

beginner
metal clay

QUICK AND EASY

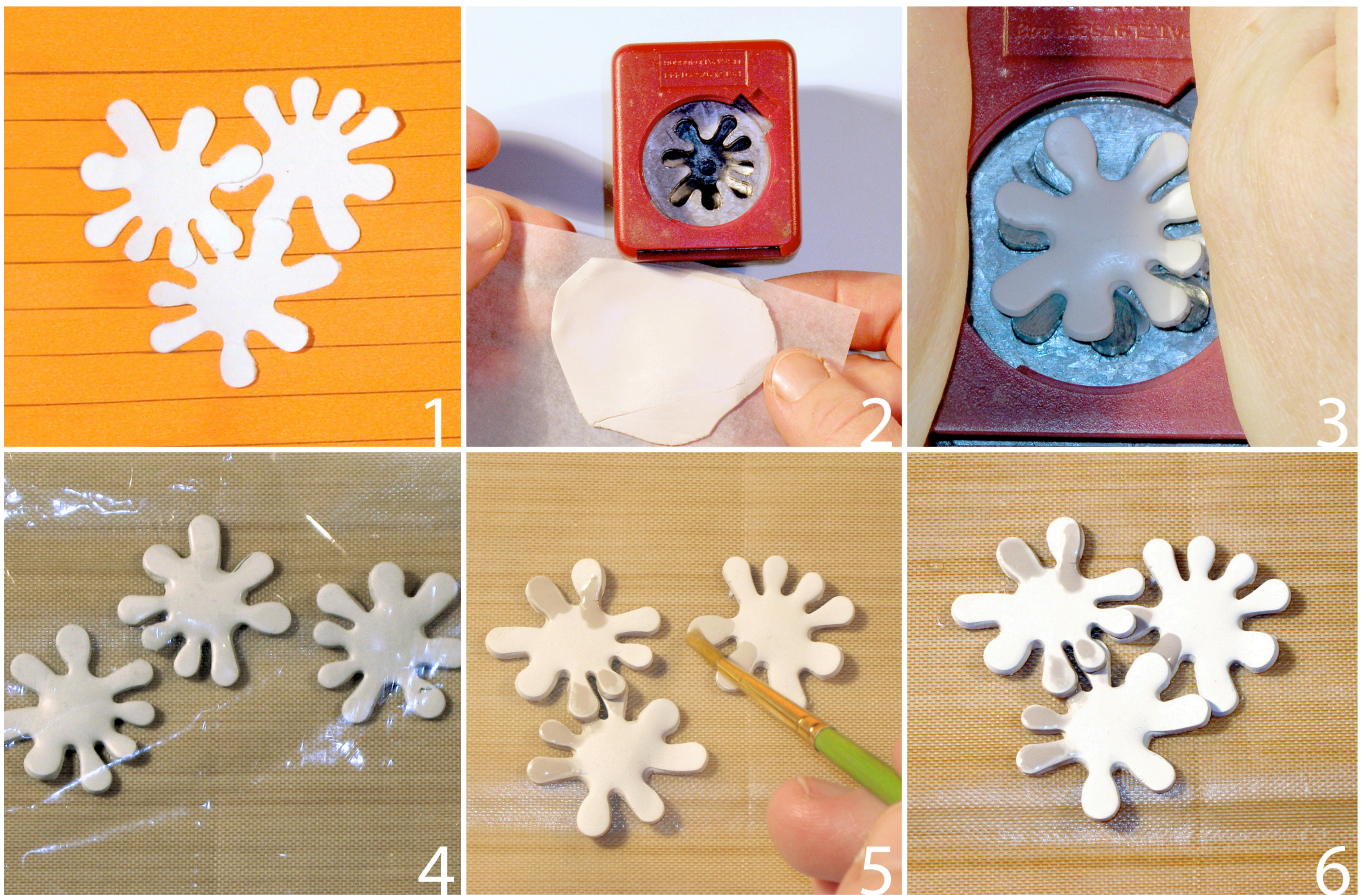
Splat!

