



The 5 Best Recipes for Paper Mache

And How to Choose the Right Recipe to Make Your Next Project a Creative Success



My most important tip for paper mache sculptors:

No matter which recipe you use, the key to creating a paper mache sculpture that will last a lifetime is to **dry it quickly**, (preferably in front of a fan), and to **seal it** with a good varnish.

If you follow this one simple guideline, your next sculpture could become a family heirloom that's treasured for years. Enjoy!

Jonni



1. Basic Raw Flour and Water Paste

This paste is cheap because it's made with plain white flour, which you probably already have in the house. It's also the easiest paste you can make. You can use it for any size project. In fact, I used for all the tiny dogs in my book [How to Make Tiny Paper Mache Dogs](#), and for my life-sized [baby Indian elephant](#).

To make this easy paste, just just pour some white flour in a bowl and add warm water gradually until you have a consistency that will work well for you. Some people like working with thin paste, and some people like it thicker—with this recipe, you decide.

You'll get the smoothest consistency if you use hot water from the tap (not boiling water!) and if you mix the paste with a whisk or immersion blender. Make only as much as you can use in one day—it will start to grow yeast and get bubbly (and less sticky) if you keep it too long. (Sourdough batter makes great pancakes, but it's lousy as paper mache paste!)

● When would you use this recipe?

This recipe does not dry clear, but it's very strong. And, as I said before, it's easy to make and cheap. I use it for most of my own projects when I'm working with traditional paper strips and paste. It's great for kids' projects and for group work in workshops and classes because you can mix it up so quickly.

However, it *isn't* a good choice if your project needs a perfectly clear paste that doesn't discolor the final paper layer, or if the surface of the dried paper mache needs to be absolutely smooth. The paste will leave residue from the flour on the surface of the paper.

2. Cooked Flour and Water Paste:

This recipe uses less flour than the raw version, but it takes more time to prepare it.

Mix **two tablespoons of white flour** with **one cup of warm water** in a small saucepan and stir until there are no lumps. Put the pan on the stove at medium heat and slowly bring it to a boil, stirring constantly to make sure it doesn't burn. As soon as it starts to bubble, remove it from the heat and allow it to cool. The paste will be runny when it's hot, but it will gel as it cools.

- **When would you use this recipe?**

This will make a smooth, clear paste that lets the color of the paper show through after it dries. The unpainted [wolf mask](#) in the photo was made with brown paper and the cooked flour and water paste. As you can see, the color of the paper shows through, although the edges of the pieces dried slightly darker. The wolf on the cover of this document was made with colored newsprint and cooked paste.



Some people believe cooked paste is stronger than the raw paste, but in my own trials that did not appear to be true. However, unlike the raw recipe, the cooked version does not leave tiny bumps of dried flour on the surface when it dries, so paper mache made with it is much smoother. This is the traditional paste used by many professional artists around the world.

3. Glue and Water Paste:

This isn't really 'paste,' in the usual sense of the word. It's just a mixture of **two parts Elmer's Glue-All** (or any white PVA glue) with one part water. Carpenter's glue also works, although it doesn't dry clear like Elmer's glue. Be sure to let each layer of paper mache dry completely before adding another layer if you use glue as the paste. If the top layer dries while the lower layers are still wet, moisture could be trapped inside your sculpture.

- **When would you use this recipe?**

There is no gluten in this mixture, so people with gluten allergies should use the glue and water paste or the Elmer's Art Paste listed below instead of a recipe that uses wheat flour.

You could get some crackling on your final layer of acrylic paint if you don't make sure to let the glue dry completely before painting. The glue doesn't soften the paper quite as much as the flour and water paste, so you'll need to take special care to smooth down each piece of paper as you're applying your paper mache.

4. Elmer's Art Paste:

This is not a home-made recipe, but it's still a valuable addition to your sculpting supplies. Elmer's Art Paste is made with methyl cellulose. Librarians use a much more expensive version of methyl cellulose to repair antique books, and it's a favorite for fine artists working with paper mache because it doesn't attract mold. Although it isn't quite as cheap as flour and water paste, you can still buy enough Elmer's Art Paste to make two gallons of paste for less than \$8.00 [on Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and that's enough for a large class of students working on small sculptures, or one very large sculpture.

- **When would you use this 'recipe?'**

This is a great choice for workshops and art classes, because the mixed paste can be stored for a long period of time and it doesn't attract mold or yeast. It may also be an excellent choice if you live in an area with insects or mice that are attracted to a paste made with flour and water.

Like the glue and water recipe, Elmer's Art Paste is gluten-free, so it's safe for people with gluten allergies.

