

Creating with Playdough

Playdough is a wonderfully versatile medium for children, guaranteed to keep little brains engaged as you introduce different elements to extend the play.

How to Do It

Help your child measure and add all the dry ingredients to the bowl. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients with a wooden spoon. Ask your child to stand aside as you add the boiling water.

Combine the oil, food colouring (if using) and boiling water (have your child stand back) and when it is mixed in and cooled down a bit, allow your child to stir also. Turn out onto a lightly floured table and knead until smooth. Your child will be keen to join in as soon as the dough has cooled enough to be handled by their delicate skin.

Once you have made the playdough, your child can begin to play. Set them up at a table complete with a selection of kitchen utensils so they can cut, squeeze and roll with the playdough to their heart's content. Encourage them to do some 'cooking' with the playdough. You could even add a pretend-play oven to the area for them to 'bake' their creations. If you have added herbs or spices, the scent will inspire some great recipes. Ground ginger will inspire cakes or muffins, while ground dried oregano might lead to pizza or spaghetti.

What Learning is Occurring?

- Development of **fine motor skills** and **upper body strength** lifting the bag of flour, pouring, stirring and kneading finger muscle development as dough is pinched, pulled, rolled etc. These are muscles that will later be used for handwriting.
- **Hand eye coordination** – as your child carefully measures ingredients.
- **Maths concepts** – talk about full, empty, more less, and measurement with cups and spoons.
- **Scientific concepts** – change of state, when wet and dry ingredients are combined.

Age Considerations

- **Babies:** Let baby explore playdough by tearing, pulling and inspecting the playdough up close and with all their senses including tasting! (Don't let baby eat the dough, but a taste won't hurt.) Consider scenting your playdough for baby with a dried herb or spices for an additional sensory experience.
- **Toddler:** make a playdough dinner. Can you make some sausages, spaghetti or even a birthday cake or an ice cream? Add kitchen utensils to the table to help enhance the 'cooking' experience in this play.
- **Kinder:** can you create a 3D model of a dinosaur, animal or person? Use paddle pop sticks, wire or sticks from the garden to create a standing up model of your favourite animal or person.
- **Transition to school:** create a visual step by step recipe for your child. Can they follow the recipe? What else can you add to the playdough to personalise it? Add food dye, glitter, fresh rosemary or mint, spices or herbs from your pantry.

Things you will need

- A bowl, measuring cup and wooden spoon
- 1 cup salt
- 3 cups plain flour
- 6 tsp cream of tartar – the magic ingredient that makes playdough soft and pliable
- 4 tsp vegetable oil
- 2 cups boiling water
- Food colouring (optional)
- A little extra flour to sprinkle on the bench for kneading
- Kitchen utensils for playing, e.g. rolling pin, garlic crusher, blunt knife, cookie cutters, trays (flat and muffin)

Tips

- This experience needs to be supervised by an adult – boiling water involved, and the dough will be very hot at first, so an adult should begin kneading the dough until it is cool enough for a child to join in.
- Instead of food colouring, add spices to create beautiful subtle colours and added scent.
- Store your playdough in an airtight container and it will last several days. If your dough has dried out a little, adding a small amount of hot water and oil will refresh it for one more day.
- Store bought clay is another, natural alternative to playdough and has additional properties and benefits for learning.

