

# Build a Pot

## Pottery Making Activity

**Ages:** 3+

**Time Required:** less than 5 minutes

**Intended Outcomes:** By making their own replica pots, participants will discover how North Carolina Indians built coiled pottery.

### Materials:

- Clay
- Decorating tools (paddles, pencils or craft sticks wrapped in string, toothpicks, plastic onion bags, dried corn cobs, etc.)
- Containers with water
- Paper towels
- Small pieces of cardboard or plastic bags
- Optional: Display text (below)
- Optional: Pottery Making Tips from *Intrigue of the Past* (below)
- Optional: Butcher paper or newspaper
- Optional: Replica pots

### Instructions:

1. If desired, cover the table with butcher paper or newspaper. Tape several copies of Pottery Making Tips around the table so that they are easy for participants to see. Display replica pots.
2. Explain the process of making a coiled pot. (See Pottery Making Tips for a guide.)
3. Give each participant a small lump of clay and help them fashion it into a small coiled pot. Young children can make pinch pots.
4. Explain some of the ways North Carolina Indians decorated pots. If desired, use replica pots as aids.
5. Encourage participants to decorate their pots.
6. To help participants transport their pots, give them a small piece of cardboard or a plastic bag. Send them off to wash their hands!

### Tips:

- Choose a location with easy access to hand-washing sinks.
- If you can find it, use clay that hardens without firing. Avoid red clay to minimize staining.
- Wear appropriate clothing.
- Use a wire to divide the clay into small lumps.
- If clay begins to dry out, dip it in water. Store any leftover clay in a sealed plastic bag.

# Pottery Making

About 3000 years ago, people in North Carolina began making pottery for cooking and storing food.



Archaeologists can learn a lot about these people by studying their pottery. They can also learn a lot by trying to make pots the way the ancient potters did.



Making pots helps archaeologists understand why ancient potters used a particular kind of clay or shaped their pots a certain way. Archaeologists also find out that it is not very easy to make pottery using ancient methods!

# Ancient Pottery Making

To get clay to make a pot or jar, an ancient potter had to find a place with good clay and then dig it out of the ground.

The potter made the bottom of the vessel from long ropes of clay shaped into **coils**. Then she added more coils to make the sides of the pot or jar.



Next the potter smoothed the inside and outside of the pot. Sometimes she also decorated it.

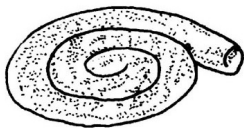
Finally, the potter dried the vessel for several days and then placed it in a bonfire. The hot fire made the clay hard.



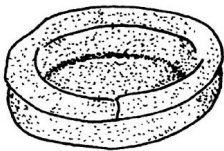
## Pottery-Making Tips



Roll a piece of clay into a long coil about 12 inches long and as thick as your finger. Make ten or so of these coils and cover them with a damp paper towel.



Using one coil, create the bottom of your pottery vessel by spiraling it around itself on a flat surface. Join the clay strips by pressing firmly and smoothing with your fingers. Turn the clay spiral over and repeat the joining process on the opposite side.



Build up the sides of your vessel by placing a coil along the outer edge of the base. Press it into place and smooth with your fingers on both the inside and the outside. When you have made a complete circle of clay around the base of the vessel, cut off the excess clay and join the two ends.



Repeat this process with the other coils until your vessel is the size you want it to be. To make a curve in your vessel's profile, you will need to vary the size of your circles. If the circles are larger, the vessel will spread out; if they are smaller, it will become narrow.



Finish your vessel by smoothing it inside and outside. Add surface treatment or decoration if desired.