



# step by step PROJECT Puffer Fish

You know pufferfish - they're the ones that blow up and are all spikey. Not blow up "boom", but puff up. I don't know why, but for some reason spikey-puffy is really cute. And weird. Both of which work for me, so maybe they'll work for you too!

For this project, we'll make halfway-inflated-guy, but I'll remember to mention how to adjust it to make deflated-guy or all-the-way-blown-up-guy.

## for this project you will need:

Premo! polymer clay: white, ecru and any accent colors (recommended: pearl green, pearl blue)

3 inches of 20gauge wire (any metal)

3 inches of 28 gauge craft wire (any metal)

one 4mm dark, round bead

dowel tool

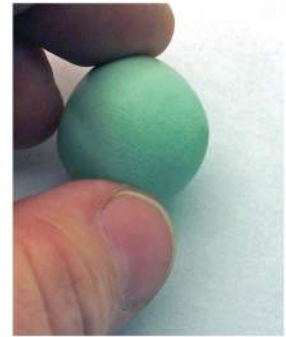
Sculpey brand translucent liquid clay (optional but recommended)

brown acrylic paint, brush, sponges (optional)



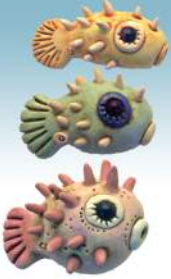
I used Premo! polymer clay, cuz I love it -- just right for sculpting -- not too mushy, not too tough. A half and half mix of white and ecru will make the base color, then add some little bits of clay to give him color. I used a smidgen each of green pearl and blue pearl. Any color will work, though - he could be a yellowy fish or orangey or pinkey! your choice.

Thoroughly blend the clay by repeated rolling and folding by hand, or by running the clays through the pasta machine. Let's also mix up some accent colors to use for the details. A good choice is to have a little bit of lighter and a little bit of darker clays-- I suggest some of the ecru/white mix for the lighter clay and some of the blue/green mix for the darker clay. Just set them aside for now.



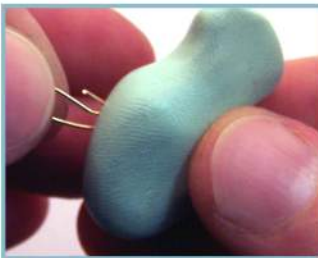
Ok, let's start sculpting. Make the fish in one piece by starting with a ball from the clay color you mixed up. The ball should be about the size of a grape. Pufferfish have big heads and little tails, so start by rolling the ball into an oval and then use your fingertips to squeeze a narrow spot separating the body blob from the tail blob. Remember the tail is little, so don't leave too much clay on the other side of the squeeze. Flatten that tail blob between your fingers and form it so that it flares out a little (by pinching the tips of the tail.)



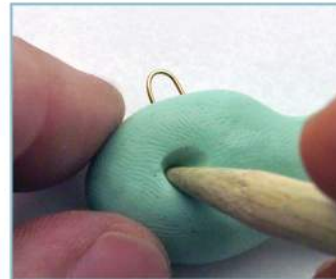


Flatten the body just a bit now, too - it should look a kinda' like a goldfish cracker at this point. Ok, I said I'd mention how to adjust for different degrees of puff. For a thinner, deflated fish - squeeze the body shape into a longer, leaner oval. For a rounder, more inflated fish - keep the ball of clay a ball - don't make it into an oval at all. In any of the three options, the tail stays the same - small and nubby.

Once you have the body to your liking, time to make a loop of wire, to hang the lil' puff baby from when it's all done. I used 20 gauge brass wire (any metal wire will work fine.) Use pliers to bend the wire -- first bend one end over over into as small a "U" as you can - sorta' like a fish hook - this will make sure the wire is anchored into the clay and won't pull out later. Now curve rest of the wire into a bigger "U" - this will be the part that will be showing on top of the fish's back (you can add a jump ring now or later to make it lay properly in a necklace.) Once you have the loop, clip off any of the excess wire.



Press the wire ends into the top center of the fish's back. Press in deeply enough so that only what you will need of the wire loop for stringing is left showing. Smooth any roughness around the wires with a sculpting tool.



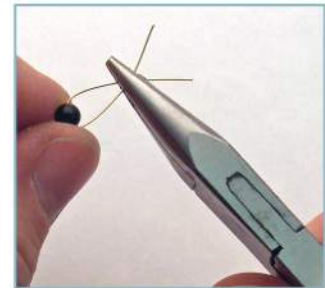
The puffer's eye comes next - big and surprized. Puffer fish always look surprized. I suppose you would too if you suddenly



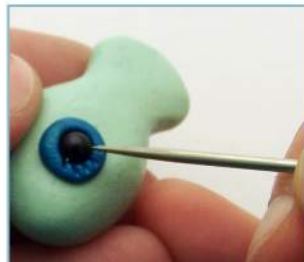
expanded to triple your size without any warning. Use either of your accent colors (I used the dark bluegreen clay) and roll a little ball about the size of a BB. Now, with a dowel tool, poke a hole where the eye will go - in the center of his face area. Press in the tool and then pivot it around to make the hole wider.



Take the BB ball of accent clay and place it on top of the hole you just made. Poke that with the dowel tool also, pivot it around in the same way, making a hole in the same spot, and simultaneously joining the clays together. Now to add the eye - big eyes are good for puffers, so pick a 4mm round, dark bead for the eye. (I used a black onyx.) I use beads for eyes instead of clay because the shine from a bead is just so much more convincing, don't you think?



