
Homemade Playdough (No-Cook Recipe)

Crafts | All Year | Ages 2-4

Store-bought playdough dries out in about three days at our house. We lose the lid, someone leaves it on the radiator, or it gets mixed into a gray-brown blob. This no-cook version costs pennies and lasts two weeks in a sealed container—longer if your kids actually put it away.

The whole thing takes five minutes. No stove, no waiting for anything to cool. Just mix, knead, and hand it over.

What You Need

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
 - 1 cup salt
 - 2 tablespoons cream of tartar (find it in the spice aisle at any Hy-Vee or Price Chopper)
 - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 - 1.5 cups boiling water
 - Food coloring (gel works better than liquid)
 - Essential oils for scent (optional—we like lavender or peppermint)

How to Make It

Mix the flour, salt, and cream of tartar in a big bowl. Add the oil. Pour in the boiling water and stir fast with a wooden spoon. It'll look like a shaggy mess at first, but keep stirring. Once it cools enough to handle—about a minute—dump it onto the counter and knead until smooth.

For color, split the dough into portions and press a well in the center of each. Add a few drops of food coloring, fold the dough over, and knead until the color's even. Gel food coloring stains less than liquid, but either way, this will dye your hands temporarily. We learned that the hard way before a family photo shoot.

What Actually Works

Cream of tartar isn't optional. We tried skipping it once to save a trip to the store, and the dough was grainy and fell apart. It's what makes this recipe smooth and stretchy.

Store each color in its own zip-top bag or small plastic container. We keep ours in an old shoebox in the pantry. If it starts to feel sticky after a week, knead in a little flour. If it dries out, add a few drops of water.

The Mess Factor This is a low-mess activity, especially compared to actual baking. We spread a vinyl tablecloth on the kitchen table or take it outside to the deck when the weather's nice. On rainy Kansas City afternoons when everyone's climbing the walls, this buys us at least 45 minutes of quiet.

Pair it with cookie cutters, a rolling pin, and some plastic knives. Our kids also love pressing in dried beans, pasta shapes, or small toys. One of our favorite setups is taking this to Loose Park—make the dough at home, pack it in containers, and let them play on a picnic blanket while you drink your coffee.

