



# Sculpting Hands

With Deb Wood

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Begin by rolling the clay into cylinders the size that is appropriate for your sculpture. Roll the clay round on the end- no sharp edges, then flatten slightly. Pull out a small nub on one side of the palm, this will become the thumb. Rolling between your finger and thumb, indent the area just below the palm, this is the wrist area.



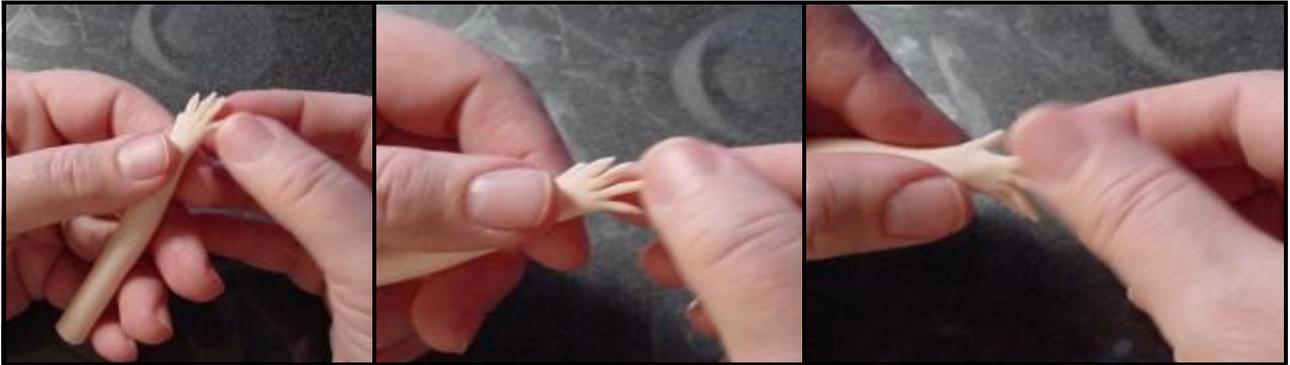
Using a paintbrush handle or other round tool, indent the area by the thumb. Do this at an angle toward the wrist. Pull out more clay into the thumb, and round it with your fingers. Using a round tool again, make another indent where the fingers will join the palm.



Redefine the areas with the round tool. Be careful to not make those indents too deep, these are soft curves. Cut the section that will be the fingers into four equal size segments. I use a scalpel for this step. Cut off excess clay at the ends of the fingers so they are tapered.



Using a needle tool or lace draping tool, separate the fingers at the base. This next step is tricky and just takes practice. Using your fingers, gently roll the fingers to make them round- with no sharp cut edges. A paint brush is helpful to get into the tight spots



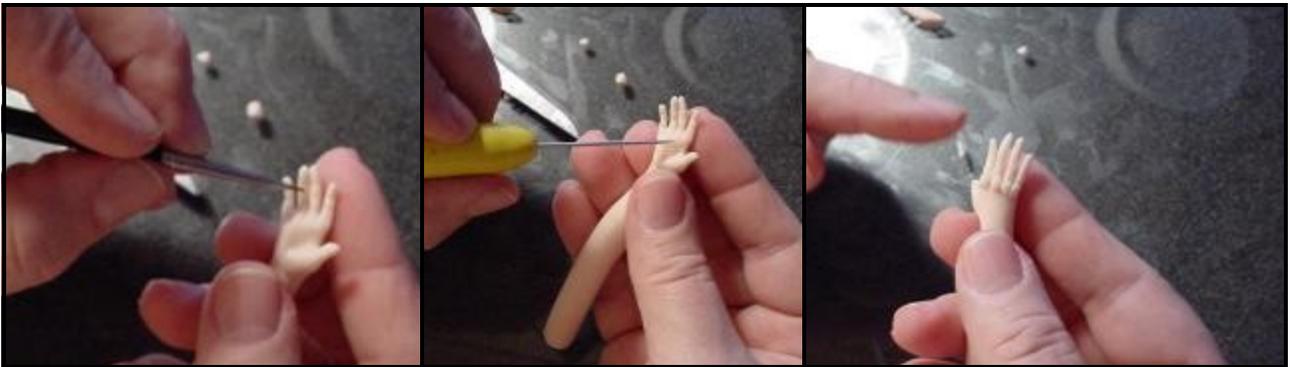
Continue to roll the clay in the fingers- stretching slightly- and lengthening them as necessary. You want them to be an appropriate thickness in relation to each other. Cut off the excess length and re-round the fingertip area.



Here you see the paintbrush being used to smooth the area between the fingers. Continue to smooth and shape the hand-see the palm contours? You can add small pads of clay to the palms if your hands need more thickness, for example, in the muscle area at the base of the thumb.



