

Steps for Rock Tumbling with a Small Rotary Tumbler

By RockTumbler.com

When you receive a new tumbler the first thing that you should do is carefully read the instructions provided by the manufacturer. Those instructions will explain how to use the tumbler successfully and maintain it properly.

Listed below are the steps that we follow for tumbling a batch of rocks with a small rotary tumbler that has a barrel capacity of between two and six pounds. We share them to help you get a successful start to rock tumbling. We have more detailed instructions on the [RockTumbler.com website](http://RockTumbler.com).

Before you begin...

Check to be sure that you have all of the materials and equipment that you will need. Our checklist includes: rough rocks, coarse grit (60/90), medium grit (120/220 or 150/220), prepolish (fine grit 500 or 600) and polish, a bar of ivory soap (optional for burnishing), a plastic colander, a plastic bucket, a tablespoon and a pair of safety glasses. Protect your eyes by wearing safety glasses when working with rocks, grits and opening tumbler barrels.

Step 1 - Coarse Grit...

Begin by filling the tumbler barrel about 1/2 to 2/3 full of rough rock. (For best results the rock should have a range of particle sizes between about 1/4" and 1 1/2".) Add the amount of grit recommended in your tumbler's instructions (we use about two level tablespoons of grit per pound of rock). Then add enough water to almost cover the rocks. Be sure that the parts of the lid and barrel that form a seal are clean. Close the barrel and check the seal. Run the tumbler for about seven days. Visit your tumbler a couple times per day to be sure that it is not leaking and running properly.

After seven days carefully open the barrel and pour the contents into your colander over a plastic bucket. Rinse the mud and used grit from the rocks, catching the rinse water in the plastic bucket. **Don't dump the used grit, mud or muddy water down the drain** - it will clog your plumbing. After the rocks are cleaned thoroughly, clean the barrel and the lid. Be sure to clean all of the grit and mud from the rocks and tumbler barrel – you don't want coarse grit in the barrel during Step 2.

Some people inspect the rocks at the end of the first week. Those that have imperfections are run through the coarse grit step again. If you are tumbling stones to place in potted plants or for aquarium gravel this is not important. However, if you hope to produce jewelry-quality stones then getting them perfectly shaped at this step is very important.

Step 2 - Medium Grit...

Place the rocks in the tumbler barrel. If your tumbler is less than 1/2 full add ceramic media to bring it up to operating capacity. Then add medium grit (about two tablespoons per pound of rock) and enough water to almost cover the rocks. Tumble for seven days, check the tumbler daily. After seven days open the barrel and clean up the rocks as described in Step 1. Remember, don't dump the used grit, mud or muddy water down the drain. If you inspect the dry rocks they should have a surface like "frosted" glass.

Step 3 – Fine Grit (PrePolish)...

Place the rocks and fine grit (prepolish) (about two tablespoons per pound of rock) into the tumbler and add water to almost cover the rocks. Tumble for seven days, check the tumbler daily. After seven days open the barrel and clean up the rocks as described in Step 1. Remember, don't dump the used grit, mud or muddy water down the drain. The dry rocks might have a little luster now. 😊

Step 4 - Polish...

Place the rocks and polish (about two tablespoons per pound of rock) in the tumbler and add enough water to almost cover the rocks. Tumble for seven days, checking the tumbler daily. At the end of seven days open the barrel and clean up the rocks as described in Step 1. Remember, don't dump the used polish, mud or muddy water down the drain. If you have done everything correctly and cleaned carefully between each step you should now be rewarded with some brightly polished stones! Wow! 😊

Burnish...

Sometimes rocks will look a bit dull when they come out of the polishing step. A couple hours of burnishing will often brighten them up. To burnish, place your rocks in the tumbler with water and a couple heaping tablespoons of grated Ivory bar soap. Run about two hours. Now you should have some really bright stones! Happy Tumbling! 😊