

HEATHER TRIMLETT

Mandrel Magic

How to care for your magical beadmaking wands

If you have taken a class with me, you know that I'm careful and specific about every step in the beadmaking process. That includes cleaning and dipping your magical beadmaking wands; your mandrels.

Mandrels that are straight, clean and well-dipped contribute greatly to the success of every bead you make.

Are They Straight?

Check each of your mandrels before cleaning and dipping them. It's hard to make a round bead on a bent mandrel. Unless it's a fancy one, I toss bent mandrels in the trash.

Cleaning Mandrels

I like to scrub the mandrels with something a little abrasive. For example, the scrubby side of a Scotch-Brite sponge.



If you prefer something more natural, these colorful scrubbers are made with cotton and tree resin: (www.trendytripper.com/product/trendy-tripper-natural-pot-scrubber/)



Scrub each mandrel, rinse well in tap water, and roll in a towel to remove most of the water.

Place the mandrels in a vase or empty coffee can to finish drying. I usually clean the beads I have just removed from my kiln while the mandrels are drying.

Bead Release Tips

Each of us has our own preferences when it comes to bead release. My go-to is from **Fusion Products International**. (www.fusionproductsintl.com)



I've used this bead release for at least 20 years! Order online or give Jim and Lorraine a call. They will be happy to help you.

The bead release needs to be an even, smooth consistency. Bumps in the bead release can mean bumps in the hole in your bead. I do two things to keep the bead release smooth:

- **I add small beads to my bead release.**

These can be beads that didn't come out the way I wanted them to (i.e. seconds) or a bunch of small spacer beads. Like the balls in a can of spray paint, these beads help mix your bead release when you shake it.

- **I store my bead release container upside down.**

This is a great way to avoid that clump of solid bead release at the bottom of the container!

My studio/classroom rule: The bead release lid is either ON or OFF, but never just sitting on the top of the jar!

Whatever you do to keep your bead release smooth, be sure to shake it well before dipping your mandrels.

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Dipping Mandrels

How hard can it be to dip a mandrel? It's not hard but here are a few things to keep in mind.

The mandrel needs to be straight/perpendicular to the earth when you dip it into the bead release container. If the mandrel is leaning to the side the release will not be round; there will be a ridge of release on one side of your mandrel. I try to always have a second jar of bead release on hand so I can keep my container topped up for straight dipping.

The first mandrel dipped is a test of the thickness of the bead release. Too thick is generally the issue. Add a bit of water, shake the container like crazy and test a second mandrel. Continue this process until you are happy with the thickness of the bead release. For me, the one on the left is too thick. I prefer a thinner coating.



It is totally counterintuitive, but it makes a difference how quickly you pull the mandrel out of the bead release. Pulling out quickly will give you a thicker coating. Coming out more slowly will give you a thinner coating.

Once you have dipped, don't do anything else. No tapping, no banging. If the bead release is the proper consistency, there should be no need for that.

In my studio I use a flowerpot filled with beach sand to hold my mandrels while they dry. If you don't have flowerpots on hand you can use any tall-sided vessel, such as a coffee can, vase or tall glass. You can substitute rice or kitty litter for beach sand.



It's amazing just how many mandrels I can cram in there! Don't let them touch each other; that will mess up your bead release and you will have to dip them again.

Mandrel Storage

I like to be organized about storing my magical beadmaking wands; it saves me time. As a general rule, each size mandrel has its own container.



Your container choices are another place to have some fun and add some color to your studio.