

Lifting the Lid on Kilns

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There comes a point in every potter's life when they want to take that final step into self-sufficiency and have their own kiln. No compromises over firing schedules, no waiting for every last inch to be filled and no worries that Maureen's pot with the ever-so-thick walls is going to explode like a hand grenade in the middle of everyone else's hard work. This will be *your* kiln to fire on *your* terms! But a kiln isn't cheap, and it is well worth getting the answers to a few questions before diving in head-first.

What kind of kiln do I need?

On the face of it, larger kilns seem to offer the best value for money as they tend to be cheaper than their smaller cousins. This is 'supply and demand' in action as fewer people can accommodate large kilns, both in terms of space and their power demand.

Will it fit?

Visualise the route the kiln will take, from the point that it is dropped off to where it will ultimately be installed. Now go and measure all of the door frames, corridors and tight corners to make sure that the kiln can pass through easily. While you are doing this, keep an eye open for any steps or uneven surfaces.

How will I move it?

Kilns can be rather heavy, and by far the easiest way to move a kiln (particularly front loaders which are designed to be moved this way) is to use a pallet truck. Gravel drives and steps can be tricky to navigate so take this into account when planning the move. Top-loaders are more straightforward and can usually be moved by a couple of people by hand. Kilns are fragile, and care needs to be taken to protect them from damage caused by knocks or drops.

Can I power it?

Some smaller kilns can be plugged into a 13 Amp socket which should be connected to a ring main for optimum results. **Never** plug any type of kiln into an extension lead. For larger kilns, look

at the current demand (Amps) and speak with your electrician to ensure that your existing electrical installation is capable of coping with the increased load. Your electrician will explain what changes will be necessary to enable the installation of your kiln, which will usually involve changes to your consumer unit and the fitting of an isolator near to the kiln. Check whether the kiln is wired for a three-phase or single-phase supply, and whether this can be changed. Most households have single-phase supplies and the costs of upgrading to a three-phase supply can be extremely high.

Do I need a large kiln?

Larger kilns use more energy, take longer to cool, take up more space and generally require more costly spares. Consider what you will be making on a regular basis and buy a kiln that suits that need. Smaller kilns will have shorter firing cycles, require less ware to fill and can be cheaper to install. You may pay a little more per cubic foot/per litre capacity for a smaller kiln, as demand is generally higher, but overall bigger isn't necessarily better. If you need the higher capacity and can fill the kiln regularly, then a large kiln is for you.

Am I happy with the specification?

Aftermarket upgrades to a kiln can be expensive, both in terms of parts and labour. It is therefore a good idea to make sure that the controller supplied with the kiln will be future-proof. Controllers have become much more user-friendly and affordable in recent years, so try to get a controller with more spare programs than you need at the moment. This won't cost much extra, but will give you lots of flexibility to explore different techniques in the future.

In the next article we will look at the common pitfalls to avoid in your search for the ideal kiln.

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