

Roly Poly Bead

A beadmaking tutorial by Laura Sparling



This tutorial shows you how I make one of my 'Roly Poly' beads.

It's a relatively simple bead to make but you will need to have good heat control and nimble mandrel-turning fingers! I came across this style by mistake one day - a bead I had made had gone wrong so instead of killing it in the water jug (like I usually do) I did a bit of a 'gravity swirl' thing with it and then pressed it into a lentil shape. I saw immediately that with a bit more control and tad more tinkering about in the construction stages a very attractive-looking bead may well be on the cards. I pootled about a bit more and my 'Roly Poly' beads were born.

Since then they've been one of my most-asked-about 'How do you do that, Laura?' beads so I've decided to write a tutorial to show you how it's done.

All of the beads pictured above started off life as a plain Roly Poly Bead.

I have a Carlisle Mini CC torch and a CattWalk Graduated Lentil Trio Press. For this tutorial I'm using Effetre white, Effetre Transparent Violet, Vetrofond clear and a 1/16 mandrel.

You will also need a graphite marver and a pair of mashers.

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Step One



Using white glass, make a small cylinder bead. I make mine the same width as the smallest well in my lentil press which is about 12mm. The cylinder measures about 7mm in diameter. It doesn't have to be a perfect cylinder.

Step Two



Keeping the cylinder warm by wafting it through the top of the flame, heat a small gather of your chosen dark transparent. I'm using Effetre Dark Violet.

Step Three



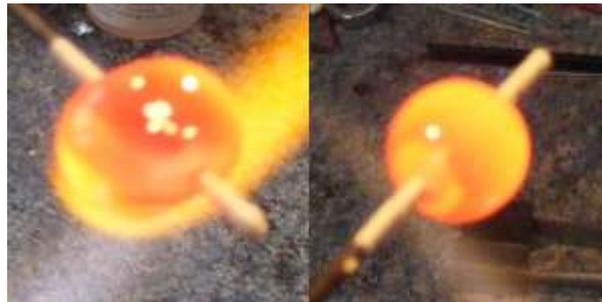
Now we're going to coat the cylinder with a thin layer of coloured transparent. I'm right-handed so I work from right to left for this. If you're left-handed you may want to work left to right. You need to paint on stripes of transparent as thinly as you can. To do this, hold the transparent rod parallel to the mandrel and push the glass on from one side of the cylinder to the other. Be careful NOT to touch the mandrel with the transparent glass.

Step Three (Continued)



You want to make sure that you leave a small area of white exposed around the bead holes. If you take the transparent right up to the bead hole then the bead will not end up looking as it should. Keep adding stripes of glass, the next stripe slightly overlapping the last one until you've covered the whole bead in a layer of transparent. Keeping the glass rod parallel to the mandrel and pushing the glass (as opposed to dragging or pulling it) forces the air to the edge of the bead so you should end up with no trapped bubbles.

Step Four



Now you will need to heat the bead until it pulls into a round blob. Don't worry if your bead has pointy ends or if it's a bit messy. It'll all work out okay in the end!

Step Five



Using a pair of mashers or two graphite paddles mash the bead into a tab shape. Return the bead to the flame and polish out any chill marks. Your bead needs to have a nice smooth surface for the next step - if you leave the chill marks there you could end up with bubbles.

Step Six



With your clear glass, coat the two flat faces of the tab in the same way as you did before.
Do NOT coat the edges of the tab.

Your tab should end up looking like this :



There is only clear glass on the flat parts of the tab and the edges are bare.

Step Seven



Now for the actual Roly Poly part!

Return your bead to the flame and heat it back into a roundish shape.
Now you need to superheat it until the glass starts to run away with itself and the molten glass begins to gloop and droop. This is where those nimble mandrel-turning fingers are required! Keep the molten glass sagging and glooping but at the same time keep turning the mandrel to gather up the drooping glass. You MUST keep turning your mandrel in the same direction for the whole of this step or the effect will not work properly.

Step Seven (Continued)



You should now see the Roly Poly effect happening.
The more you heat and gloop the glass, the prettier the finished bead will be.
Keep turning (in the same direction!) until you're happy with the level of swirliness.
If you look at the bead from the end you should see a kind of whirlpool effect.

Now, keeping the mandrel horizontal and turning, bring the bead out of the flame and let the glow come out of the bead in order to stabilise it a bit.

Step Eight



Reheat the bead to an even glow and roll it in the largest well of the lenticular press. You're aiming for that pre-press olive shape. The bead should be slightly smaller lengthways than the width of the lenticular well. My press makes an 18-19mm diameter lenticular so I make my olive shape about 14-15mm long.

You can stop at this point if you like and you will have pretty Roly Poly olive-shaped beads.

Step Nine



The lenticular pressing part. Reheat your olive-shaped bead to an even orange glow and press. You may need to reheat and re-press several times. I normally end up repeating the pressing part about four or five times until I'm happy. Make sure you flame polish out any chill marks.

Step Ten



The finished Roly Poly lentil bead!

Hints & Tips

Experiment with other colours but you will need a pale opaque and a dark transparent. Pale opaques that work well for this style of bead are white, periwinkle, pale pink and pale grey. If your chosen transparent is too pale it will spread out and barely show so stick to nice deep shades. Rootbeer, Teal, Cobalt Blue, Amethyst, Sage Green and CiM Leaky Pen work well.

Why not make a bi-colour Roly Poly? The blue olive-shaped beads and the orangey lentils on the first page of this tutorial are made with two colours. When you come to coating your cylinder, paint half the stripes in one colour and the other half in another and then follow the rest of the tutorial. When you get to the Roly Poly swirling stage the colours will mingle.

Sometimes I like to add a very small amount of enamel to the surface of my Roly Poly lentils. As a final step I heat the surface of the bead and then gently dip part of the bead into a tray of enamel. A quick flash through the flame adheres the enamel to the bead but leaves it slightly raised for a bit of texture. Fine grind frit or Pixie Dust (mica) can be used in the same way.

Experiment and have fun!

Thank You

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If you have any questions or if you'd like to send me photos of your own Roly Poly beads made with the aid of this tutorial please send me an email at laura@beadsbylaura.co.uk.

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