

Sedona Gem and Mineral Club

The Adventure Begins!

How to Tumble Rocks

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Step 1: Use course grit. Fill the tumbler barrel 2/3 to 3/4 full with properly graded and sized stones. If the barrel is not full enough, you won't get the proper tumbling action in the later steps. Add the necessary amount of coarse grit to the stones in the barrel. After adding the grit, slowly add water until the water level is just touching the bottom of the top layer of stones. Do not overfill because too much water will inhibit the tumbling action. Run the tumbler for 24 hours, then open the barrel to release any slight gas build-up during the coarse grind. If the slurry appears pasty or very thick, add a small amount of water.

The first (coarse) grind is the most important step and will take 7-10 days. Be patient and don't stop too soon. If the stones are not all smoothly rounded (to your satisfaction), it is necessary to repeat the coarse grind. The original grit will have broken down too much to provide additional shaping. After the grind, you must clean the barrel and stones thoroughly to remove all traces of the coarse grit slurry. Do not pour slurry into your plumbing system. It will settle in the pipes and harden like cement. Dispose in a bucket of sand or on a gravel driveway. If there should be no visible grit or slurry left on the stones, you are now ready for the next step.

Step 2: Use medium grit. Place the cleaned stones in the barrel, inspecting them as you go, and removing any that need more coarse grinding. If you have less than 2/3 barrel full of stones, add plastic pellets to make up the additional volume to 2/3 or 3/4 full. Add proper amount of water and grit according to table, reseal the barrel and let it run for 2-3 days before checking stones. On the 7th day, they should have a smooth matte finish over their entire surface, if not, run for an additional 2-3 days. Plastic pellets (if used) will float to the top, after and during the cleaning process, remove them and clean them as they can be used over and over. Use the same cleaning procedures you used in Step 1.

Step 3: Use pre-polish grit. Place stones in the barrel, following previous instructions. Run for about a week, checking progress after 3 days. Clean and inspect the stones for the final polishing stage.

Step 4: Use cerium oxide or tin oxide polish. Gently place the stones in the barrel to avoid any scratching or chipping. After filling the barrel with water and polishing compound, add plastic pellets to increase volume to 2/3 or 3/4 full. The pellets will help carry the polishing compound and cushion the stones. Polishing should take 5-7 days. At the end of this time, remove and inspect several stones. If they look the same when dry as  they do when wet, your batch is finished. If, after 7 days, your polished gemstones appear to

have a slight film on them, it can be removed or have extra shine and luster by adding by a burnishing step. Before burnishing, be sure to thoroughly clean the barrel and stones.

Burnishing: Place stones in barrel, add the plastic pellets and a small amount of powdered or bar (non-detergent) soap. Do not use any liquid detergents, dishwasher powdered or any products containing bleach or additives as these products will damage the barrel and ruin the polish. Add water as in previous steps and run for 4 days.

Amount of grit to use: The amount of grit to use seems to vary by manufacturer. They also seem to recommend a lot more than is needed. I think this is because most of them also sell grit in addition to tumblers. Our recommendations below are based on our personal experience with which we get good results. I guess that's all that should matter.

Note: The amount of time spent in each step will vary depending on how "rounded" you want your finished stones to be. The longer you leave them in a step (particularly the pt step) the more rounded the edges will be. It goes without saying that scrupulous and thorough cleaning of the barrel and your rocks between steps is of utmost importance. Bits of grit remaining in crevices of rough rocks will contaminate the results of the next step, and so on. Then you will have to repeat that step if you want good results.

- **Course: 46/70, 60/90 or 80; 1/2 T per pound rocks; 8-12 days**
- **Medium: 120/220 or 240; 1/2 T per pound rocks; 7-10 days**
- **Pre-polish: 600; 1/2 T per pound rocks; 7-10 days**
- **Polish: 1/2 T per pound rocks; 3-5 days**

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