

How to Make a Slab Plate or Platter
Sue Wadoski
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This method is the basis for making many varieties of plates without a mold. You can use common materials found in every home and it is easy to improvise tools. Hand building relies on clay straight from the bag, so you are working clay that has not been centered or thrown with added water. That means it can usually be rolled or coiled or pinched and textured and completed in one session.

Our example is a simple rectangular plate, 12 3/4" x 6 3/4", rolled from a slab, textured, with edge altered, and dried on a board with an improvised form made from pieces of foam, rolled up bubble wrap, or clay snakes. The fired plate shown below was made with this method.

You will need the following: A bag of clay, a cutoff wire, heavy paper for a pattern, a ruler to measure and cut a straight edge, a rolling pin, a pin tool or skewer, a small kitchen knife or exacto knife, plastic to cover your work, a small sponge and a cup of water, a small work board, canvas or stiff fabric, newspaper, a cookie sheet or additional board to dry your piece, and an old sheet or pillowcase if you don't have newspaper. If you want to add texture your piece, you can use a stick, the sole of a sneaker, the back of a tile, a stiff leaf or twig, pasta, shells, or anything else you find at home. Be creative.

In addition, you will need objects that you can use to support your rolling pin so your slab is rolled evenly, such as two same-sized dowels, or several magazines of the same size, or two cutting boards. Small pieces of foam or bubble wrap comes in handy for supporting your piece as it dries.

1. **Make a pattern** for your piece with heavy paper. Make your pattern at least 10 -12% larger than your final desired piece, since clay shrinks 10 - 12% as it dries and is fired. You will roll a slab larger than your pattern to give you room to cut clean edges.
2. **Cut and compress your slab (top, bottom, and edges).** Cut a block of clay of about 4+ lb. A bag of clay is 25 lb. so you can estimate this without a scale. Using your rolling pin as a mallet, compress the clay on each side. Press the side edges down on the table to compress. Continue to compress until your slab is 6 x 8 x 1 inches, or about two inches narrower than the rolling pin. It's a good idea to roll your clay lengthwise and widthwise to compress and add strength. If you want a slab that is wider than your rolling pin, you can skip the side supports (in step 3) and just eyeball or feel the thickness.
3. **Prepare work space and roll your slab.** Cover your work board with canvas or stiff fabric and attach tightly with a staple gun or with duct tape. Place your dowels, magazines or cutting boards on either side of the clay slab with the narrow sides of the clay slab at the top and bottom. Roll away from your body, then gently lift the slab, lay it back down, and continue rolling. Turn it over, smooth any creases, and roll again. Just like pie dough, lifting it up frees it from the work surface and allows it to stretch as you roll. If you have any air bubbles, pierce them with the pin tool and gently smooth. Try to avoid impressions from the rolling pin by always starting to roll at the bottom of the slab and rolling all the way to the top without stopping.
4. **Texture** your slab as much or as little as you like, but go deep enough to make sure that glaze will not obscure your texture.

5. **Cut and Compress the slab.** Place your pattern over the textured slab, hold down lightly with one hand, and cut around the pattern. Use a straight edge to help cut a clean line. Remove your pattern and compress the side edges all around with your finger or damp sponge. Alter the edge- it doesn't have to be straight. Gather excess clay, wet and gently wedge, and return to your clay bag.
6. **Prepare your drying board.** Roll up bubble wrap, snakes of clay, or pieces of foam into the shape of your plate.
7. **Place completed slab onto form.** Gently slide your slab onto the piece of sheet fabric or double sheet of newspaper and position it onto your form. Adjust, curving edges up as you like. You may need to go back in a few hours and adjust your curved edges. Cover lightly with plastic. When the plate is firm enough to hold its shape - in a day or two - turn over and sign the back.



Compress slab



Compress edges by tapping slab on the table.



Roll slab



Texture slab - in this case with my plywood pattern. Use your imagination.



Soften lines gently with damp sponge



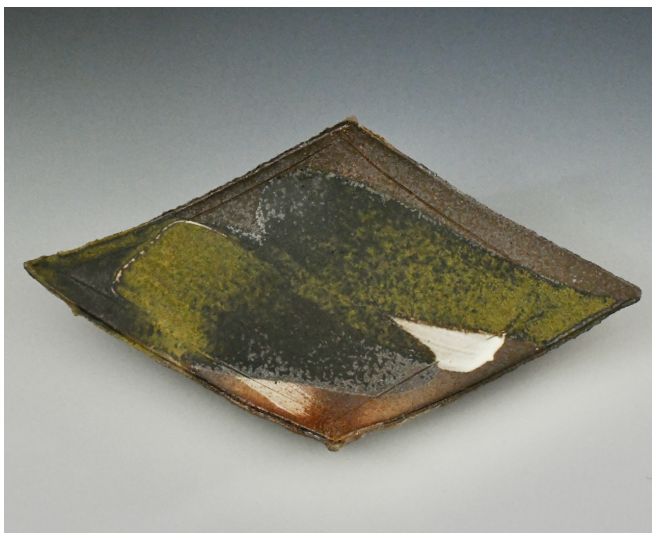
Place pattern on slab and cut with kitchen knife or exacto knife. Alter the edge. Smooth edges gently with finger or sponge. Slide plate onto fabric or double sheet of newspaper.



Arrange foam, clay snakes, or rolled bubble wrap on board. Lift slab using newspaper or sheet as a sling and place on foam supports.



Adjust edges. You may want to curve edges or corners to make a curved form. Use a slightly damp sponge to push gently on the center of the piece to make sure it touches the board and develops a flattened bottom for stability.



Diamond shaped plate. Groggy clay with torn edges, textured with a pencil. Brushed porcelain slip. Tea dust glaze. Wood-fired in 2019.

