



## Just a Fish Out of Water

This polymer clay bead set accented with turquoise is so quick and easy to create, you'll be hooked!

by Christi Friesen

Make a splash with this fishy little bead. As always, the first step is to condition the clay to make it soft and ready to work with. Condition your clay by repeatedly rolling and folding it in your

hands until soft (or take the easy way out and run it through a pasta machine). Now it's time to blend those conditioned clays into a fun color for the water. This blend is mostly white with some ecru, turquoise and a touch of green. As you blend, keep folding so that the most interesting parts of the blend stay in the front where you can see them. To add a bit of speckle, use a pinch of embossing powder or even glitter. You don't have to, but it's fun! Don't over blend – leave some streaks of color visible.

Look over the blend and find the section with the most interesting mix of color. Rip off a 2-3 inch section (the rough edges are better than cut edges for this project). Set that aside. Take some more of the clay blend, and roll it up into a small oval – this will become the core of your bead. Wrap that core with the clay you set aside – like a present, but with wrinkles in it. This works best if that scrap of clay is a little thinner first (so roll it out a bit more). Then scrunch the clay “wrapper” over the core as if you were wading up a scrap of paper to throw away. The entire bead core should be covered in the clay wrapper, and the covering should be pressed firmly all around.



Use a needle tool to pierce a hole through the center of the bead lengthwise. Remove the tool and insert a thicker piece of wire through the hole to hold it open.

This wire will stay in all during the sculpting and baking process.



### For this project you will need:

- ✓ **Premo! polymer clay:** white, ecru, turquoise, green, copper, gold
- ✓ **beads:** one small, dark-blue glass seed bead (for eye), five turquoise disk-shaped beads
- ✓ **wire:** 28 gauge craft wire (about 12 inches), 18gauge or 16 gauge wire (one piece about 4 inches long)
- ✓ **mica powder** (optional, but fun!) PearlEx #659 Antique Gold, paintbrush
- ✓ **tools:** sculpting tools, needle tool, wire cutters, pliers, pasta machine (optional)
- ✓ **acrylic paint:** blue, brown; paintbrush, sponge
- ✓ clear **varnish/glaze** in satin or matte finish
- ✓ **cord** for stringing
- ✓ **oven,** oven thermometer

That's a cool bead just the way it is, huh? Well let's add a fish anyway! First you need some fish-colored clay. Just about any color could work fine, but I suggest a salmon color because, well, it's salmon-colored! (but mostly because the color goes so nicely with the turquoise). Make this color by mixing ecru clay with just a smidgen of copper and gold. Blend a similar color for the fins - only more copper and gold in the mix to make it contrast.

Use the lighter color clay to make the fish's body - just a teardrop shape. The roundy side is the head. Press it onto the bead base firmly to attach.

Create the front fin by making a little teardrop shape out of the darker clay. Use a tool to impress a little indentation in the fin area (more than halfway along the underneath side of the fish body, toward the head side). Add the fin by laying it on top of the indentation and pressing.

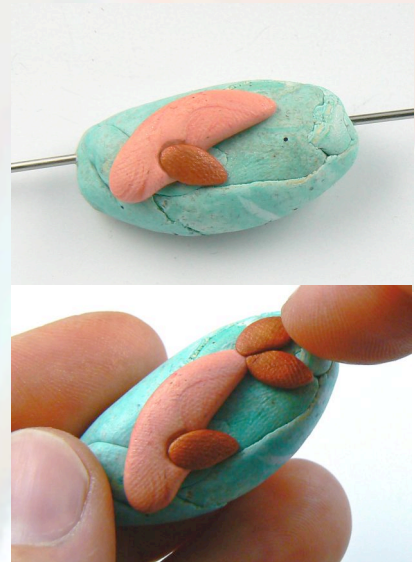
The tail fins are the same clay, same size – just press them on the tip of the teardrop on the opposite side from the head (duh).

The top fin is a little rice-shaped piece of clay pressed right on the top of his back.

Now all you need to do to create the hint of realism for all those fins is to use a needle tool to gently impress lines on the surface of each. Press, not scratch the lines into the clay. Yup, just like that.



Ok, here's a cool trick for adding scales quickly and painlessly. Most metal needle tools are made with a textured grip – just roll that grip right on top of your body (no, not your body, your clay fish's body). Instant fins. Cool, huh?

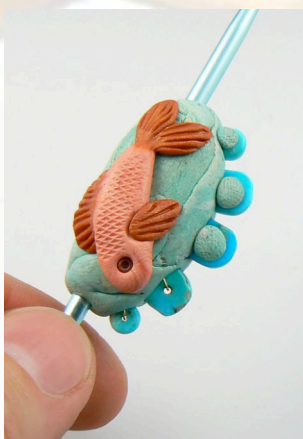


Fishy needs an eye. A dark delicate glass bead will do the trick – just press it straight down into the face so that it looks like a little “o” in the appropriate eye area.

The fish is done. Now let's add some splash to the bead by attaching disk-shaped beads of turquoise along the bottom. This will create an interesting shape as well as adding a bit of weight to help the bead to hang nicely.