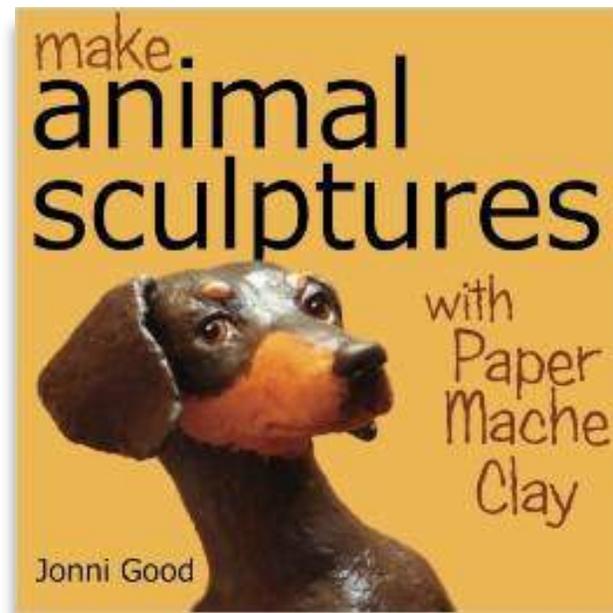
5. Jonni's Famous Recipe for Paper Mache Clay

This recipe was created by the author back in 2009 and has now been used by thousands of amateur and professional artists around the world. It is used in a thin layer over an armature to replace traditional paper strips and paste. This recipe was used for all the projects in my book [Make Animal Sculptures With Paper Mache Clay](#).

Paper Mache Clay must be used in a thin layer, 1/8" to 1/4", to make sure it can dry all the way through. Once it's dry, it will be extremely hard and strong.

For Paper Mache Clay You'll need:

- **Cheap Toilet Paper** (measure the wet paper pulp as instructed in the video, and use 1 1/4 cups – some rolls contain much more paper than you need, and the recipe will be lumpy if there's too much paper in the mix.)
- **1 cup Drywall Joint Compound** from the hardware store or Walmart. Get premixed joint compound that comes in a plastic tub, not the dry powder form. **Note:** The DAP brand does not work. It will turn your paper mache clay into a rubbery mess. Most other brands will work just fine.
- **3/4 cup Elmer's Glue-all** (or any white PVA glue—but *not* construction glue or school glue.)



- **1/2 cup White Flour**
- **2 tablespoons Mineral Oil** (which is also sold as Baby Oil). If you don't have any baby oil in the house, just leave it out. The recipe works just fine without it.
- Some people like to add a few drops of **oil of clove**, to keep mold from growing in the paper mache clay while it's still wet.

[Watch the video](#) at least once for details on making your clay. You'll need a large bowl with high sides so you don't splatter the ingredients on your cupboards, a small electric mixer,* a measuring cup and a tablespoon measure. To keep the finished clay from drying out between use, you'll need an air-tight container. The recipe makes approximately one quart of paper mache clay.

Notes: Drywall joint compound is produced for the construction industry and is not edible, so small children should not use this recipe for their projects. If you need to sand it after it's dry, use a mask to keep the fine dust out of your lungs. (You should do this when you sand *anything!*)

Paper mache clay is difficult to clean out of a mixer, so try to find a cheap one at a garage sale and use it only for your craft projects.

Mixing the paper mache clay:

Step 1. Fill a bowl with warm water. Remove the toilet paper from the roll and throw it into the water. Push down on the paper to make sure all of it gets wet.

Step 2. Let the paper soak for five minutes. Then pour that water and paper into a colander. Pick out the paper and squeeze out as much water as you can. Put your paper mass back in the high-sided bowl.

Step 3. You will want to break the paper into small chunks. This will help your mixer break the paper into individual fibers.

Step 4. Add all the other ingredients to the bowl and mix, using an electric mixer. The mixer will pull the fibers of the toilet paper apart and turn it into pulp. Continue to mix for at least 3 minutes to make sure all the paper has been mixed in with the other ingredients. If you still see some lumps, use a fork or your fingers (with the mixer turned off!) to break them apart, and then mix some more.

If you want thicker paper mache clay, add more flour. Use less flour to make it thin enough to spread a very thin layer over an armature. The flour is just used as filler, so the amount you use is up to you.

If you don't plan to use your clay right away, place it in an airtight container to keep it from drying out. The clay should stay usable for 5 days or more if you keep it covered and in the refrigerator, or for months if you keep it in the freezer between sculpting sessions.

- **When would you use this recipe?**

This recipe was developed to make paper mache sculpting easier and faster, and with considerably less mess. I now use it for almost every sculpture I make, and so do many of my blog readers. By using this recipe you avoid the bumps and dips that are often found on sculptures made with traditional paper strips and paste, although the paper in the paper mache clay will leave a light texture on the surface of the sculpture.

Paper mache clay can be used over armatures made with crumpled paper and masking tape, or over armatures made with crumpled foil and hot glue. I've used it over aluminum mesh to make dragon wings, too. It also works when applied thinly over a mask made with cardboard, like the [lion mask](#) shown on this page.



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