
FEATURE

Easy art recipes for every classroom—and family

Teachers are inclined to thrift, using repurposed materials, scavenging unusual and energizing tools, and relying on kitchen alchemy to mix paint, clay, and doughs for children to explore and manipulate.

The following recipes include both cooked and non-cooked materials. If you use a recipe that requires cooking and you want to make it with children, follow all safety precautions carefully.

- Assemble all materials and ingredients.
- Wash hands.
- Allow children to measure and mix ingredients.
- Insist that adults manage the work at the stove or hotplate while children, with hands on their tummies, watch.

Introduce new materials deliberately. Encourage children to talk about similarities and differences in smell, smoothness, softness,

surface texture, and color, for example. Help children discover that different materials have different drying times too: some need to air dry slowly while others can bake in an oven without cracking.

Store all doughs and paints in airtight containers. When materials get sticky or moldy it's time to mix a new batch.

It's good practice to have children wash their hands before and after play.

Special note: Share these recipes with families, especially if you are working to keep children engaged during a time of quarantine. Teachers and parents find that the quiet manipulation of art materials has a calming, reassuring impact on children.

Uncooked materials

Invite children to help you mix these or prepare them ahead of time for a specific activity or for general use.

Gak (homemade Silly Putty™)

- ¼ cup liquid laundry starch
- ¼ cup white school glue

Pour the glue and starch into a small bowl—one for each child. Show the children how to use their fingers to combine the two

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ingredients. It will be sticky until it's well mixed. If desired, color with dry tempera.

Combine the individual bowls for storage.

Playdough

1 cup flour
¼ cup salt
¼ to ⅓ cup water
3 to 5 drops liquid detergent

Mix the flour and salt together. Slowly stir in ⅓ cup water and a few drops of liquid detergent. Mix well and knead thoroughly, adding more water, a few drops at a time, to the proper consistency. If desired, color with a pinch of powdered food coloring.

Store in an airtight container and refrigerate when not in use.

Goop or Oobleck

1 pound cornstarch
1 ½ cups cold water
Paste or powder food coloring

Mix the cornstarch, water, and coloring together in a large bowl. Invite children to experience the dry-to-liquid aspects of the mixture: When held in a tight fist, the mixture feels hard and solid; when the fingers loosen, the mixture drips through.

Make smaller amounts by combining 2 parts cornstarch to 1 part water; add coloring as desired. Store in a sealed container; add a bit of water if the mixture dries out. Discard in the trash—not down the drain.

Shiny tempera

½ cup liquid tempera
2 tablespoons corn syrup
1 ½ teaspoons liquid detergent

Combine all ingredients in a small container, making as many individual colors as desired. Use the paint with brushes on cardboard or matte board. The paint is glossy, sticky, and dries more slowly than regular paint.

Salt paint

½ cup liquid starch
2 cups salt
1 cup water
powdered tempera

Combine starch, salt, and water in a large bowl. Mix thoroughly. Slowly add tempera, stirring to mix. Use as paint with brushes on paper or cardboard. Let children discover how pictures sparkle when the paint dries.

Goo

½ cup liquid starch
2 cups rock salt
½ cup white school glue

Combine starch, rock salt, and glue in a bowl. Add powdered tempera or food coloring, if desired. This recipe makes a gooey, grainy mixture that dries hard. It can pile into mountains or other three-dimensional shapes.

Salt modeling clay

1 cup flour
½ cup salt
1 teaspoon alum
⅓ to ½ cup water

Mix the dry ingredients together in a bowl. Add the water slowly and blend into a smooth, thick clay.

Roll the clay to ½-inch thick disks and cut with cookie cutters or a plastic serrated knife. Dry at room temperature for 2 to 3 days

or in a 250-degree oven for 4 to 6 hours.

Invite children to paint or otherwise decorate with glue and collage materials.

Cinnamon dough

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
¾ to 1 cup warm water

Combine the dry ingredients in a bowl. Make a well in the mixture and slowly pour in ¾ cup water. Mix with hands to form a ball; add more water, a teaspoonful at a time, to make a soft but not sticky dough. Knead until smooth—about 5 minutes. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least an hour before using.

Show children how to roll out the dough into a ½-inch thick disk. Cut out shapes with cookie cutters or a plastic serrated knife. To harden, air dry for several days or dry more quickly in a 350-degree oven.

