

Shrinky Dink Charms

Create shrinky dink charms from recycled polystyrene plastics to celebrate America Recycles Day.

Collect

- #6 plastic container—like the “clam shell” containers from the salad bar
- Permanent markers
- Scissors
- Hole puncher
- Oven or toaster oven
- Oven mitts
- Aluminum foil
- Cooking sheet
- Spatula
- Yarn or paper clips



Prepare Your Plastic

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and cover the top of the cooking sheet with aluminum foil.
2. Use scissors to cut the plastic container into smaller 3”x 3” pieces. **Tip:** Try cutting your pieces into a variety of shapes like squares, triangles, circles, and stars.
3. Decide how you would like your shrinky dink charm to hang, and use the hole puncher to make a hole. **Tip:** This step must be done before the plastic goes into the oven.

Decorate and Bake!

4. Use the permanent markers to decorate the plastic.
5. Once you have finished decorating, place your project on the cooking sheet with the decorated side facing up and then place the sheet in the oven.
6. Watch the shrinky dinks in the oven as they fold and crinkle. You will know they are “done” when they flatten out again.
7. Use the oven mitt to remove the sheet from the oven.
8. Wait about 10 seconds before gently peeling your shrinky dink off with a spatula.
9. Add yarn or paper clips to your charms to make a necklace or a bracelet!

How it Works

Polystyrene is a thermoplastic made up of long chain-like molecules called polymers. Because it is a thermoplastic, meaning that it is moldable above a certain temperature, it can be manufactured into cups, clam shells, and other #6 plastics by heating the material up, stretching it into shape, and then rapidly cooling the material. This process “freezes” the polymer chains in place. However, once reheated, polystyrene can “shrink” back to its original size and shape.