First you'll need to wire up the beads. Snip a 2-3 inch piece of 28 g. wire and thread on the turquoise disk. Pull the wires up, parallel with each other so that the turquoise is at the bottom. Now grip the wires with pliers and twirl the bead with your fingers so that the wire twists up firmly to touch the turquoise. You want about a quarter of an inch of twist. With wire cutters, trim off the excess wire. The reason for wiring the bead is to help make sure the

bead stays firmly attached to the clay after baking. Clay and stone don't stick together, but the “tail” of irregularly shaped wire connected to the turquoise bead will give the clay something to harden around which almost always insures the bead will stay put!



Now press the turquoise disks straight into the bottom of the clay bead. Press firmly enough so that the stone embeds a bit into the clay (don't smush your fish!) To hide the wire and strengthen the connection, place a small ball of clay on the front side and backside of the turquoise – covering the wire, but also touching the clay – and press both sides at the same time. This flattens the ball of clay onto the clay base and over the wires – doesn't that look swell?

One last finishing touch if you wish – add a swipe of mica powder along the middle of the fish's body for a wonderful shimmer. (I used PearlEx Antique gold.) Use a soft paintbrush or your finger and just give it a light dusting. Zing!



This bead will look a lot nicer in a necklace if you make two accent beads to go along side it, don't you think? Just take a little bit of the water-colored clay and wad it up – that's all! You want an irregular shape, to match the larger fish bead. You can add a flattened ball of clay to the surface of each little bead to echo the dots on the turquoise. Now, use the needle tool again to make a hole through each accent clay bead. Remove

the tool, and insert the beads onto the thicker wire.

Bake all three beads in an oven for at least 30 minutes at 275°F, or according to your clay's instructions. You can place the wire with all three beads on it on top of a piece of heavy paper (like an index card) and bake on that. Let it cool completely after baking.



As a finishing touch, can add a patina to bring out the details. This is an optional step – you don't have to if you don't want to. If you do want to, just use acrylic paint (any brand works equally well) and brush the color into the cracks and details. Immediately wipe it off the surfaces with a damp sponge (the color will stay in the deeper parts). I used blue paint on the watery areas, and brown on the fish.

If you add a patina, you should cover it with a clear coating to protect the added colors. You can add a clear coat to your beads even if you didn't patina. A very low shine looks best with this organic design, so use a satin or matte finish glass, not high gloss. There are several products available. Brush the varnish on to the front sides with a small paintbrush. Coat the backs once the fronts are dry. Do not varnish over the turquoise beads, but do varnish over the glass bead that is the fish's eye to seal it securely into the bead (since it wasn't wired in). Now let them dry completely.



Once more into the oven at 200°F for 15-20 minutes will set the coatings. Let the beads cool completely and then twist and gently pull them off the wire.

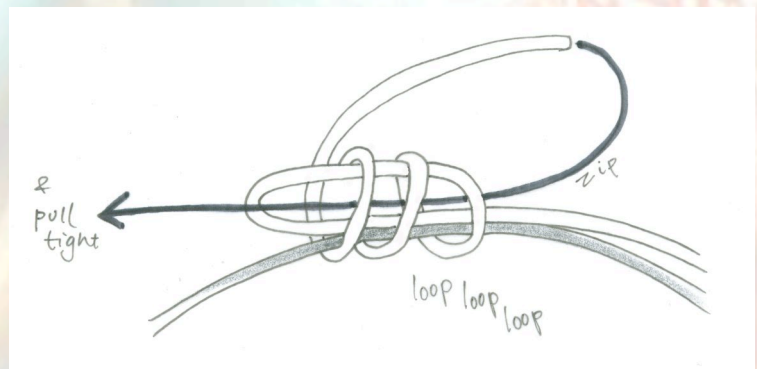
To string the necklace, simply thread the fish bead onto a cord and tie knots on either end to keep it in place. A knitting needle works well to position the knots close to the bead. Slip the other beads on either side.

You can create a simple slipknot closure to make the necklace adjustable. Take both ends of the cord and overlap them. With one end, curve the cord back over itself and hold with your fingers. Now loop that end around all the cords two or three times – not too tightly. Bring the end of the cord back to the beginning and thread it through all

the loops. Pull while gently holding the cords. This will create a slipknot. Hold the cords and repeat exactly with the other end of the cords, about 2 inches away. You should be able to adjust the length of the necklace by pulling or pushing on the knots.

And there you have it – a necklace that's the catch of the day!

*Christi Friesen is an award-winning artist. Her embellished polymer clay work can be found in galleries, shows and publications. She teaches workshops around the country, and has a series of how-to books as well as projects available, just in case you want a little more polymer clay fun. For more information, visit: [www.CForiginals.com](http://www.CForiginals.com).*



## Resources

wire, mica powders, tools: [www.CForiginals.com](http://www.CForiginals.com)

beads, wire, cord, tools: your local bead store, of course! and online - [www.FireMountainGems.com](http://www.FireMountainGems.com)