Cooked materials

These recipes require a bit more time and a heat source, but they tend to last longer than uncooked materials. Remember to store airtight.

Cooked playdough

1 cup flour
½ cup salt
1 cup water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 tablespoon alum
1 teaspoon vanilla
powdered or paste food coloring

Mix the dry ingredients together in a heavy saucepan. Combine the oil and water and mix slowly into the

dry ingredients. Cook over a low heat until the mixture thickens—it should reach the consistency of mashed potatoes. Stir in vanilla—or a flavoring of your choice.

Turn out the mixture onto a large cutting board or tabletop and allow to cool enough to handle. Knead in the coloring until the dough is smooth and uniform in color.

Salt clay

2 cups salt
1 cup cornstarch
1 cup water

Mix the salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the salt is dissolved. Remove from heat. Combine the cornstarch and the remaining water in a small bowl and add it to the salt mix-

ture. Cook over low heat until the mixture is thick and smooth, adding up to another tablespoon of water to make the mixture pliable.

Spoon the clay onto a cutting board or tabletop and allow to cool enough to handle.

Children can shape the clay as they desire. The clay will air dry in several days or can be dried more quickly in a 250-degree oven for 2 to 4 hours. The dry clay can be painted or otherwise decorated, or left sparkling white.

Finger paint

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cornstarch
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cold water
2 cups hot water
1 tablespoon glycerin
powdered tempera

Combine the cornstarch and water in a heavy saucepan and

stir until smooth. Add the hot water and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture boils. Cool slightly and pour into a muffin tin or individual cups.

Use on heavy, shiny paper (like freezer wrap). Invite children to choose a tempera color to sprinkle onto their paint and use fingers to blend and streak.

Dryer lint modeling compound

3 cups dryer lint
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
2 cups water

Put the lint and water into a large saucepan. Stir well to dampen all the lint. Add the flour slowly and mix thoroughly. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture holds together and forms peaks. Pour out onto several thicknesses of newspaper to cool.

Use the mixture over a box, bottle, balloon, or other framework as you would papier-mâché pulp. It will dry in 3 to 5 days into a hard, durable surface that can be painted or otherwise decorated. Show children how to use the form as a base for sculpture or a piñata, for example.

The wet pulp will keep for several days in an airtight container.

Cornstarch finger paint

3 tablespoons sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cornstarch
2 cups cold water
powdered tempera

Combine sugar, cornstarch, and water in a heavy saucepan. Cook over low heat until thick, stirring constantly. Cool slightly and then

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pour into a muffin tin or individual cups.

Use on heavy, shiny paper (like freezer wrap). Invite children to choose a tempera color to sprinkle onto their paint and use fingers to blend and streak.

Soap powder finger paint

3 cups water
¼ cup soap powder
½ cup liquid laundry starch
¼ cup talcum powder
powdered tempera

Pour the soap and water into a heavy saucepan. Stir to dissolve. Mix in the starch. Cook until the mixture boils and becomes clear, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and gently stir in the tempera and talcum. Avoid breathing in the talcum dust. Beat with an

eggbeater until the mixture is smooth and foamy.

Refrigerate when not in use.

Rubbery playdough

2 cups baking soda
1 ½ cups water
1 cup cornstarch
dry tempera

Mix the soda and cornstarch together in a heavy saucepan. Add water slowly, stirring until smooth. Cook over medium heat until the mixture thickens—about 2 minutes.

Spoon the dough onto a sheet of waxed paper and allow to cool slightly. Knead in about 1 tablespoon of dry tempera paint (¼ teaspoon powdered food coloring is an economical and vibrant substitute) until the dough is smooth and uniform in color.

Sand clay

1 cup fine sand
½ cup cornstarch
1 teaspoon alum
½ cup hot water
powdered food coloring

Combine dry ingredients in a medium saucepan. Add water and stir vigorously. Cook over medium heat until thick. Pour out onto a cutting board or tabletop, and let it cool enough to handle. Knead in paste or powdered food coloring, if desired.

Use the clay for sculpture. It will air dry to a stone-like texture.

Play clay

1 cup soda
½ cup cornstarch
¾ cup warm water

Mix the soda and cornstarch together in a medium saucepan. Slowly mix in water, stirring until smooth. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture is the consistency of mashed potatoes. Turn out onto a cutting board and, when cool enough to handle, knead until smooth.

Use the clay for sculpture. Children may choose to paint their dried work. ■

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