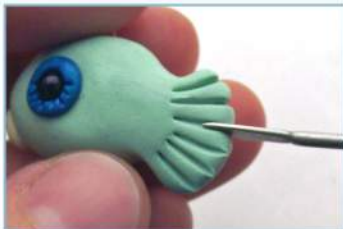
The eye beads are wired before adding them to the clay - this extra "tail" of wire will help the clay have something to "grab" which will keep the bead firmly embedded. We don't want his eye popping out later on. First snip an inch or two of 28 gauge craft wire and then thread on your eye bead. Bend the wires up so that the two lengths are parallel and grab the wires with pliers - about a quarter of an inch away from the bead. Hold the wire with pliers and twirl the bead with your fingers to twist the wire up firmly to the head of the bead. You only need about an eighth to a quarter of an inch of twist. With your wire cutters snip off the excess to leave the little tail of wire - you want enough to poke into the clay, but not so much that it will come out the other side of his head!



Now place the bead, wire-side first, into the hole you made for the eye. Push it in, embedding the bead halfway into the clay. If the bead isn't pushed in enough he really will look like he's going to explode! Now you can add some little indentations all around the eyes just for fun - kinda' like eyelashes (fish of course don't have eyelashes, but they would if they could, and we can, so we will.) A needle tool or any tool with an edge will make these texture lines.

course don't have eyelashes, but they would if they could, and we can, so we will.) A needle tool or any tool with an edge will make these texture lines.

Mouth is next - also surprised-looking, and for those same reasons. Make the mouth the very same way as the eyes (well, up to the adding the bead part). Make a hole with a dowel tool. Roll out a BB of clay (I used the light accent clay this time so it wouldn't look the same as the eye.) Place the clay BB on and poke that with the dowel - see, surprised! or maybe just blowing bubbles.



Let's make the tail look more tail-ish. The quick and easy way luckily works just great for this guy. Make the appearance of fins by using a needle tool (or any other tool with an edge) and press lines into the tail blob. They should fan out, kinda like rays of the sun - straight in the center and angling out towards the tail ends as you go. Another fun thing to do now is dust the tail with a little mica powder to give it some extra color. I used gold PearlEx powder. I also dusted a little around his mouth too, just for fun. Since it's really easy to overdo it on powder, and you just want a light "kiss" of color, not a smothering clump, I find it's best to dip a small paintbrush (the kind with hair bristles, not plastic ones) into the powder, then tap that into the lid and spread it around. Then you can dip into just a thin layer of powder from the lid to dust your clay with. Controlled shimmer.

On to the finishing touch - the little spikeys all over! Well, not all over - don't put any on the backside because that would feel weird when you wear him on a necklace. The spikes are just little rice-shaped bits of clay in one of the contrasting colors (I used the light color, same as the mouth.) First use the dowel tool to poke holes that the spikes will go into. These should be all over his body except none on the tail, and none in front of the eye. Probably you will end up with about 9 to 16 holes. You don't need to pivot the dowel tool for these holes, just poke it in, twist, and it will come right back out. Once you've made all the holes, place a rice-shaped clay spike in each hole. You can just place the spike in by holding it in your thumb and finger and pressing a bit to grab, but I find that sometimes these spikes don't grab enough and they can come out after



baking if you do it this way. Also, fingers get a bit big to get all the spikes in this small area, so the best way to do it is to first fill all the holes with a dab of translucent liquid clay (which comes in a little glue-like bottle for handy squeezing!) Now when you put each spike in, it will be grabbed by the liquid clay and will stay perfectly.

If there is any blobs of extra liquid clay after you've added the spikes, you can gently wipe it off with a tissue or Qtip.



Ok, look him all over - all the spikeys look good? any empty spots? Cufe, huh? Time to bake him.

Bake him according to the instructions on your clay - I recommend setting him on a piece of cardstock paper or index card and baking him in an oven at 275°F for at least 30 - 45 minutes. The temperature is important - too cool and the finished piece will be brittle, too hot and scorching or burning can happen - we don't want that! So, get a good oven thermometer! And make sure that you have good ventilation when baking.



Let lil' Puffy cool and he's finished! Of course you can still add a patina if you like (I always do, I like the look!) This step is entirely optional. A patina is simply adding a surface color to accent the details. I use acrylic paint, brushed on, and then sponged off so that the paint only stays in the cracks and textured areas. I used a light brown for this puffer and brushed on just a little at a time. Use lots of sponges for the wiping - they should be well rung out so that they are just damp, not wet. Keep using fresh sponges so you don't just smear paint all around. Let it dry. Finally you can protect the finish and create a little shine by covering the whole bead with a clear protective coating. There are several options available. Sculpey makes a clear glaze in shiny and matt. Many folks use a "Diamond Finish" verithane by Flecto (my personal favorite). Again, this is also an optional step. Add it if you like, but your fish will be fine without it, too. Set the coatings with another quick pop into the oven - this time at 200°F for about 15-20 minutes. Let him cool completely.

Tah Dah!! Isn't he Pufferific! and Spiketacular! As always - go show him off and get some well-earned oohs and aahs!

Christi Friesen is an award-winning artist, teacher and author of numerous books and projects for using polymer clay creatively. For more info, and more projects, visit online: [www.ChristiFriesen.com](http://www.ChristiFriesen.com).