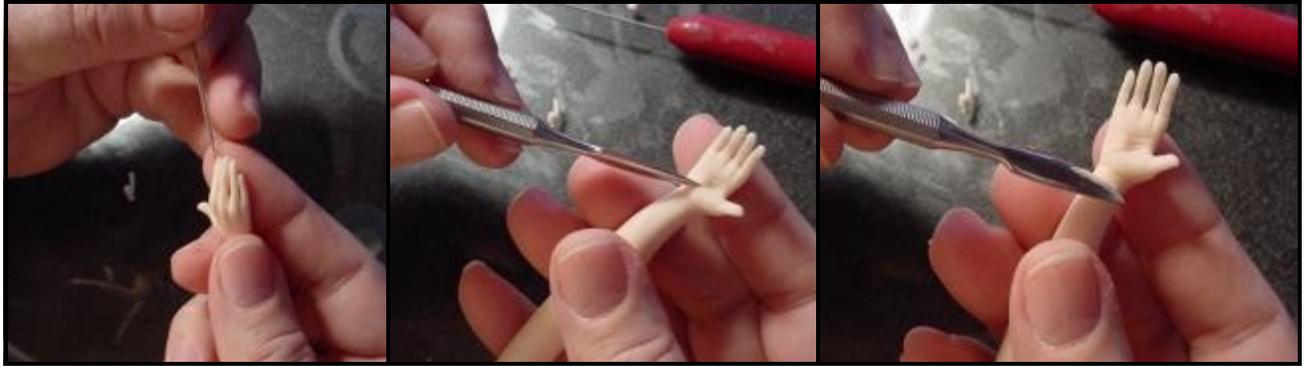
I use a stiff, small shader brush to make the indents on the inside of the finger knuckle joints. This makes for a softer indent- not so sharp as would be the case if I used a needle tool here. The creases can increase the chances of the finger breaking there, so you don't want a sharp indent.



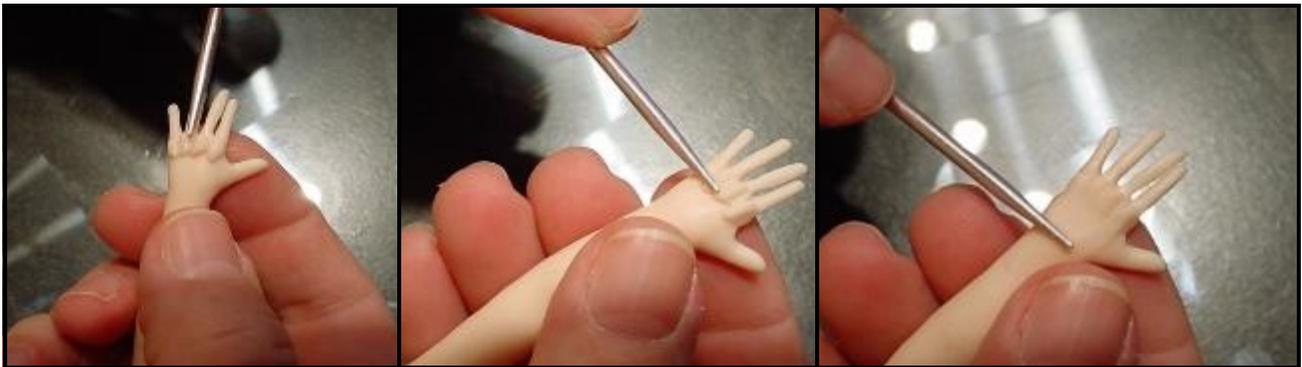
Small balls of clay are added to the back of the hand to form knuckles. I am using a knitting needle tool to smooth and blend these balls on the hand. Once they are smoothed into place, follow up with a brush to smooth out any ridge marks.



Continue the indent through the back of the hand, again using the knitting needle. A bit of clay is trimmed from the back of the hand, near the wrist. This makes that area look more contoured. Follow up with more smoothing with the paintbrush.



A bit more trimming, smoothing and contouring. If you find you cut off too much, no problem, just add a small pad of clay back onto that spot. Study the palm of your own hand to see where the lines are placed. I am using a dental tool here to put these indents into the palm, but the same could be done with a needle tool. Add a few wrinkle creases at the wrist.



**Note:** About needle tools, these are simple darning needles and embroidery needles imbedded and baked into different colored clay handles. Each color is a different size needle. Saves me time looking for the right size tool.



More shaping, trimming and posing. If the fingers are too long, trim the tips off and re round the tips of the fingers. The middle finger should be about the same length as the length of the palm, so based on that, cut the fingers in the right proportions with each other. Continue the indent through the back of the hand, again using the knitting needle. A bit of clay is trimmed from the back of the hand, near the wrist. This makes that area look more contoured. Follow up with more smoothing with the paintbrush.



Final touches now- bending and shaping the fingers, bringing the thumb into proper position with the palm. In the first photo above, I am pushing the whole thumb area toward the palm, not just bending the thumb. Study your own hand and how it moves to get this pose correct. Your thumb doesn't move e- the whole muscle group moves too.

Fingernails can be done several ways. There are tools available to use for this- or you can simply make the indent of the cuticle with a fine needle, as you see in the photo above. Remember to also make a slight crease at the tip of the fingernail where the nail joins onto the fingertip. This crease can be detailed with a touch of paint later to create the look of a real fingernail. In the last photo you see the finished hands. More detail will be added once they are on the sculpture--wrist tendons, etc., but the hands are mostly finished before they are placed on the sculpture. Of course you will reevaluate them once they are on the sculpt, and before baking

*I hope you have enjoyed this tutorial and find it useful. These hands are a simplified version, you can add as much detail as you wish, or as much as your sculpture dictates. Be sure your clay is thoroughly warmed and conditioned (see my tutorial about conditioning clay) as this makes the process so much easier. Also, my tools are simple. A scalpel, dental tool, knife, paint brushes for smoothing, a knitting needle and homemade needle tools.*

Hope you enjoyed this tutorial!

Hugs, Deb