*Assemble modular
metal clay cutouts into
a fun, funky pendant.*

by Elaine D. Luther

By repurposing a paper punch, you can easily cut out multiple, identical metal clay components. The trick is to arrange these components into a pendant that is both structurally sound and visually interesting. I like to use paper templates to explore the different ways I can arrange these pieces before I commit to a configuration in metal clay.

The 1³/₈ x 1³/₄-in. (35 x 44 mm) pendant's overlapping elements are carefully placed and joined before the assembly is fired.



Make a paper template. Select a paper punch, and punch several cutouts from a sheet of cardstock.

Arrange the cutouts in a pleasing configuration, making sure they overlap sufficiently so that the assembly will be soundly connected. For example, the “arms” of my cardstock cutouts overlap at four points, creating a stable connection and interesting negative spaces [1].

Lubricate the paper punch. Apply olive oil to a paper towel, making sure that the oiled area is as large as the perimeter of the punch’s cutting surfaces. Insert the oiled paper towel into the punch, and slide the towel against the punch’s upper and lower cutting surfaces. Discard the towel.

Make a tracing-paper support. Cut a piece of tracing paper about ½ in. (13 mm) larger than the punch’s perimeter. You’ll use this to support your metal clay when you insert the clay into the punch.

Roll out a sheet of metal clay. Lightly coat your hands, an acrylic roller, and a

flexible Teflon sheet with olive oil. Working on the flexible Teflon sheet, roll out about 14 g of metal clay to 3 playing cards thick in a roughly rectangular shape. Roll the clay sheet in alternate directions until it’s smooth.

Support the clay. Place the clay sheet on your tracing-paper support, aligning one edge of the clay sheet with one edge of the tracing paper. This edge is your leading edge — the first edge you’ll insert into the punch.

TIP: When you’re using a paper punch to make cutouts from a sheet of metal clay, support the metal clay with tracing paper in order to prevent the edges of the cutouts from getting ragged or distorted. The thickness of tracing paper is just right for this purpose.

Insert the clay into the punch. Place the punch upside down on your work surface.

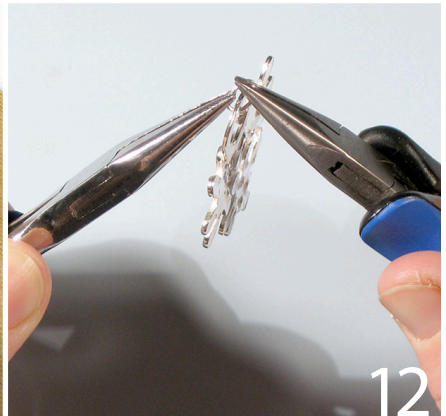
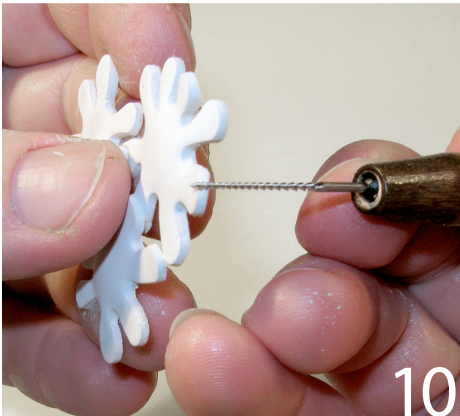
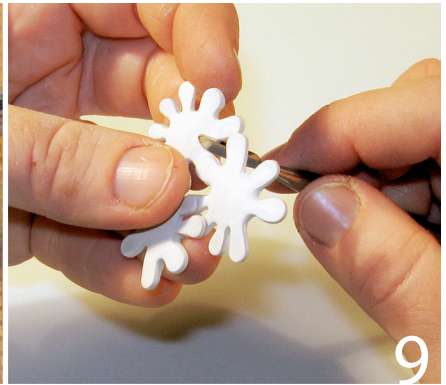
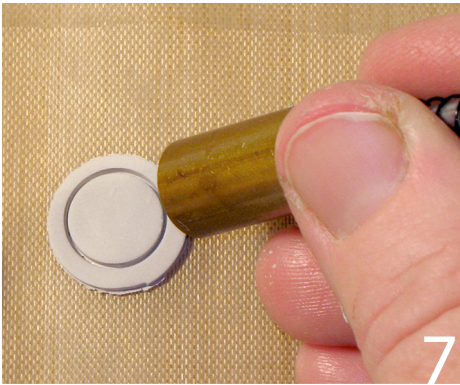
Lifting the paper and the clay together, insert the leading edge into the punch [2]. Then center the clay.

