



Intermediate



## PROJECT: CHRISTMAS TREE EARRINGS & NECKLACE SET

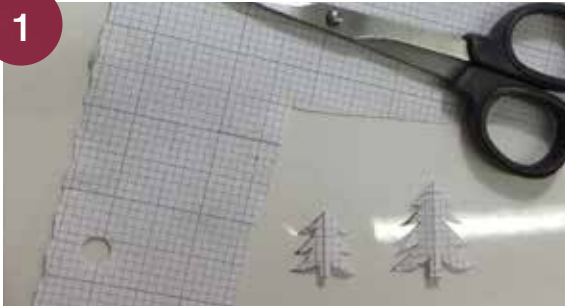
By Lori Ridgway

### Kit List:

7g Art Clay Silver or PMC3 Fine Silver	855 200 855 026
2.5mm Round White Cubic Zirconia Stones	61CZ P250
6mm Sterling Silver Closed Bolt Ring	NVD C60X
6mm Jump Rings	NVD C60X
Sterling Silver Hook Wires	NVK 007X
Sterling Silver Chain	

Nature's Touch Balm	700 575
Needle Tool	700 586
Needle Files	999 528
Curved Edge Cutter	700 677
Wooden Handle Brass Brush	999 173
<i>Emery Paper / Wet and Dry Paper:</i>	
Grade 1200	973 090
Grade 500	973 070
Grade 180	973 050
Hand Torch	999 955
Sandpaper	999 SS01
Stone Setting Burr	989 130
Ball Burr	984 003
Syringe Paste	855 207
Rubber Tipped Tool	999 AH9
Soldering Block	999 968
Mesh Rack	860 092
Pin Vice	999 AKK
1.2mm Drill Bit	971 070B
Spacer & Roller Set	700 643 & 700 644
Tiles to use as a work surface	

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### 1: CREATE A TEMPLATE

Draw two Christmas tree shapes on some graph paper; one for the earrings and one for your pendant. Note: Remember your clay will shrink a bit (how much depends on which clay you use – see manufacturer’s instructions) so make the templates slightly larger to compensate. Cut the shapes out. Tip: Fold along the centre line of your shapes, cut one side out and unfold for an even shape.

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### 2: ROLL OUT THE CLAY

Spread Nature’s Touch Balm on a tile, the templates and your hands.

Using the spacers, roll out the clay so that you can fit the templates on. Turn the clay round if you need it to be wider.

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### 3: CUT THE SHAPES

Making sure you have put Nature’s Touch Balm on your templates, lay them onto the clay and gently roll again with your spacers in place to ensure the templates don’t move when you cut them.

Trace round the edge of the template with your needle tool held straight up to ensure you get a straight edge on your pieces. Dry the pieces in your normal way.

**Note:** I use a kitchen hostess tray for food warming to dry my clay pieces, but you can use tea warmers, dehydrators or some kilns have a drying program. If you do not have any of this equipment, leave your pieces somewhere warm to dry out overnight.

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### 4: SAND YOUR PIECES

Make sure you tidy the edges of your pieces before setting the stones as once you have drilled the stone holes, the piece will become more fragile. Use needle files and various grid sanding paper to smooth the edges, front and back. Make sure you hold close to where you are working as the piece is very fragile at this stage. The more time you spend at this stage of the process, the better the finish after firing. I collect any sandings as these can be reconstituted into paste or clay once enough has been collected.

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### 5: SET THE STONES

Place the stones on your pieces to see where to set them, and mark the places with a soft pencil. Using a ball burr slightly smaller than the diameter of your stone, make a small hole where each of the stones are going to be set, then follow up with a stone setting burr the same size as your stone to shape the hole to the stone. Your stones should fit into the piece flush with the top of the clay, then as the piece shrinks on firing it will hold the stone in place. If the stone sticks out above the clay when firing, the stone will be squeezed out.

Once the holes are drilled and the stones are flush, squirt a small amount of syringe paste into the holes and place the stones in. Make sure the table of the stone is level. If you are new to this, then do one stone at a time or the paste will dry out too quickly. Use a rubber tipped tool to smooth any excess clay around the stone edge.

Don't worry if you put too much paste in, you can scrape any excess off with your needle tool once it is dry.

Once all the stones are set, dry your piece in your normal manner.

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### 6: PREPARE FOR FIRING

Using your graded sandpaper, sand and smooth the front and back of your piece. I go down to about 6000 grit, and the more time you spend now, the better the finish on your fired piece. If you have polished enough, you will start to see a faint silver colour on your pieces.

This is the best point to drill a hole for the jump ring and earring wires. Use a pin vice to drill the hole and be careful not to put too much pressure on your pieces, or they will crack and break. Remember that the clay will shrink as will the hole, so make it slightly larger to compensate. A 1.2mm drill bit is usually good enough for 1mm jump rings.

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### 7: FIRE THE PIECE

Your pieces need to be totally dry before firing to prevent bubbles and holes.

Once you are happy with how the piece looks, it is ready for firing. Any lumps/bumps/scratches you can see now will be visible after firing, so make sure they are removed by sanding or filling with paste.

You can now fire your piece using one of three methods:

#### Method 1: Using a Kiln

The packaging suggests firing at 650°C, which is the minimum firing temperature. I find that firing at 830°C for about 35 minutes gives me the best results and stronger pieces. As the pieces have stones in, it is best to let the pieces cool completely before removing from the kiln, do not be tempted to cool them using water as this will crack the stones.

#### Method 2: Torch Firing

You can fire the pieces using a hand torch. Place the piece on a solder block or heatproof surface and gently heat each piece separately until they glow pale orange and hold at this temperature for 3–4 minutes each piece. The binder will catch fire, just keep heating till the flames die away.

Move the piece out of the way to cool. Don't be tempted to cool in water or this will crack the stones.

#### Method 3: On a Gas Hob

Place the grid over your hob and switch the gas on. Once it is up to temperature carefully add your pieces and leave in the hot areas for 7–10 minutes. Again, allow to cool gently to protect the stones.

Once fired, the pieces will appear white, but are now solid Silver. Rub a brass brush over the pieces until they are all Silver. You can now use the emery papers wet to add a final polish to the back and sides of the pieces if required.

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### 8: FINISH YOUR PIECES

Once polished, add a jump ring to the pendant piece and make your chain using the chain, bolt rings and jump rings. Add ear wires to your earrings and you're all finished.