***M&M Mini's Container Kaleidoscope***

Materials: (per kaleidoscope)

1 M&M Minis container, empty & washed.
3 strips of thin mirror material, each cut to 2.2 cm x 8.5 cm. I found that "locker mirrors" purchased at the Dollar Tree provided ideal material for these. You can get 2 kaleidoscopes from each mirror, once you peel off the magnet from the back (save that for another project!) and cut it into the strips.
2 circles cut from clear plastic – I use the packaging from the mirrors. (or use that clear plastic supermarket salad bars sometimes use for their take-out containers). Each circle is 2.7 cm in diameter.
Tissue paper or wax paper - a piece about 9 cm. square
1 thin cardboard (like from pantyhose packaging) strip cut to 1 cm x 8.5 cm (you may have to trim it just a bit shorter to fit)
Rubber band (med. size) or tape
Assorted clear colored beads - pony bead size or thinner (an assortment of shapes is nicest to use - experiment a little!) Go for the darker colors - pastels don’t work as well. Bright red, blue, green, purple, and hot pink are beautiful colors to try! Experiment with other items too, like colored cellophane (I didn’t have any on hand to try) cut into different shapes.
Awl or sharp pointed scissors

Directions:

Gently poke a hole in bottom of Minis container, using scissors or awl. Widen it to about ¼ inch or so in diameter. Smooth off any rough edges. (Make sure you aren’t leaving a big lip of material inside too.) Note: I would do this ahead of time at home, instead of having the girls tackle it. It was a little tricky for me to do! Do not try to punch a hole with a hammer & nail - it cracks the tube (yes, I tried it!)

Note: I later found that using an electric drill with a ¼ inch bit works great!

Drop the first clear plastic circle inside Mini container to cover the hole (this protects your eye from anything that might fall down tube as you are looking through it)

Insert the 3 mirror strips inside the tube so that the mirrors are facing in toward each other. Try to have them form an equilateral triangle in cross-section view, so your kaleidoscope will produce a nice symmetrical look. Push them in all the way - they should not be flush with the top of the container. (Tip, you can tape the 3 mirrors together before sliding them in. Let the girls see what the world looks like looking through the form created by these mirrors - it’s pretty interesting even without all the colored beads you’ll be adding later.)

Place the other clear plastic circle on top of the mirrors.

Curl the cardboard strip by pulling it quickly back & forth over the edge of a table. Put this curved strip of cardboard around the inside of the tube, right on top of the plastic circle. (This just helps to keep that plastic circle in place. You can glue this in, but I didn’t bother)

Now put about 4-7 (depending on size) beads in the space you’ve just created with the clear plastic and cardboard. Be sure they have room to shift around! (Don’t worry, you can experiment and change the beads at any time)

Put the waxed paper on the top of the tube, and secure with tape or a rubber band.

Hold your kaleidoscope toward a light, and look into the eyehole. Turn the tube to see new beautiful patterns!

Try new combinations of beads & shapes, if desired, until you find a set that pleases you most. I haven’t made a permanent top for my kaleidoscope, because I like to change it from time to time, but you could try hot gluing a piece of "cloudy" plastic (like from a Pringles can lid) on the top instead of covering it with waxed paper if you want to make the lid more permanent. I would glue it on, trim the edges flush with the tube, and glue again around the edge to make it really secure.

If you wanted to get fancy, you could decorate the outside of your kaleidoscope too! Wrap it in fabric or paper, or paint it, put stickers on, cover it with pretty paper & Modge Podge….the sky’s the limit!

I’ve been asked what you do with the lid of the Minis container. Well, I just snipped it off of the first one I made, but later tried leaving it on for a protective cap that you can close when not using your kaleidoscope (if you are doing the waxed paper/taped lid). Works okay both ways.