Punch out the clay. Use the heels of your hands to press down on the punch [3]. (I stand while doing this to get better leverage.) Carefully remove the clay cutout, and without distorting it, set it on the flexible Teflon sheet. Cover the cutout with plastic wrap to keep the clay wet.

Reroll the leftover clay (adding some fresh clay if necessary) to 3 cards thick, and repeat the punch-out process to make your desired number of cutouts. Be sure to cover the cutouts with plastic wrap to keep the clay pliable [4].

Assemble the cutouts. Referencing your cardstock template, use a fine-tip paintbrush and water to moisten the cutouts where you want them to overlap [5]. Assemble the cutouts [6], and use your fingertips to apply light pressure to the joins. Because the cutouts are wet, you need only water to bond them.

Allow the assembly to dry completely.



Make the bail. Roll out approximately 5 g of clay to 3 cards thick. Use a large circle cutter to cut a circle from the clay. Remove the excess clay. Then, use a small circle cutter to cut a hole in the center of the clay circle, creating a ring [7]. Remove the excess clay, and use a fine-tip paintbrush and a little water to smooth the edges of the ring [8].

Allow the bail to dry completely. Then, refine the edges with an emery board.

Refine the cutout assembly. When the cutout assembly is completely dry, use a carving tool [9] or a wax-detailing tool [10] to refine the edges of the cutouts. I like to use these tools because I can get them into the nooks and crannies of a piece. You could also use needle files and emery boards to refine the cutouts.

Attach the bail. Apply metal clay paste or slip to the back of the cutout assembly where you want to attach the bail.

TIP: I like to use a carving tool instead of a paintbrush to apply slip. Because the carver is rigid, I can better control the amount and placement of the slip I use.

Carefully press the cutout assembly onto the bail. Apply more slip as needed to soundly join the pieces. Use a paintbrush to remove excess slip from the assembly [11]. Then dip the paintbrush in a little water, and use the brush to smooth the join. Set the assembly aside to dry completely.

Fire and finish the pendant. Fire the pendant according to the metal clay manufacturer's instructions. Allow the pendant to cool.

Polish the pendant in a tumbler with steel shot and burnishing compound for at least 30 minutes.

Attach jump rings to the bail. Using two pairs of flatnose or chainnose pliers, add three jump rings to the bail [12]. The inside diameter of your jump rings should be large enough to accommodate your selected chain.

Patinate the pendant, if desired. To enhance the dimensional aspects of my pendant, I patinated just the edges of the cutouts [13]. To do this, prepare a liver of sulfur solution according to the manufacturer's instructions. Then, use a fine-tip paintbrush to apply the solution.



materials

- Metal clay: 28 g
- Metal clay paste
- Jump rings: 18-gauge (1.0 mm), oval, 5 mm inside diameter, 3

toolbox

- Metal clay

additional tools & supplies

- Paper punch
- Cardstock
- Tracing paper
- Circle cutters: ½-in. (14 mm) diameter, ⅜-in. (10 mm) diameter
- Carving tool or wax-detailing tool
- Pliers: 2 pairs of flatnose or chainnose
- Liver of sulfur (optional)