

## TIPS AND TOOLS

# no mess extruding

by Holly McKeen

This oh-so-simple idea of wrapping plastic around the clay before inserting it into the extruder can make a big difference in clean-up time at the end of a long day in the studio.

An extruder is a great tool and welcome addition to any pottery studio. Utilizing multiple dies, I extrude handles for all sorts of pots and vessels. There is, however, one often lamented drawback to extruding, and that comes when the day is done and it's time to press out the remaining clay and clean the barrel. It's a messy job. Also, in the middle of the day, when the extruder die needs to be changed to work on another project, some extruders require starting over with a clean barrel and a new die, which takes time.

Here is a trick that completely avoids the mess and saves hours of scraping and scrubbing at the end of an extruding session. I first noticed a comment or two online last year about putting your clay pug into a narrow plastic bag before inserting it into the extruder barrel. I must admit, it was a head-slap moment, and I couldn't wait to go try it out. After years of scraping old clay out of the barrel, and sponging out the messy inside of the barrel, (with muddy water running down my arms), I couldn't help but wonder why I had never heard of, or thought to do this myself.

This trick also allows you to change dies easily when moving to a new style of handle or another die. This idea is so simple and

effective, one would think it should be common practice in pottery studios everywhere.

### Here's How It Works

The thin plastic used to lightly cover pots for slow drying works fine. There's no need for thicker plastic or specialty bags made to fit. First, lay your prepared pug on a piece of plastic, approximately 24x24 inches. Wrap the plastic around both ends and roll the pug so that it is covered completely in the plastic (1). Next, use a sharp knife to slice a hole in the plastic on one end of the pug. The hole should be slightly larger than the opening or shape cut into the extruder die (2). Now drop the plastic-covered pug of clay into the barrel with the small opening facing down, insert the plunger, and let the extruding begin (3)! When it comes time to change dies or to clean up at the end of the day, just remove the die from the bottom end and press the remaining clay through and out the bottom. It should drop right out, still neatly wrapped in the plastic (4). Carefully unwrap the plastic that remains around the end piece



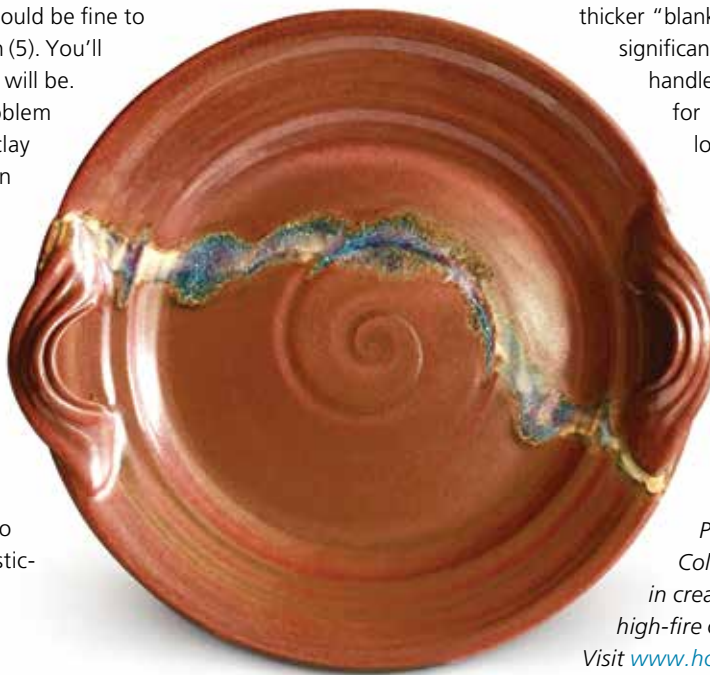
**1** Before putting your clay into the extruder, wrap it entirely in plastic. **2** Cut a hole into the plastic. **3** Place the plastic-wrapped clay into the extruder barrel. **4** The plastic-wrapped clay can easily come out of the extruder when switching extruder dies. **5** After using the extruder, remove the clay, unwrap the plastic, and store your clay for later use. **Opposite:** Holly McKeen's 16-inch platter with extruder handles, cone 5 B-Mix clay, glaze, fired to cone 6 in oxidation.

of the pug and that last bit of clay should be fine to use again or throw into the recycle bin (5). You'll be amazed at how clean all the parts will be.

This plastic trick also solves the problem of contamination of the unused clay when an older extruder has corrosion starting to accumulate inside the barrel. No matter how carefully an old barrel is scrubbed and cleaned, the leftover clay can still, unfortunately be contaminated and end up in the trash. Some potters coat the inside of the well-cleaned extruder barrel with oil to help slide the clay out easier, but this method was not successful in my studio. Nothing compares to the ease and simplicity of the plastic-wrap solution.

#### Ideas to Try

Altering handle extrusions for trays, bowls, and platters, or using extruded blanks to pull mug handles helps to create consistent sized and shaped handles for all your designs. Extruding



thicker "blanks" to pull handles from can significantly speed up the process of handle making, while still allowing for the good energy, feel, and look of a hand-pulled handle.

Feel free to chuckle and shake your head each time you use this plastic wrapped pug trick.

You might fall in love with your extruder all over again, now that there's no more messy cleanup.

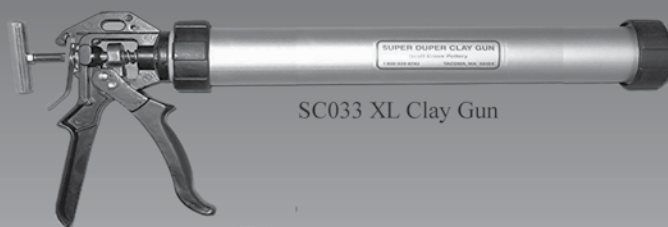
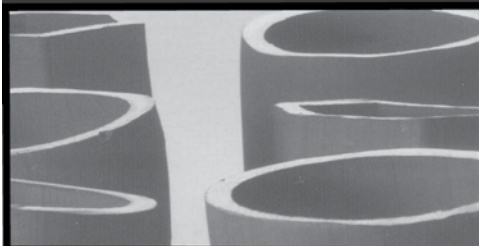
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Visit [www.hollymckeenpottery.com](http://www.hollymckeenpottery.com) and follow Greendale Pottery by Holly McKeen on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, where you can see her video "Handle Pulling Made Easy."

Have a great tip? Got a new tool hack? Let us know at [editorial@ceramicsmonthly.org](mailto:editorial@ceramicsmonthly.org). If we use your idea, you'll receive a complimentary one-year subscription to CM!

# Scott Creek Extruders

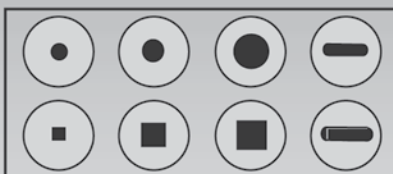
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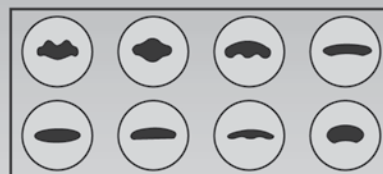
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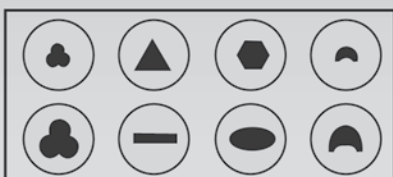
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SC002 Clay Gun Die Kit



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