Occasionally I have had a piece of clay that has been stored a long time break down and lose its elasticity and smooth quality. I'm not sure why this happens because other pieces have stayed workable for a long time. I suspect some kind of contamination. In the past I recommended adding medium or hand cream for reconditioning clay. I'm not sure if that is a good idea for clay that is going to be kept for a long time. Maybe eventually we will know more about what we can add and what causes the clay to break down. It's all an experiment.

Sticky wet clay will cause problems when rolling with a pasta maker or pressing into molds. It will stick to the molds and make a mess if you try to press it into a mold when it is too moist. When rolling in a pasta machine it will cling to the rollers and come out ruffled and uneven.

A piece of clay that has been wrapped and stored will require a bit of reconditioning. It will form a skin on the outside that is slightly drier than the middle. Knead vigorously turning the surface in to the middle and bringing the moist clay in the middle to the outside. Then it's ready to roll.

## Storage

The recommended way of storing the clay is to wrap it in tightly in plastic wrap and kept in an air tight container. The best containers I have found that are really air tight are the Lock and Lock brand. They are carried by Target, Walmart and Penney's or you can get them on-line at <http://www.heritagemint.com/> The clay lasts longer in them than in anything else I've tried. I suggest rolling pieces of clay into smooth balls for storage and wrapping in plastic wrap to keep it clean and moist. A damp cloth or sponge stored with the clay will keep the air in the container from drying out the clay.

